

## ABSTRACT

**Title of Dissertation:** LADIES OF THE SHADE: THE  
PASTORAL POETRY OF APHRA  
BEHN, ANNE FINCH, AND  
ELIZABETH SINGER ROWE

Heidi Laudien, Doctor of  
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In the hands of women poets like Aphra Behn (1640-1689), Anne Finch (1661-1720), and Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674-1737), the inherently imitative genre of the pastoral becomes quite interesting. The artificiality of the Golden Age and the stock dramatic action of one-dimensional nymphs and swains are enlivened and given depth as these women manipulate convention to produce a strikingly different kind of verse. Sexual and political authority appear to overlap in their poems and a host of subversive women's stories emerge, featuring powerful heroines equipped not only with sexual and political, but also authorial power. Their pastorals challenge the Puritan ideology of self-denial, the masculinization of desire, and the pervasive insistence on female chastity. Behn, Finch, and Singer Rowe use the form of the pastoral for self-exploration,

dramatization, and expression. Their pastorals offer a powerful revision of a masculine tradition in terms of constructing a space for the articulation of female desire, spirituality, and retirement, and also for their challenges to heteronormativity in the pastoral tradition and in culture at large. This fresh style explores female sexuality, relationships, politics, and social issues from a personal and intimate perspective, and lends insight into the creative mind and life of the Restoration female poet.

Their uses of the pastoral undermine the genre's attempt to construct stable binary categories of oppositional difference. Their unique engagement with pastoral conventions and their emphasis and development of pastoral attributes reveal that such features are capable of fresh interpretation and application in the hands of women pastoralists. Their ability to redirect the pastoral tradition allows us as readers to understand their relationship to the male poetic tradition through their changes from their source. Thus their pastorals do not offer merely model countercultures that contest contemporary society, rather these poems consistently use the conventions of the pastoral to explore a female-specific space from which to characterize this particular poetic oeuvre as a whole. The pastoral creations of Behn,

Finch, and Singer Rowe foreground the woman writer as a unique challenge to masculine dominance in the field of female representation.



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ANNE FINCH, AND ELIZABETH SINGER ROWE

By

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## **DEDICATION**

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother, father, and sister, Lori, whose continued support and encouragement made the completion of this project possible.



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