

## Anne Finch's "Contemn'd Retreat" and the Politics of Lyric

In recent decades, few poetic genres have been subject to as much redefinition as the lyric. Since the term first circulated regularly in critical discourse across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, its vocabulary and taxonomy have encouraged critics to range across a number of topics—including subjectivity, interiority, brevity, musicality, and speech—and to debate their relative importance. Virginia Jackson's entry on "lyric" in the Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics aptly summarizes the state of critical play, emphasizing that the term remains unstable and polarizing in all its guises: "A persistent confusion—among verse genres, between historical genres and natural 'forms,' between adjective and noun, between cognitive and affective registers, between grammar and rhetoric, between privacy and publicity, and among various ideas about poetry—may be the best way to define our current sense of the lyric."<sup>1</sup> Among these contested terms, the "confusion" between the private and the public remains one of the most pressing in lyric studies, and in studies of eighteenth-century lyric in particular. This essay seeks to reexamine this public-private dynamic through the lyric's commonly assumed association with solipsistic retreat, and to delineate its consequences on the interpretation of eighteenth-century lyric poetry.

I use "retreat" here to denote two positions. In one sense, critics and historians of lyric have presumed that the genre retreats from or refuses to engage with contemporary politics, and that British poets began to adopt this position of retreat in the mid-eighteenth century. These

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Jackson, "Lyric," in The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics, ed. Roland Greene et al., 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2012), 826.

presumptions stem from a long tradition of critical and editorial practices which have privileged particular features of a poem—its construction of an individuated subject; the retreat of the subject into nature or solitary meditation; the subject’s transparency of inner feeling; the dramatization of the poet’s power or failure to call his or her desires into being—as characteristically lyrical. Such features came to be associated with what modern critics call the “romantic” lyric, or an aesthetic paradigm modeled after the works of the romantic poets.<sup>2</sup> As scholars like Jackson and Yopie Prins have contended, however, nineteenth-century critics and historians misleadingly projected this romantic paradigm back onto the poetry of earlier periods, such that poems which were perceived to have similar features became recollected and interpreted as lyric. This understanding, Jackson and Prins further argue, stemmed from reading practices which they group together under the capacious term “lyric reading.” Such practices were likewise built upon two mutually constitutive conceptions that came to define the lyric in

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<sup>2</sup> I use “romantic lyric” not to name a historically instantiated genre, but rather to denote an interpretive ethos which, as I later explain, presumes that the operations of lyric poetry and interpretation are separable from historical context. In this sense, my usage follows Mark Jeffreys’ suggestion that the term functions primarily as a foil for more historically specific models of lyric. See Jeffreys, “Introduction. Lyric Poetry and the Resistance to History,” in New Definitions of Lyric: Theory, Technology, and Culture, ed. Mark Jeffreys (New York: Garland, 1998), ix–x. More recently, scholars have pressed for a careful reevaluation of the relationship between romantic-era studies and historical poetics, with “lyric” reemerging as a hotly contested term; see especially the essays in “Romanticizing Historical Poetics,” ed. Julia S. Carlson, Ewan J. Jones, and D. B. Ruderman, special issue, Essays in Romanticism 25, no. 1 (2018).

twentieth-century Anglo-American literary criticism. If virtually all poetry could be read and taught through the paradigm of a lyric speaker or persona—a decisively “post-Enlightenment concept,” in Jackson and Prins’ view—then this model of speech could be readily retrojected into the poetry of earlier times and spaces.<sup>3</sup>

In the field of eighteenth-century studies, this interpretive model led literary historians writing in the mid- to late-twentieth century to assimilate eighteenth-century English poetry into the overlapping paradigms of “pre- or protoromanticism” and the “rise of the lyric.” Foregrounding the odes of Thomas Gray, William Collins, and their mid-century contemporaries, such histories emphasized the eighteenth-century lyric’s uneven but gradual shift from publicly oriented speech toward privately oriented utterance.<sup>4</sup> This trajectory thus

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<sup>3</sup> Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, eds., introduction to The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2014), 1–8.

<sup>4</sup> Representative studies include M. H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953), 72–88; Norman Maclean, “From Action to Image: Theories of the Lyric in the Eighteenth Century,” in Critics and Criticism, Ancient and Modern, ed. R. S. Crane (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1955), 408–60; John Sitter, Literary Loneliness in Eighteenth-Century England (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982); Anne Williams, Prophetic Strain: The Greater Lyric in the Eighteenth Century (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984); and Marshall Brown, Preromanticism (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1991). Also notable is G. Gabrielle Starr’s argument that lyric, understood to be “a changing body of conventions linked to a particular mode and a particular group of literary kinds (sonnets, odes, elegies, etc.),” emerged from “the structures, strategies, and spaces of the [eighteenth-

produced the assumptions that ground Jackson and Prins' broader claim about the history of lyric reading. If the lyric "rose" ineluctably during the eighteenth century toward its "romantic" moment in the early nineteenth century, then it did so precisely as poets directed their attention, address, and subject matter inward.<sup>5</sup> To think about the lyric "rising" in these historical terms is to conclude, as Marshall Brown has quipped, that "there was no lyric poetry in the eighteenth century worth speaking of."<sup>6</sup>

Critics of this romantic model question its historical trajectory, and especially (as Clifford Siskin writes) "that strange but powerful developmental tale in which, after decades of dry reason, late eighteenth-century Englishmen finally got in touch with their feelings."<sup>7</sup> Other recent studies have emphasized eighteenth-century poets' public performances, as for instance their investments in imperial Britain's fortunes, and have analyzed the tropes and techniques they used

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century] novel." Starr, Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2004), 12, 1.

<sup>5</sup> See especially Sitter, Literary Loneliness, 85–86: "By the mid-century, retirement has hardened into retreat. . . . Moreover, the melancholy poems [of the period] seem merely to be part of a larger turning away from the social-historical world to which poetry traditionally belonged . . ."

<sup>6</sup> Marshall Brown, "Passion and Love: Anacreontic Song and the Roots of Romantic Lyric," ELH 66, no. 2 (1999): 373. Margaret Doody similarly observes that the long eighteenth century witnessed an "eclipse of the lyric." Margaret Anne Doody, The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 57.

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Siskin, "The Lyric Mix: Romanticism, Genre, and the Fate of Literature," The Wordsworth Circle 25, no. 1 (1994): 8.

to celebrate or criticize its policies.<sup>8</sup> Historians of early modern lyric have likewise recovered poets' engagements with the social and material dimensions of poetic form, thus demonstrating that poets have always engaged with, and attempted to reshape, the circumstances of poetic production in their lyric practices.<sup>9</sup> Still, a second position of retreat remains prevalent in general accounts of the lyric and its development. This position, I suggest, is best described as “transhistorical,” and likewise entails a mode of interpretation that abstracts poems from matters of historical specificity or the lived present. In this vein, the transhistorically oriented reader recognizes historical variations in the lyric's character and purposes, yet nevertheless treats the lyric as a coherent tradition founded primarily upon the articulation of poetic interiority or its associated problematics of transience, voice, and unrealized possibilities.

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<sup>8</sup> Suvir Kaul, Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire: English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2000); Dustin Griffin, Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Great Britain (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002); Kevis Goodman, Georgic Modernity and British Romanticism (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2004), 67–105; James Mulholland, Sounding Imperial: Poetic Voice and the Politics of Empire, 1730–1820 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> See for example Arthur F. Marotti, Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1995); Heather Dubrow, The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2008); and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry, and Culture 1640–1680 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2013). See also Ben Burton and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, eds., The Work of Form: Poetics and Materiality in Early Modern Culture (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2014).

The transhistorical model of lyric interpretation that I have summarized above is most fully articulated in Jonathan Culler's Theory of the Lyric (2015). Elaborating on his previous work on structuralist poetics and lyric address, Culler aims to correct two misleading presumptions in modern lyric theory: first, that all lyric poetry is the "representation of subjective experience"; and second, that lyric poems must be "subordinated to interpretation," whereby poems are translated into the "target languages" demanded by different schools of literary theory.<sup>10</sup> These tendencies, in his view, have posed significant obstacles to a comprehensive theory of lyric. Furthermore, he holds that the popularity of historicist criticism and novel studies since the late twentieth century has made that task especially difficult. What needs to be clarified and confirmed, Culler contends, is a conception of lyric utterance which is based on a set of key elements as they persist "across historical periods and radical changes in circumstances of production and transmission" (Theory 3–4).

To fulfill these ends, Culler proposes a capacious model built upon four working parameters: the poem's "enunciative apparatus," or fundamental dependence on sound effects and voicing; its use of deixis to "create the effects of presence"; its "ritualistic" function, in so far

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<sup>10</sup> Jonathan Culler, Theory of the Lyric (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2015), 2, 5–6, henceforth cited parenthetically in the text as "Theory." For examples of Culler's earlier work on lyric, see Structuralist Poetics (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), 161–88; The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction (Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 135–54; "Reading Lyric," in "The Lesson of Paul de Man," ed. Peter Brooks, Shoshana Felman and J. Hillis Miller, special issue, Yale French Studies 69 (1985): 98–106; and "Lyric, History, and Genre," New Literary History 40, no. 4 (2009): 879–99.

as lyric language invites and demands its re-performance across time and space; and its “hyperbolic character,” or that which makes the poem an event worth recording and performing (Theory 33–38).<sup>11</sup> Though not exhaustive, these vectors nevertheless map a broad critical terrain that orients readers toward a given poem’s language and performance, rather than toward the poem’s circumstances of composition, circulation, and reception. Just as important to this model is that it neither presumes nor demands the “fiction” of an identifiable speaker. Instead, Culler suggests, the lyric poem makes its presence—the situation it enacts—felt through its arrangement of language and the effects of such language on its readers, whether in terms of rhythm, repetition, figuration, or address (Theory 35). When understood in these terms, the lyric poem becomes an immanent utterance whose signs are best registered in the very moment of reading, and which does not need any information other than that provided within the bounded space of the poem.

Culler’s Theory thus builds upon and responds to the efforts of earlier and contemporary critics who share his investments in both a transhistorical model of lyric and a coherent lyric “tradition,” even as their studies invoke different parameters.<sup>12</sup> Notably, these other studies,

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<sup>11</sup> These four parameters emerge from Culler’s readings of nine poems in the Western lyric tradition: Sappho, “Ode to Aphrodite”; Horace, Odes 1.5; Petrarch, Canzoniere 1; Goethe, “Heidenröslein”; Giacomo Leopardi, “L’infinito”; Charles Baudelaire, “A une passante”; Federico Garcia Lorca, “La luna asoma”; William Carlos Williams, “The Red Wheelbarrow”; and John Ashbery, “This Room.”

<sup>12</sup> Of course, many of these efforts were also inspired in part by Culler’s earlier work on the poetics of lyric.

which also express varying degrees of resistance to historicizing the lyric, conceive the mode in bodily terms—whether in the fiction of a lyric speaker or in the experience of a human reader—that Culler might otherwise dismiss. In her influential analyses of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, for example, Helen Vendler insists that lyric poetry must be interpreted as the mimesis of an individuated, fictive mind.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Susan Stewart appeals to eidos or “intersubjectivity” as the foundation of the lyric across time and space, given lyric poetry’s lasting appeal to the human senses.<sup>14</sup> Reviewing the claims made by the essays anthologized in Jackson and Prins’ Lyric Theory Reader (2014), Stephen Burt likewise observes that “[l]yric . . . tends or aspires to replace the live, mortal, present body of one person present in one place at one time . . . with something else . . . by means of a variety of forms and tropes, to a variety of emotive ends.”<sup>15</sup>

While these models may provide convincing explanations of the lyric’s poetic effects on a hypothetical reader, I suggest that their transhistorical perspective—and by extension, their indifference toward or suspicion of historically specific conceptions of lyric—misleadingly endorses a distinction between a poem’s intrinsic elements of voice, address, and rhythm, and its

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<sup>13</sup> Helen Vendler, introduction to The Art of Shakespeare’s Sonnets (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), 1–41.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Stewart, Poetry and the Fate of the Senses (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 2002), 41–57.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen Burt, “What Is This Thing Called Lyric?”, review of The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins, Modern Philology 113, no. 3 (2016): 439. Burt appears to agree with Gabrielle Starr’s contention that “[b]odies disappear” when mid-eighteenth-century poems use “I” to denote “personal utterance.” Starr, Lyric Generations, 75.



extrinsic circumstances of production and reception. If, as such critics would claim, the lyric poem primes the reader to focus on its immanent structure, then that structure is likewise presumed to be separable from, or at best contiguous with, the historical conditions that enabled the utterance. By this logic, any attempt to integrate those conditions into the structure would overwrite or violate the very nature of lyric expression itself: the poem would no longer be lyric but rather narrative, another textual object circulating in real, non-lyrical time. Such was Paul de Man's conclusion when he proposed that the lyric "depends entirely for its existence on the denial of phenomenality as the surest means to recover what it denies."<sup>16</sup> That is, the lyric poem maintains its status as lyric on the condition that the utterance is imagined and not real, materially circulating speech. Acknowledging that this assumption is always already impossible—"No lyric can be read lyrically nor can the object of a lyrical reading be itself a lyric," since interpretation demands that the fictional utterance be reconfigured as speech act—de Man advocated a "defensive" hermeneutics intended to preserve the lyric from the narrativizing imperatives of history.<sup>17</sup> To read the lyric poem as an object embedded in history is to deconstruct the poem's very status as lyric.

Similarly, transhistorical lyric theory concludes that any attempt to historicize a lyric poem—that is, to sketch its system of imagined or realized social relations—must necessarily be performed as a reconstruction or recovery that, in turn, dislocates the poem's apparent meaning from the sense of time that it crafts. "In effect," Culler writes, "the relations between lyric and

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<sup>16</sup> Paul de Man, "Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric," in The Rhetoric of Romanticism (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984), 259.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

society are constructed retrospectively, by those who experience the history that these lyrical practices help create and who thus register the effects of these poems or explicitly reconstruct one of the histories to which they contribute” (*Theory* 301). A historical interpretation of the lyric poem, in other words, cannot by definition reconstitute or reproduce the poem’s lyrical act; rather, it can only instrumentalize the poem’s use of language, and its resulting effects, with reference to the realm of actual social performance.<sup>18</sup>

What, then, do these theories of lyric—from those which emphasize the historical specificity of poetic production and interpretation, to those which depend upon transhistorical continuity—have in common? And how might their divergence over the lyric’s historical character, or lack thereof, affect the study of eighteenth-century poetry and poetics? First, such theories, despite their various points of departure, recognize the lyric’s persistence in the form of a coherent “tradition” across centuries of historical change. Second, they attribute that persistence to several competing factors: the long-standing presumption of a speaking presence in post-Enlightenment lyric poetry and theory; the centrality (and by extension, universality) of

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<sup>18</sup> One partial exception that Culler points out is the possibility of future address through historical gesture, as lyrics may “project a distinction between the immediate historical, communicative situation and the level at which the work operates in its generality of address and its openness to being articulated by readers who will be differently situated (situated in part by the history of these works themselves). . . .What becomes evident in any discussion of sociopolitical implications of concrete literary works is the unpredictability of their historical efficacy.” Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 301. See also John Michael, “Lyric History: Temporality, Rhetoric, and the Ethics of Poetry,” *New Literary History* 48, no. 2 (2017): 265–84.

poetic performance to the human experience; and the vitality of a critical-interpretive ethos that prioritizes the immediate context of one's reading experience over previous contexts. Such theories therefore embed the history of lyric in the poetics and politics of retreat: that is, in the lyric poet's apparently receding engagement with contemporary history and society, and in the lyric theorist's reluctance or refusal to conceive the form beyond the moment of reading.

Given these preoccupations, this essay turns to the historiography and reception of Anne Finch's poetry to argue that her reputation as a poet became exemplary of the romanticized conventions of lyric I traced above: the construction of an identifiable speaker who voices to introspective feeling, and the lyric poem's invitation to retreat from contemporary context (whether within the space of the poem or within the frame of interpretation). Such assumptions, in turn, were grounded upon the occlusion, if not outright erasure, of the poet's life in forced retreat. This occlusion effectively amounts to the "lyricization" of Finch's oeuvre, or the assimilation of her poetry into a critical paradigm which neglects or refuses attention to the poet's material circumstances.

Such critical issues emerge clearly in Finch's "Pindarick Poem. Upon the Hurricane in November 1703. referring to this Text in Psalm 148. Ver. 8. Winds and Storms fulfilling his Word. With a HYMN compos'd of the 148<sup>th</sup> PSALM Paraphras'd." Among Finch's poems of retreat, "Upon the Hurricane" is distinguished by its apparent defiance of lyric conventions and the tropes of retirement poetry. Rather than narrate Britain's most destructive storm or proffer consolation in the natural world, the poem instead dispenses harsh political and spiritual judgment on the ravaged nation, all while studiously concealing its poet's identity. Between its Pindaric form, digressive movement, "occasional" framework, and strategically displaced "speaker," the poem likewise refuses easy categorization as it plays upon the lyrical conventions

that critics have identified in her less overtly political poems. Yet such generic unease, I argue, enables Finch to exploit her “contemn’d Retreat” in ways that exceed the imperatives of transhistorical lyric theory. By stating that her political precarity is essential to her poem’s composition, “Upon the Hurricane” models a lyric practice whose salient features—the presence of a stable speaking subject, and the mutually constitutive relationship between caller and respondent—constitute strategies of political engagement. To understand Finch’s “retreat” as a “contemn’d” one, then, is to reverse the conclusion which historians and theorists of lyric would later draw from her poetry: namely, that the poet’s withdrawal to the English countryside conditioned a poetic practice far removed from her political circumstances.

#### Lyricizing Anne Finch

Finch began writing poetry at a critical turning point in England’s political landscape. The national turmoil of the 1680s—including the mass hysteria of the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis; the failed Monmouth Rebellion (1685) and concomitant succession debacle; and ongoing anxieties over James II’s Catholic sympathies—culminated in the Revolution of 1688 and, for the second time in nearly fifty years, the escape of a Stuart monarch into France. Much as during the Civil Wars of the 1640s, these political ruptures forced supporters of the Stuart regime into retreat, where they viewed William III and Mary’s coronation less enthusiastically than contemporary print propaganda suggested. Among these pro-Stuart spectators was Anne Kingsmill, who had forged close connections to the court amidst the upheaval. She served as a maid of honor to Mary of Modena between 1682 and 1684, and she left upon marrying Heneage Finch, gentleman of the bedchamber to the duke of York and future James II. It was at court, however, that she wrote her first poems in secret. As the poet’s preface to her folio manuscript

collections reveals, she feared that public expression of her poetic ambitions would damage her reputation:

every one wou'd have made their remarks upon a Versifying Maid of Honour; . . .  
 And indeed, the apprehension of this, had so much wean'd me from the practice  
 and inclination to itt; that had nott an utter change in my Condition, and  
 Circumstances, remov'd me into the solitude, & security of the Country, and the  
 generous kindnesse of one that possest the most delightful seat in itt; envited him,  
 from whom I was inseparable, to partake in the pleasures of itt, I think I might  
 have stopp'd ere it was too late, and suffer'd those few compositions I had then by  
 me, to have sunk into that oblivion, which I ought to wish might be the lott of all  
 that have succeeded them.<sup>19</sup>

Finch's anxiety strongly echoes Katherine Philips' avowed fears over the unauthorized printing of her 1664 Poems. In her letter to Charles Cotterell ("Poliarchus") that would later preface the posthumous 1667 edition of her works, Philips lamented that she could not "so much as think in private" for fear of her "imaginations [being] rifled and exposed . . . to undergo all the raillery of the Wits, and all the severity of the Wise, and to be the sport of some that can, and some that cannot read a Verse."<sup>20</sup> Such sentiments, as feminist literary historians have observed, registered familiar anxieties among women poets about print culture: from concerns that public exposure of

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<sup>19</sup> Anne Finch, "The Preface," in The Poems of Anne Countess of Winchilsea, ed. Myra Reynolds (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1903), 7–8.

<sup>20</sup> Katherine Philips, preface to Poems by the most deservedly Admired Mrs. Katherine Philips The Matchless ORINDA (London: H. Herringman, 1667), [ii].

their poetry would constitute (in Dorothy Mermin's words) "a kind of sexual self-display," to fears that print publication without permission or proper patronage would violate social protocol.<sup>21</sup> Finch and Philips' remarks thus appear to confirm the gendered pressures that public print culture imposed not only upon women's poetic production, but also upon the reception of their poems.<sup>22</sup>

These concerns partially explain Finch's attribution of her poetic output to the "solitude, & security of the Country." Yet her prefatory remarks also remind her readers that this retreat (an "utter change in my Condition") was unexpected. Although the "utter change" in question is

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<sup>21</sup> Dorothy Mermin, "Women Becoming Poets: Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, Anne Finch," ELH 57, no. 2 (1990): 337–38; Kathryn King, Jane Barker, Exile: A Literary Career, 1675–1725 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 181–84. Meanwhile, Gillian Wright observes that for all the tributes Philips received, few other women writers opted to publish their poems in print. Gillian Wright, Producing Women's Poetry, 1600–1730 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 146.

<sup>22</sup> In recent years, feminist literary historians have challenged this historical interpretation by examining the full spectrum of women writers' professional practices; see especially Paula McDowell, The Women of Grub Street: Press, Politics, and Gender in the London Literary Marketplace 1678–1730 (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998); Margaret Ezell, Social Authorship and the Advent of Print (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1999); Sarah Prescott, Women, Authorship and Literary Culture, 1690–1740 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Kathryn King, "Scribal and Print Publication," in The History of British Women's Writing, 1690–1750, ed. Ros Ballaster (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 127–44.

likely her marriage to Heneage in 1684, it is also possible that Finch was referring to the fallout of the 1688 Revolution, by which time she and her husband were forced to leave London and—after Heneage’s arrest in 1690 for his failed attempt to contact the exiled James in France—to resettle at Eastwell Park in central Kent, where they spent most of the subsequent two decades in uncertain circumstances.<sup>23</sup> This latter possibility emerges from Finch’s observation that in her retirement at Eastwell, she “cou’d fix [her] eyes only upon objects naturally inspiring soft and Poeticall imaginations” and, in the process,

engage my self in the service of the Muses, as eagerly as if

From their new Worlds, I know not where

Their golden Indies in the air—

they cou’d have supply’d the material losses, which I had lately sustain’d . . .<sup>24</sup>

Here, Finch quotes lines 109–110 of Abraham Cowley’s “The Complaint,” in which the male poet faults his lyric Muse for his own failure to secure a royal pension in 1662–63. The “golden Indies” in Cowley’s poem mark the extent of commercial and territorial ambition in Restoration England, and they consequently figure in the ode as the airy temptations of his deceiving Muse. But in Finch’s autobiographical Preface, they foreground her commitment to poetry as a mode of proper royalist service, a sentiment consistent with what Gillian Wright has identified as “a near-

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<sup>23</sup> While the exact date of the folio manuscript in which the “Preface” appears remains unknown, Myra Reynolds speculates that it was compiled in 1702, “for it contains at least one poem [i.e., her “Elegy on the Death of King James”], written after, and probably very soon after, 1701.” Reynolds, introduction to The Poems of Anne, lxxxv.

<sup>24</sup> Finch, “The Preface,” The Poems of Anne, 8.

identification between female-authored literary writing and pro-Stuart conservatism.”<sup>25</sup> If Finch therefore attributed her poetic production to her retreat, she did so knowing that this retreat was predicated on the events of 1688, and that the “solitude & security of the Country” were invariably tied to the changed political landscape.<sup>26</sup>

As Carol Barash and Margaret Ezell have demonstrated, however, later readers and editors of Finch’s poetry came to recognize her as a very different kind of poet-in-retreat, even as they praised her talents.<sup>27</sup> After the poet died in 1720, her eighteenth-century reputation became founded, as Myra Reynolds summarizes, on three accomplishments: “She was a countess, she wrote The Spleen, and Pope had praised her.”<sup>28</sup> These were the aspects of her life that Finch’s eighteenth-century anthologists and biographers emphasized in their collections. Thomas Birch’s entry for the poet in his General Dictionary (1734–41), for example, featured six relatively apolitical poems—the entirety of The Spleen; Pope’s “To Lady Winchelsea” and her verse reply; and three additional poems taken from the Countess of Hereford’s manuscript—and praised her

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<sup>25</sup> Wright, Producing Women’s Poetry, 98.

<sup>26</sup> It is also worth noting that Heneage’s financial, literary, and moral support were essential to Anne’s poetic output; indeed, he transcribed, edited, and compiled many of her manuscript poems, particularly the Northamptonshire, Folger, and Wellesley manuscripts. Wright, Producing Women’s Poetry, 154.

<sup>27</sup> Carol Barash, “The Political Origins of Anne Finch’s Poetry,” Huntington Library Quarterly 54, no. 4 (1991): 327–29; Margaret Ezell, Writing Women’s Literary History (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1993), 127–29.

<sup>28</sup> Reynolds, introduction to The Poems of Anne, lxxii.



as “a Lady of excellent Genius, especially in Poetry.”<sup>29</sup> George Colman the Elder and Bonnell Thornton followed suit with an expanded selection of Finch’s poetry in their collection of Poems by Eminent Ladies (1755), anthologizing nine of her verse fables in addition to The Spleen and her exchange with Pope; but as the editors themselves suggested of their enterprise, the added poems may have been selected “merely to fill up so many pages.”<sup>30</sup>

Whether or not they were aware of her political sympathies, then, none of Finch’s eighteenth-century editors presented her as a poet whose life was subject to political uncertainties, and thus as a writer whose poems could be read as responding to her precarious circumstances. On this basis, later generations would have approached her poetry without knowledge of, or interest, in the political circumstances of her retreat, and they would have remembered her instead as a lyrical poet of seclusion and retreat into nature. This critical construction, modern Finch scholars generally agree, began with William Wordsworth’s “Essay, Supplementary to the Preface” to Lyrical Ballads (1815). In an oft-quoted passage on “genuine imagination” and the lack thereof among her contemporaries, Wordsworth celebrated Finch as a poet (and the only woman poet of note) whose works display an original vision detached from those of her staid Augustan contemporaries:

Now it is remarkable that, excepting a passage or two in the Windsor Forest of Pope, and some delightful pictures in the Poems of Lady Winchelsea [*sic*], the

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas Birch, “Winchelsea [*sic*] (Anne, Countess of),” in A General Dictionary, Historical and Critical (London: J. Bettenham, 1734–41), 10:178.

<sup>30</sup> G. Colman and B. Thornton, “Preface,” Poems by Eminent Ladies (London: R. Baldwin, 1755), 1:iv–v.

Poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the *Paradise Lost* and the *Seasons* does not contain a single new image of external nature; and scarcely presents a familiar one from which it can be inferred that the eye of the Poet had been steadily fixed upon his object, much less that his feelings had urged him to work upon it in the spirit of genuine imagination.<sup>31</sup>

Although critics panned his Preface and Poems,<sup>32</sup> Wordsworth's remarks on Finch shaped the course of her reception for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Edmund Gosse, who unknowingly purchased a folio collection of her manuscript poems in 1884, and who proclaimed himself her first "champion" since Wordsworth, lamented her inability "to create an atmosphere for herself within the vacuum in which she languished."<sup>33</sup> Twenty years later, Reynolds, in a more nuanced reading of Finch's oeuvre, acknowledged that the 1688 Revolution was "a momentous and lamentable event as a result of which the course of [the Finches'] lives were changed," but nevertheless concurred with Wordsworth and Gosse that "Lady Winchelsea, in her attitude toward external nature, was so far in advance of her age as to be isolated from it."<sup>34</sup> Even

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<sup>31</sup> William Wordsworth, "Essay, Supplementary to the Preface," Poems, 2 vols. (London: Printed for Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown, 1815), 1:358.

<sup>32</sup> William Rowe Lyall, unsigned review of Poems by William Wordsworth; including Lyrical Ballads, and the Miscellaneous Pieces of the Author, with additional Poems, a New Preface, and a Supplementary Essay, The Quarterly Review 14, no. 27 (1815): 201–25.

<sup>33</sup> Edmund Gosse, "Lady Winchelsea's Poems," in Gossip in a Library (London: William Heinemann, 1891), 123.

<sup>34</sup> Reynolds, introduction to The Poems of Anne, xxvii, cxxi.

Reuben Brower, who was disinclined to see Finch as Wordsworth's direct predecessor, nevertheless interpreted her poetry through all but her present: "In her poetry as in her way of living, Anne looks both before [her time] and after."<sup>35</sup>

These testimonies, as Barbara McGovern has noted, show that Finch came "to be analyzed, anthologized, and categorized almost exclusively as a nature poet and precursor of Wordsworthian Romanticism," and thus in ways that abstracted her life and poetry in service to a "romantic" sensibility or "domestic" feminine ideal.<sup>36</sup> To this understanding, I would further add that such processes are part and parcel of what we might call "lyricization," or the ongoing construction of Finch as a lyric poet excluded from contemporary political life as well as from any literary-historical discussion of her lived circumstances.<sup>37</sup> Putting all of these critical elements in play, we can better understand how this particular image of Finch as a socially and temporally detached poetess—as a poet whose femininity confirmed her distance from cultural

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<sup>35</sup> Reuben Brower, "Lady Winchilsea and the Poetic Tradition of the Seventeenth Century," Studies in Philology 42, no. 1 (1945): 63.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara McGovern, Anne Finch and Her Poetry: A Critical Biography (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1992), 79. See also Charles H. Hinnant, The Poetry of Anne Finch: An Essay in Interpretation (Newark, DE: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1994), 27.

<sup>37</sup> I adapt the term from Virginia Jackson's influential study of Emily Dickinson, which astutely argues that many of her writings became lyrics once they were printed as lyrics: as standalone poems which, once stripped of their original communicative contexts, could be interpreted without reference to their conditions of composition. Virginia Jackson, Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005).

controversies and political events—circulated in the interest of a romanticized, transhistorical paradigm of lyric.<sup>38</sup> Twentieth-century editions like John Middleton Murry’s 1928 Poems solidified the connection further, compiling only those poems which exemplified her domestic femininity, pensive melancholy, or desired retreat.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, as Ellen Moody has shown in her extensive online bibliography, the three most widely circulating Finch poems in the period 1900–2000 were “A Nocturnal Reverie,” “To the Nightingale,” and “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat.”<sup>40</sup> These patterns appear to have persisted into the present century,<sup>41</sup> supporting Charles

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<sup>38</sup> On the tradition of the “poetess,” see Anne K. Mellor, “The Female Poet and the Poetess: Two Traditions of British Women’s Poetry, 1780–1830,” Studies in Romanticism 36, no. 2 (1997): 261–76.

<sup>39</sup> Carol Barash, “Political Origins,” 328; Margaret Ezell, Literary History, 127–29. Both critics also observe that Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One’s Own (1929), “perpetuates this image of the pensive countess by quoting Murry; [and] she goes one step further by assigning the cause of Finch’s melancholy to her thwarted literary ambitions.” Ezell, Literary History, 129.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen Moody, “Bibliography of Primary and Secondary Sources,” Anne Kingsmill Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720), last modified October 6, 2003, <http://www.jimandellen.org/finch/finchbiblio.html>. By Moody’s count, “A Nocturnal Reverie” was the most frequently reprinted of Finch’s poems across the twentieth century, appearing in no fewer than twenty-five anthologies.

<sup>41</sup> Representative teaching anthologies include Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology, ed. Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, eds., The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Traditions in English, 2

Hinnant's critique of the consensus view that "the classic subject of Finch's verse is retirement—but a retirement that has very little to do with politics, culture, or even religion; it is all a matter of withdrawal and quiet reflection."<sup>42</sup>

Hence for over two centuries after Finch's death, most readers knew her almost exclusively through her lyrical, less (explicitly) political poetry. This fact, I have suggested, confirmed her as a poet-in-retreat who, like the "Reverie's" speaker, "Joys in th'inferiour World, and thinks it like her Own" (line 46),<sup>43</sup> and whose vision of an "Absolute Retreat" depended entirely on a setting conducive to solitary meditation. Recognizing these phenomena as consequences of her canonization, modern Finch scholars have actively reassessed her legacy,

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vols. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, eds., Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015); and Volume C: The Restoration and the Eighteenth Century of The Norton Anthology of English Literature, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 10<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018). Of these collections, Lonsdale's fifteen Finch selections most strongly demonstrate her versatility across forms, but only Fairer and Gerrard include "Upon the Hurricane" in its entirety.

<sup>42</sup> Hinnant, The Poetry of Anne Finch, 37.

<sup>43</sup> Anne Finch, "A Nocturnal Reverie," Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions. Written by a Lady (London: J. Barber, 1713), 292, line 46. All subsequent in-line citations of Finch's poetry will refer to this edition.

paying renewed attention to her manuscript poems (including the now-recovered Wellesley manuscript<sup>44</sup>) and her numerous songs, pastoral dialogues, fables, epistles, and plays.<sup>45</sup>

As studies of Finch continue to produce a more nuanced account of her poetic practice, we should therefore ask: How can this reception history change our understanding of lyric? And how might we comprehend Finch's lyrical qualities as inseparable from her lived circumstances in political retreat? To answer these questions, I turn now to "Upon the Hurricane," a poem whose powerful response to its contemporary crises depends fundamentally upon the poet's "contemn'd" situation and her resulting play with lyric expectations.

#### Finch's Hurricane Poetics

Finch likely completed "Upon the Hurricane" on February 9, 1704, about two-and-a-half months after the titular Great Storm barreled from the Atlantic into Britain,<sup>46</sup> but she made

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<sup>44</sup> Anne Finch, The Anne Finch Wellesley Manuscript Poems: A Critical Edition, ed. Barbara McGovern and Charles H. Hinnant (Athens, GA: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1998).

<sup>45</sup> On Finch's legacy in these forms, see Paula Backscheider, Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2005), 39–58; Diana Solomon, "Anne Finch, Restoration Playwright," Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 30, no. 1 (2011): 37–56; and Anne-Marie Miller-Blaise, "Ardelia's Voice: Anne Kingsmill Finch and the (Female) Lyrical Moment," Études anglaises 67, no. 4 (2014): 407–23.

<sup>46</sup> The storm made landfall on November 26, 1703 and departed for Scandinavia the following day. It likely emerged from exceptionally powerful winds that had been building in the English

substantial revisions across several manuscripts before including the poem in the 1713 Miscellany.<sup>47</sup> Although this hurricane remains the most destructive storm to have struck the British Isles, it became especially memorable as the first major event to provoke reportage and commentary from Britons nationwide.<sup>48</sup> The most comprehensive of these accounts was Daniel Defoe's prose tract The Storm: or, a Collection of the most Remarkable Casualties and Disasters which happened in the late Dreadful Tempest, both by Sea and Land (1704); its claims to truthful reportage rested on written testimonies submitted by residents from all over the country.<sup>49</sup> Several such accounts from Kent, including Defoe's own travels, detailed how the storm tore off

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Channel over the previous month. Martin Brayne, The Greatest Storm (London: Sutton, 2002), 43–46.

<sup>47</sup> Gillian Wright, "Manuscript, Print, and Politics in Anne Finch's 'Upon the Hurricane,'" Studies in Philology 111, no. 3 (2014): 571–90; see especially 573–77 for a detailed account of "Upon the Hurricane's" manuscript and print versions. While I am indebted to Wright's discussion of "Upon the Hurricane" and its multiple textual variants as evidence of Finch's changing political and religious outlook, my analysis focuses more on the poem's strategic self-presentation vis-à-vis the ongoing "lyricization" of Finch's poetry from the eighteenth century to the present.

<sup>48</sup> Pat Rogers, "Hurricanes Happen in Hampshire," Times Literary Supplement, July 4, 2003, 14.

<sup>49</sup> On Defoe's tract and the Great Storm's meteorological and political significance, see Rogers, "Hurricanes," 15; Richard Hamblyn, introduction to The Storm (New York: Penguin Classics, 2005), xxii–xxxiv; and Robert Markley, "'Casualties and Disasters': Defoe and the Interpretation of Climatic Instability," Early Modern Cultural Studies 8, no. 2 (2008): 102–24.

boats, barns, and churches from their foundations and tossed them into the air.<sup>50</sup>

The Finches most likely witnessed the disaster first-hand from Eastwell Park. By this time, they had already begun to pursue some semblance of public life, especially after the Stuart monarch Anne succeeded William III upon his death in 1702.<sup>51</sup> Still, Anne's ascension did little to improve the Finches' immediate fortunes, as the following decade witnessed dramatic changes in the political landscape. Prevailing fears over another Catholic succession motivated the English Parliament to pass the Act of Settlement 1701, which named Sophia of Hanover as the next Protestant in line. Scotland responded by issuing the 1704 Act of Security, which stipulated that the nation was to choose its own successor; the passage of this bill initiated tense, protracted debates over the mutual fate of both nations. Three years later, the Finches would observe the official formation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain (and possibly the "Pretender" James Francis Edward Stuart's ultimately failed plan to invade the new Union) while still residing at Eastwell.

When "Upon the Hurricane" was therefore finally printed in its entirety in 1713, its first readers would have known the previous decade's political and meteorological disturbances.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Defoe, The Storm, 96.

<sup>51</sup> Heneage even attempted to stand as MP on three occasions, but lost the elections of 1701, 1705, and 1710. By 1708, however, they had likely moved back to London. McGovern, Anne Finch and Her Poetry, 89–91.

<sup>52</sup> Finch's concluding "Hymn" to the poem was first printed anonymously, along with several of her other poems, in Delarivier Manley's The New Atalantis (1709). Wright, "Manuscript, Print, and Politics," 574–75.



These overlapping disturbances unfold in the poem's elaboration of the Great Storm's biblical, monarchical, and poetic ramifications during a period of national uncertainty. Hence the terms and images of the forceful apostrophe to the hurricane's winds in the opening lines:

YOU have obey'd, you WINDS, that must fulfill  
 The Great Disposer's righteous Will;  
 Throughout the Land, unlimited you flew,  
 Nor sought, as heretofore, with Friendly Aid  
     Only, new Motion to bestow  
 Upon the sluggish Vapours, bred below,  
 Condensing into Mists, and melancholy Shade.  
     No more such gentle Methods you pursue,  
     But marching now in terrible Array,  
         Undistinguish'd was your Prey . . . (lines 1–10)

The formerly pleasant winds, which once dispelled the “melancholy Shade” that characterizes Finch's other retreat poems, now blow under the “righteous Will” of God and comprise a “terrible Array” of forces which prey upon the land. As Courtney Weiss-Smith notes, this transition accompanies a shift in agency from divine inspiration to natural force.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the apostrophe itself moves from passive (“You have obey'd”) to active voice (“you flew . . . you pursue”). The “unlimited” volition of the winds enables them to tear apart, among other trees and structures, the mighty oak:

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<sup>53</sup> Courtney Weiss-Smith, “Anne Finch's Descriptive Turn,” *The Eighteenth Century* 57, no. 2 (Summer 2016): 254–255.

In vain the Oak (so often storm'd)  
 Rely'd upon that native Force,  
 By which already was perform'd  
 So much of his appointed Course,  
 As made him, fearless of Decay,  
       Wait but the accomplish'd Time  
 Of his long-wish'd and useful Prime,

To be remov'd, with Honour, to the Sea. (lines 15–22)

Finch's attention to the oak is hardly coincidental, given the tree's prominence in Jacobite iconography and consequent interpretations of the 1688 Revolution.<sup>54</sup> Her syntactic padding of appositives and strong alternating end-rhymes also foregrounds the oak's "native" sturdiness rather than its inevitable collapse. Hence the poet tempers the storm's destructive force as much through her suggestive political allusions as through her "Pindaric" poetics: that is, her idiom and imagery evoke the storm's terror and its effects. In the process, the passage registers the regrettable collapse of the Stuart monarchy as much as it symbolizes the ravaged land.

Such allegorical maneuvers are part of a poetic practice far removed from that presupposed by any description of Finch as primarily a lyrical poet-in-retreat. Such practice, I now want to suggest, raises further questions about a key lyric feature that the poem seems to lack: an identifiable, individuated subject or "speaker." For who precisely in this poem claims

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<sup>54</sup> Charles II reportedly hid himself in an oak tree following the royalists' defeat at Worcester in 1651. On Finch's political symbolism of the oak, see Wes Hamrick, "Trees in Anne Finch's Jacobite Poems of Retreat," SEL 53, no. 3 (2013): 541–63.

the authority to dispense such bold accusations and judgments? Finch certainly wrote other poems without deploying a lyric-I, but “Upon the Hurricane’s” conspicuous lack of the first-person pronoun—especially so given the poem’s apostrophes and its epideictic rhetoric (i.e., of praise and blame)—has put considerable pressure on readers who have tried to delineate its lyrical qualities.<sup>55</sup> Reading the Pindaric poem alongside “A Preparation to Prayer” and “All is Vanity,” Hinnant observes that across these poems “Finch avoids the first-person pronoun of lyric poetry and prefers instead the convention of second-person address—the characteristic pronoun of the didactic mode.”<sup>56</sup> Categorizing “Upon the Hurricane” as didactic rather than lyric, Hinnant concludes that the three poems “converge on the same dilemma – namely, the mind’s difficulty in coming to terms with a force that defies human understanding.”<sup>57</sup> This generic uncertainty likewise shapes, to varying degrees, more recent descriptions of the framework of “Upon the Hurricane.” Although David Fairer observes that the poem evokes the musical connotations of the “lyric,” he contends that the harmonious association dissolves once

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<sup>55</sup> As Culler and other theorists of the poetic device remind us, one of the central functions of apostrophe is to make visible the poem’s circuit of communication. See especially Culler, The Pursuit of Signs, 135–54, and Barbara Johnson, “Apostrophe, Animation, and Abortion,” Diacritics 16, no. 1 (1986): 28–47. That “Upon the Hurricane” deploys its apostrophes without reflexively identifying its speaker therefore raises crucial questions, as I suggest below, about both the poem’s lyric status and Finch’s capacity to dispense judgment on the Great Storm while in political exile.

<sup>56</sup> Hinnant, The Poetry of Anne Finch, 245.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 246.

readers encounter image after image of civil anarchy.<sup>58</sup> For other critics, the absent lyric-I forecloses the possibility that the poet was writing in her own voice: Gillian Wright notes simply that Finch constructs a narrator of “magisterial authority,” while Weiss-Smith contends that the poet replaces any easy ontological distinction between subjects and objects with a series of “multiple, overlapping and dispersed agencies.”<sup>59</sup>

These remarks signal that critical readings of “Upon the Hurricane’s” generic unease hinge upon competing conceptions of lyric. On the one hand, as Hinnant and others have noted, the poem’s conspicuous lack of a first-person speaker would seem to rule out the possibility of reading the poem as lyric utterance. Similarly, the poem appears to lack the lyrical features that critics from Wordsworth onwards have identified in other poems of retreat: intimate address, regular rhythm, and transparent expression of the poet-persona’s internal emotions. On the other hand, as transhistorically oriented critics like Culler might argue, a poem need not fashion or designate a speaker in order to be considered lyric. Indeed, given its epideictic judgments and its hyperbolic, even dramatic restaging of the winds’ destruction, “Upon the Hurricane” fulfills several key criteria of Culler’s model of the lyric, even though it does not appear to identify a speaker. To read the poem as “lyric” in these terms is to treat the poem as an autonomous

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<sup>58</sup> David Fairer, “Modulation and Expression in the Lyric Ode, 1660–1750,” in The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations, ed. Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2013), 104–06.

<sup>59</sup> Wright, “Manuscript, Print, and Politics,” 580; Weiss-Smith, “Anne Finch’s Descriptive Turn,” 256. Wright does note in passing that Finch refrains from using the first-person pronoun until the final stanza of the “Hymn.”

utterance: one that offers extensive and highly political commentary on a natural and national disaster, but one that can also be understood independently of its poet's situation.

I want to suggest, however, that the absence of a coherent speaker in "Upon the Hurricane" raises key methodological concerns about transhistorical models of lyric. To assume that this poem simply functions without a historically identifiable speaker, I would suggest, is also to treat the staged event (here, the hurricane and its immediate aftermath) as an immanently linguistic event: that is, as an event unfolding in lyric time, or the moment of reading, rather than historical time. Under these conditions, Finch's poem is a lyric in so far as its refusal to identify a speaking voice also entails a distinction between the historical event (the Great Storm of 1703) and its poetic performance. Whatever one's interpretive choice, it would seem, Finch herself remains paradoxically absent from a poem that "speaks" extensively to a catastrophe she witnessed. This absence, in turn, would appear to prepare the grounds for the interpretive conditions under which she and her poetry were subjected for centuries: namely, that her poems of natural retreat were apolitical and contemplative, and thus that her political circumstances could be readily separated from her lyrical works.

Keeping in mind these generic concerns alongside the ongoing lyricization of Finch and her poetry that I traced earlier, how might we characterize "Upon the Hurricane?" Here I propose an alternative possibility for interpretation, and that is to treat Finch's Pindaric poem as a lyric poem which diagnoses the parallels between climatic destruction and national turmoil precisely to recover her own poetic authority, now diminished by the circumstances of her forced political retreat. I suggest further that her resulting poem deploys a specifically impersonal lyricism which enables the poet to "speak" without marking herself as an already vulnerable political subject: that is, as a Stuart sympathizer writing in a politically unstable moment. Reading the poem as

lyric in these terms enables us, in turn, to comprehend the complexity of Finch's "contemn'd" position: a situation she later names and exploits as essential to her poetic craft.

What characterizes the impersonal lyricism that stands in for the absent lyric-I? The poem offers one possible answer when it turns directly to Britain's stranded citizens, whose voices falter in the aftermath of the storm:

What alas, is to be done!  
 Those, who in Cities wou'd from Dangers run,  
 Do but encreasing Dangers meet,  
 And Death, in various shapes, attending in the Street;  
 .....  
 One half's interr'd, the other yet survives,  
 And for Release with fainting Vigour strives;  
 Implores the Aid of absent Friends in vain;  
 With fault'ring Speech, and dying Wishes calls  
 Those, whom perhaps, their own Domestic Walls  
 By parallel Distress, or swifter Death retains. (lines 82–85, 90–95)

In destroying the physical and thus the social fabric of Britain's cities, the Great Storm cuts off ordinary public modes of communication and response. The poem enacts this fallout in highly emotive declaratives, and the lines' end-rhymes (survives/strives, calls/Walls, vain/retains) forcefully register the contradictions of re-performing the chaos in verse. But most suggestively, the passage appears to dramatize Finch's own limited capacity to speak from her precarious position: her description of the victims' voices as "fault'ring" and echoic (because they can only reverberate within "their own Domestic Walls") seems especially self-reflexive as it

demonstrates the vulnerability of personal address in a moment of national crisis. These features pose difficult questions to poet and audience alike: is Finch proposing that the poem must achieve its enunciative force by recovering lost and faltering voices, including the poet's own? If so, then what happens to the lyric utterance itself?

Such concerns likewise animate the poem's later passages, as when Finch offers a token lament for the death of Richard Kidder, Bishop of Bath and Wells, who replaced the non-juror Thomas Ken in 1691 but died during the storm:

O Wells! thy Bishop's Mansion we lament,  
 So tragical the Fall, so dire th'Event!  
 But let no daring Thought presume  
 To point a Cause for that oppressive Doom.  
 Yet strictly pious KEN! had'st Thou been there,  
 This Fate, we think, had not become thy share . . . (lines 96–101)

As Wright explains, Finch's praise for Ken (who was exiled from his post for refusing to swear allegiance to the Williamite regime) is not coincidental, and the passage clearly registers the poet's "conviction that, had Ken still been bishop, he and his palace would have escaped destruction."<sup>60</sup> Having explicitly sympathized with Ken, her fellow subject-in-exile, Finch then accuses the "bold Winds and Storms" (line 109) once more of perpetrating the contemporary political chaos:

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<sup>60</sup> For more on the two bishops' careers, see Brayne, The Great Storm, 11–15. Wright also speculates that Finch may have known Ken personally, as he took shelter with her relatives at Longleat after his exile. Wright, "Manuscript, Print, and Politics," 583.

You South and West the Tragedy began,  
 As, with disorder'd haste, you o'er the Surface ran;  
     Forgetting, that you were design'd  
 (Chiefly thou Zephyrus, thou softest Wind!)  
 Only our Heats, when sultry, to allay,  
 And chase the od'rous Gums by your dispersing Play. (lines 112–17)

Addressed directly as culpable agents of “the Tragedy,” the invoked winds suggestively link the storm’s “disorder’d haste” with the surrounding political climate. Consequently, critics have cited this particular passage as evidence either of the poem’s ambiguous political sentiments, or of the poet’s sense that any political rationalization of the storm would be futile.<sup>61</sup> Just as importantly, Finch’s second-person addresses once again raise pressing questions about her own poetic practice: are the winds being accused of overstepping their metaphysical bounds? Or is the poem, having persistently summoned the winds, now seeking to temper its own performative energies and the retroactive violence they indicate?

Finch does not answer these questions directly, but rather carries her expansive poem to

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<sup>61</sup> On the one hand, Hinnant warns that the poem, despite its historical references, makes no decisive “judgment upon the events of the previous fifteen years.” On the other hand, Fairer and Gerrard speculate that the four winds may recall the high Tories’ failed attempt to purge all Whigs from political office in 1702. Wright, meanwhile, concludes of this passage “that the ills diagnosed by Finch’s Jacobitism now exceed any realistic means of political redemption.” Hinnant, The Poetry of Anne Finch, 247; Fairer and Gerrard, Eighteenth-Century Poetry, 29n; Wright, “Manuscript, Print, and Politics,” 584.



the secure conclusion of renewed faith in God. She then closes the Pindaric section by triangulating God, her first-person plural audience, and “the Poet” into a plea for public faith:

Then let to Heaven our general Praise be sent,  
Which did our farther loss, our total Wreck prevent.

And as our Aspirations do ascend,  
Let every Thing be summon'd to attend;

And let the Poet after God's own Heart

Direct our Skill in that sublimer part,

And our weak Numbers mend! (lines 297–303)

It is in these final lines that Finch properly summons a “Poet” who, as choirmaster, can direct the nation’s “general Praise”—a trope intended to restore voice to those formerly “fault’ring” citizens—to God and Britain alike. Moreover, this summons arrives not as the source of the preceding Pindaric ode, but rather as its product. The poem’s request for a living Poet “after God’s own Heart” gives voice to Finch’s ensuing “Hymn,” and enables her to claim it as her own in the poem’s sole acknowledgement of her authorial presence:

From my contemn'd Retreat, obscure and low,

As Grotts from whence the Winds dispense,

May this His Praise as far extended flow;

And if that future Times shall read my Verse,

Tho' worthless in it self, let them his Praise rehearse. (lines 369–373)

Beyond explicitly indicating the poet’s “obscure and low” status, the final lines of the “Hymn” suggest that the lyric-I cannot speak as such until it properly recognizes God’s supreme authority. By admitting to her “contemn’d Retreat,” however, Finch deftly turns her otherwise

third-person utterance into first-person speech, by which she claims the authority to address and ameliorate her nation's woes. Her resulting call to national community is therefore a conspicuously personal moment in the poem, and it recalls the protracted conditions that "contemn'd" her to the countryside. Moreover, it is the call of the psalmist, of a figure who stakes her authority to write lyric under the aegis of an omnipotent God and the paradigm of communal song. Finch's self-authorization thus offers a provocative rejoinder to Paula Backscheider's general observation that eighteenth-century women poets "made the retirement poem about the self and about the recognition of an autonomous identity."<sup>62</sup> Given that "Upon the Hurricane" does not disclose the poet's presence until its final lines, Finch enacts the reverse of Backscheider's claim: only after the poet withholds her presence can she reclaim it by insisting on her capacity to write a "Hymn" that relies on collective voice rather than on solitary meditation. The final passage therefore serves to remind her readers of the poet's politically marginalized position, while also allowing her to bring into being a collective voice that will restore the nation after its natural and political disasters.

By thus attending to Finch's strategic modes of address, we can see how she manipulated her marginal status to maintain her authority as a poet even as her poem comments compellingly upon a contemporary national crisis. Specifically, "Upon the Hurricane" circumvents the political dangers of identifiable first-person speech, but it does not retreat from condemning the causes of Britain's destruction. The poem also exploits its author's "contemn'd Retreat" in a way that still allows her to speak adequately from exile to her fellow displaced and embittered citizens. The turbulent climate, and her own personal circumstances, pushed Finch to craft a

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<sup>62</sup> Backscheider, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, 240.

poem that combines personal restraint and public address, tropes of retreat and of political engagement.

Beyond the immediate frame of the poem, moreover, Finch's concluding disclosure of her "contemn'd Retreat" preempts the imperatives and concerns which have come to inform modern lyric theory. If transhistorical theorists like de Man and Culler would claim that the lyric utterance is separable from historical circumstance, then "Upon the Hurricane" argues precisely the opposite relation: its epideictic judgments and poetic effects stem directly and irrevocably from the political ruptures that forced its poet to "retreat" in the first place. For Finch, living in the "solitude and security of the Country" thus enabled a lyric practice by which she could reclaim her authority as a poet writing in service to the nation. Attending carefully to the poetics of one of Finch's most forceful retreat poems, this essay has argued, should compel us to reassess the historical legacies of lyric theory. Such reassessments should likewise remind us that a voice that represents itself as exiled or marginalized, or even in retreat from contemporary circumstances, is never stripped of its power to speak.