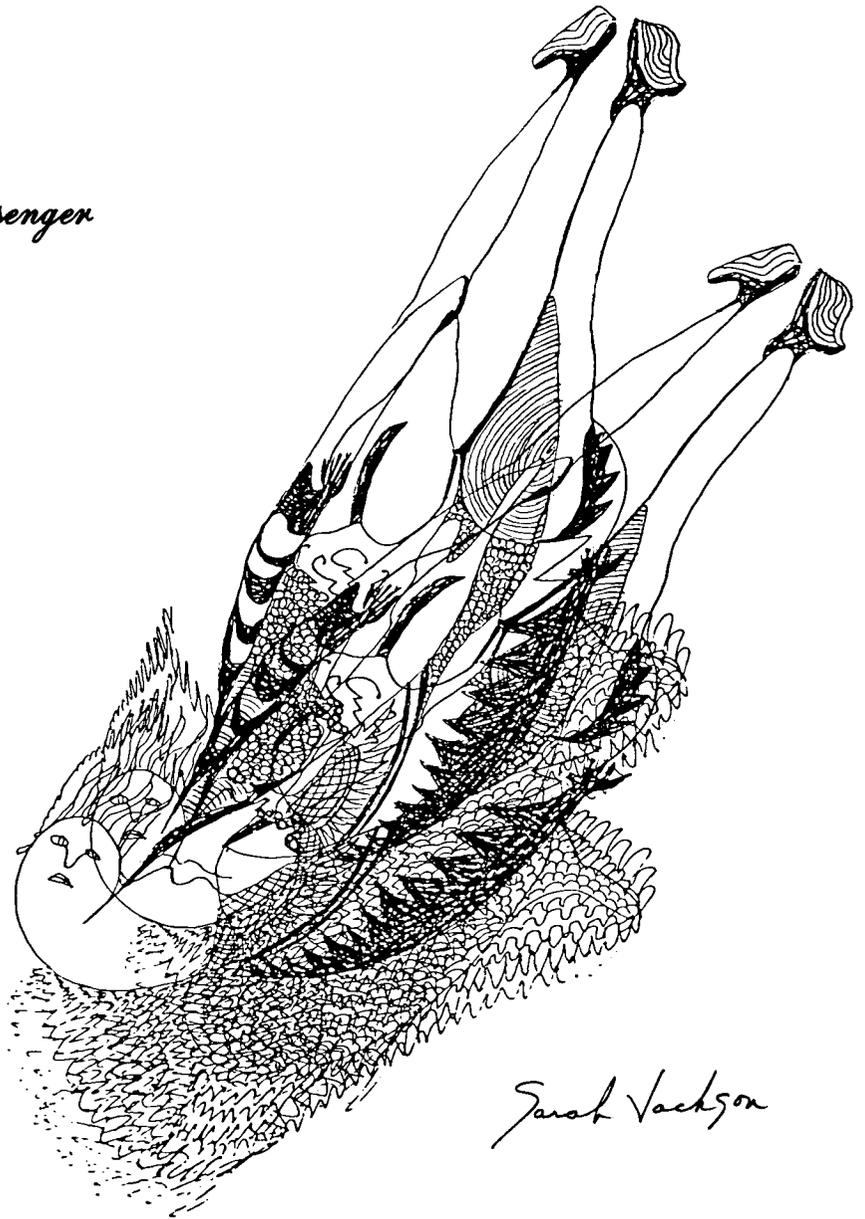


*Lady Winchilsea and Twice-Fallen Women*

*by Ann P. Messenger*



How are we fal'n, fal'n by mis-  
taken rules?  
And Education's, more than Na-  
ture's fools. . . .  
("The Introduction," ll. 51-52)

In 1929, Virginia Woolf wrote of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, that "one has only to open her poetry to find her bursting out in indignation against the position of women." (1) The first collection of Lady Winchilsea's poems, published during her lifetime in 1713, does not clearly support such a sweeping statement. This collection includes a wide range of kinds of verse: fables modelled on Aesop, a parody of Milton, Pindaric odes, brief songs, translations of Tasso and a paraphrased psalm, some pastoral poems and a rather limp blank-verse tragedy. Lady Winchilsea's versatility as a poet is amply illustrated in this collection, but only occasionally does a note of protest against the position of women appear in her lines.

The introductory poem, "Mercury and the Elephant, A Prefatory Fable," is characteristic of the way that note is sounded in the 1713 volume. The poem makes the claim, familiar in Augustan introductions, that the poet wrote for her own amusement and published her work only to make sure that accurate copies were preserved. This claim is introduced by a fable in which an elephant describes to Mercury a fierce battle he has recently had with a wild

boar and the scandal that followed, namely the accusation that he fought unfairly. The elephant says he scorns the talk of men and animals and wants only to know what the gods think of his tactics in the fight. Mercury's total ignorance of the whole affair, and the triviality of it, are expressed in his surprised exclamation, almost a question--"Then have you Fought!" Lady Winchilsea goes on to explain the import of her fable:

Sollicitous thus shou'd I be  
For what's said of my Verse and  
Me;  
Or shou'd my Friends Excuses  
frame,  
And beg the Criticks not to blame  
(Since from a Female Hand it came)  
Defects in Judgment, or in Wit;  
They'd but reply--Then has she  
Writ!(2)

Taking into consideration the conventions of introductory poems, this verse paragraph is little more than the denial of vanity expected of a little-known poet rising for the first time to the dignity of a collected edition.

Looking a little more closely at these lines, however, one can begin to see something of what a female poet had to expect from the critics (and the reading public) in the early eighteenth century. First, she would not be expected to write at all. True, women did, and gained fame. The list is familiar: in the mid-seventeenth cen-

tury, Margaret of Newcastle was notorious, if not famous; Katherine Philips, "the matchless Orinda," wrote passionately of friendship between women; Anne Killigrew had made a name for herself as a poet and painter and ensured her fame by dying in 1685 at the age of about 26; (3) Aphra Behn, "the incomparable Astrea," competed successfully in the commercial world of letters with plays, novels and practically everything else that would pay--and earned Lady Winchilsea's admiration, although she wrote "a little too loosely" for her taste. (4) And other "female scribblers" existed, perhaps many of them, but generally speaking women were not expected to write. Surprise, then, is the first reaction to her book that Lady Winchilsea expects. The rest of the parallel with the fable of Mercury and the elephant is more damning. She, the female poet, is equated with the elephant, a clumsy beast, and, what is more important, an animal, thus lower than mankind on the scale of being. The critics on the other hand are paralleled with Mercury; they are males and they are gods, and are thus twice removed from the level of the elephant poet. Critics are always to be feared by any poet when they find "Defects in Judgment or in Wit," the two prime criteria for Augustan verse. But when the poet is a woman, such defects are only to be expected--or so Lady Winchilsea's so-called friends would say, arguing that the critics should apply a different and

lower standard to the work of a woman. This idea can be taken two ways: as part of the great modesty, false or genuine, expected in introductory lines; or as a glimmering of the bitterness and indignation at woman's lot that Virginia Woolf saw in Lady Winchilsea's heart.

At this point, two reminders concerning genre and persona are of the utmost importance, however obvious they are. The first concerns the importance to Augustan writers of the conventions of the various genres. Lady Winchilsea seems to be deliberately experimenting with a considerable number of genres in the 1713 volume, which demonstrates her knowledge of what was appropriate to introductory verses, to eulogy, to the Horatian poem of retreat to a pastoral scene and so forth. These conventions make questions about "sincerity" almost impossible to answer. The second is the question of persona, which overlaps that of genre. Poets of Lady Winchilsea's period were not accustomed to reflect on their emotions in tranquility and then allow them powerfully to overflow in verse. They were not generally confessional poets. Even when private anguish appears to play a major part in a first-person poem, as in Pope's "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," one must look for--and one will find--the artful purpose behind such apparently artless spontaneity. The poet is using a persona, whose relationship to the

poet himself has become a matter of intense critical controversy.(5) The persona can be a totally different person from the man or woman who composed the lines or can function in any kind or degree of relationship to him or her. Obviously, Augustan poets, like those of any period, wrote out of their own experience, and equally obviously, they often re-shaped that experience through the device of the persona. I cannot hope to explore the full complexity of this controversial matter here; suffice it to say that critically sophisticated readers of Augustan verse cannot interpret Lady Winchilsea's poems as autobiography pure and simple, as Virginia Woolf seems to have done.

"Mercury and the Elephant," then, is a conventionally modest introduction to a collection of poems, with its modesty intensified by the fact that the poet was a woman and expected her work to be received as a woman's work; that is, according to male critics, as flawed and trivial. The prevailing tone of the poem is light; the undertones are darker. Darker still are the tones of some of the poems contained in the collection of Lady Winchilsea's work that Virginia Woolf refers to directly: John Middleton Murry's slim volume published in 1928.(6) Here we find clearer support for Woolf's judgment that Lady Winchilsea was "bursting out in indignation against the position of women."

The position of women, as Lady Winchilsea depicts it in her poetry, is that of the twice-fallen. Woman's first fall is the one she shares with man, the Fall in the Garden of Eden. As a devout Christian (and having further, personal grounds for a gloomy view of the human condition),(7) Lady Winchilsea returns again and again to the idea of the fall as an explanation for the sorrows and imperfections of mankind and, even more, of womankind. Eve's role in the fall is especially important and not at all easy to determine, nor is her position vis-à-vis Adam. The Bible says simply that she ate the forbidden fruit because the serpent said it would make her wise, that she then gave some to Adam, "and he did eat." Only after the fall is it clearly stated that Adam shall rule over her (Genesis 3:16).

Perhaps the very bareness of outline of the story in Genesis is responsible for the many variations that followed, including Milton's in Paradise Lost. Lady Winchilsea knew Milton well enough to parody his style;(8) she must have known his version of the creation and fall, in which Eve is subordinate to Adam from the very beginning and is largely responsible for the fallen state of humankind because it was she who seduced Adam into eating the apple.(9) Others besides Milton laid the blame more or less squarely on Eve and, in some poems, in some moods, Lady Winchilsea appears to accept that

blame. For example, a long poem celebrating Mr. Rowe's translation of Horace, and commenting on his mistress "Orania" and his gentlemen friends, concludes thus:

Happy You three! happy the Race  
of Men!  
Born to inform or to correct the  
Pen  
To profitts pleasures freedom and  
command  
Whilst we beside you but as  
Cyphers stand  
T'increase your Numbers and to  
swell th'account  
Of your delights which from our  
charms amount  
And sadly are by this distinction  
taught  
That since the Fall (by our  
seducement wrought)  
Ours is the greater losse as ours  
the greater fault.(10)

One must not overlook the value of women implied in these lines: they reproduce the race of men and are responsible for at least part of men's happiness; but the emphasis is on the justifiably inferior position of women, justifiable because as daughters of Eve they are to blame for the fallen state of mankind. Most of the references to the wiles of Satan and to the forbidden tree to be found in other poems do not overtly condemn women, but it is interesting to note that none of the poems puts the blame on Adam.

Furthermore, the ideas of woman as the weaker sex and man as born to rule her appear again and again in the poems, differing widely in tone though not in doctrine. The tone is comic in "Fanscomb Barn," (pp. 210-213) the parody of Milton, in which the strolling beggar Strolepedon, primed by "the swarthy Bowl. . . / Replete with Liquor," (ll. 17-18) orates lengthily to his wife Budgeta on the beauties of Fanscomb Bottom; she is instructed to observe the verdant slopes, if she is not getting too sleepy from the drink -- "(if the drouzy Vapour will admit, / Which from the Bowl soon triumphs o'er thy Lidds, / And Thee the weaker Vessel still denotes)." (ll. 75-77) The tone is more serious in "The Spleen," (pp. 248-252) the best known of Lady Winchilsea's poems during her own lifetime. Both men and women are subject to the ravages of the spleen, a melancholic disease, but "Ladies Fees" (l. 140) in particular enrich the physicians who attempt to treat the illness. Sometimes "the Imperious Wife" suffers from the spleen to such an extent that her "show'ring Eyes" have an unduly strong influence on her husband, "Lordly Man, born to Imperial Sway," and cause him to "servilely Obey" her, relinquishing his proper role as her master. (ll. 53-63) There is no overt statement here that the wife is deliberately tyrannizing over her husband; "The Spleen" is a serious treatise on a real disease, and was reprinted in a medical text on the

subject. However, the imperious wife is said to be "arm'd with Spleen," suggesting deliberate tactics in the battle of the sexes, while some of the other characters in the poem, such as the would-be wit and the coquette, are clearly pretending to suffer from the disease in order to conceal their various deficiencies. But the doctrine remains clear: man is "born to Imperial Sway."

The intellectual superiority of men to women appears again in two occasional poems which are compliments addressed to women. "To the Honourable the Lady Worsley at Longleat" (pp. 52-55) praises "Utresia" and expresses gratitude for her correspondence, concluding with a comparison between Longleat and the garden of Eden; Lady Worsley, the Eve in this garden, is praised for her beauty, while her father, the Adam of the comparison, is credited with intelligent conversation:

'Twas Paradiſe in ſome expanded  
Walk  
To ſee Her motions, and attend  
his Talk. (ll. 110-111)

A similar attitude is expressed in "To the Right Honourable the Countess of Hartford, with her volume of Poems." (p. 61) The father of the Countess is said to have given "spirit" to Lady Winchilsea's lines, "So deep his judgment, so acute his wit," (l. 7) while only the compassion of her "gentle nature" (l. 9) is requested of the Countess. Even that is described

as an inheritance from her father.

A final example of the idea of women as the weaker sex, "On Myselfe," (pp. 14-15) has a very peculiar tone indeed for an orthodox Christian and a sufferer from the spleen.

Good Heav'n, I thank thee, ſince  
it was design'd  
I ſhou'd be fram'd, but of the  
weaker kinde,  
That yet, my Soul, is reſcu'd  
from the Love  
Of all thoſe Trifles, which their  
Paſſions move.  
Pleasures, and Praise, and Plenty  
have with me  
But their juſt value. If allow'd  
they be,  
Freely, and thankfully as much I  
taſt,  
As will not reaſon, or Religion  
waſt.  
If they're deny'd, I on my ſelfe  
can Live,  
And ſlight thoſe aids, unequal  
chance does give.  
When in the Sun, my wings can be  
display'd,  
And in retirement, I can bleſs  
the ſhade.

The doctrine of the relative weakness of women is clearly stated and it is not heterodoxical to say that some are weaker than others. Yet there is a touch of the Pharisee in these lines-- "I thank thee that I am not as other men"--as Lady Winchilsea, with barely

concealed pride, describes her superiority to the ups and downs of fortune. She had some basis for such pride: she found genuine satisfaction in a retired country life after her exclusion from the court. But she could by no means control her feelings: she suffered severely from the spleen, and immediately following "On Myselfe" is "Ardelia to Melancholy," (pp. 15-16) in which she helplessly abandons herself to the force of her disease.(11) Was she unaware of the pride, of the sophistry, in "On Myselfe"? Was her persona simply stating a classic Stoic doctrine?(12) Or was she proclaiming her own value in the teeth of the orthodox idea that women are less valuable creatures, while at the same time acquiescing in that idea? These questions cannot really be answered but the peculiarity of tone in this poem seems to come from the unresolved conflict between her apparent acceptance of the inferiority of women and her assertion of her own strength and worth.

The same conflict is handled with complete success in "The Appology," (p.13) another introductory poem.(13) Here the sophistry of the argument is deliberate, the self-deprecation is witty and the conclusion comes very near to claiming equality with men.

'Tis true I write and tell me by  
 what Rule  
 I am alone forbid to play the fool  
 To follow through the Groves a  
 wand'ring Muse  
 And fain'd Idea's for my pleasures chuse  
 Why shou'd it in my Pen be held a  
 fault  
 Whilst Mira paints her face, to  
 paint a thought  
 Whilst Lamia to the manly Bumper  
 flies  
 And borrow'd Spiritts sparkle in  
 her Eyes  
 Why shou'd itt be in me a thing  
 so vain  
 To heat with Poetry my colder  
 Brain,  
 But I write ill and there-fore  
 shou'd forbear  
 Does Flavia cease now at her  
 fortieth year  
 In ev'ry Place to lett that face  
 be seen  
 Which all the Town rejected at  
 fifteen  
 Each Woman has her weaknesse;  
 mind [sic] indeed  
 Is still to write tho' hoplesse  
 to succeed  
 Nor to the Men is this so easy  
 found  
 Ev'n in most Works with which the  
 Witts abound  
 (So weak are all since our first  
 breach with Heav'n)  
 Ther's lesse to be Applauded then  
 forgiven.

In "On Myselfe" Lady Winchilsea had proclaimed her superiority to her weaker sisters; here, she allies herself with them in a series of wittily poor analogies to "prove" her right to write. The poem belongs to the "portrait gallery" genre which Pope used so brilliantly in his second Moral Essay, "Of the Characters of Women." Like Pope, Lady Winchilsea gives her ladies pastoral names and picks on the most commonplace of women's weaknesses: over-doing their make-up, drinking and proudly parading a superannuated face. Her acceptance of the fact that her sisters do behave this way and her extreme modesty about her own writing, "hoplesse to succeed," disarm the reader. He (and I use the pronoun advisedly) cannot object to a female poet who admits that she and all other women "play the fool." Then comes the punch line. Women may be poor writers but men are not that much better, because all human beings are weak, corrupt since the fall of Adam and Eve, and in their work there is "lesse to be Applauded then forgiven."

"The Appology" is an introductory poem and obeys the conventions of that genre. It argues by analogy, the weakest form of argument, and the analogies are themselves weak; writing verse and painting one's face are not genuinely comparable activities. Elsewhere, Lady Winchilsea sets herself apart from other women and indeed attacks their behavior with some vio-

lence. All this makes it possible to take the poem as no more than a witty bagatelle, a clever tricking of the reader into temporarily accepting an unacceptable idea. Lady Winchilsea herself obviously thought that she had the right to compose verses but her convictions about the equality or inferiority of women are hidden by the wit of the poem.

## II

All humankind are fallen and the stigma of that first fall can never be totally eradicated. Yet it is one's duty to strive for improvement. Perfection, for the Christian and the Augustan, is not attainable but improvement is, primarily through education. (The first purpose of education, as Milton said, is "to repair the ruins of our first parents.") It is here that virtually all women were at a great disadvantage in Lady Winchilsea's time, so much so that she has written of their disabilities as a second fall. Their limited education trained them to play only limited roles, which in turn reinforced assumptions about the limited capabilities of women--a sort of chicken-or-egg situation. This situation does, in some poems, call forth Lady Winchilsea's indignation, as Virginia Woolf said, though the tones of the poems and the methods and objects of attack vary widely. She rebels against lack of education and against assumptions about women's

roles, against the prejudice directed towards women writers, against the value placed on women's beauty to the exclusion of other qualities. She scolds her empty-headed sisters for being empty-headed and praises the heroines of old for their wit and talent. Sometimes, but not often, she attacks the oppressiveness or foolishness of men. Yet throughout all this, she never denies that women are twice-fallen, a fact that she faces with rage, with despair, with resignation, with humor--with sanity.

The poem that most clearly illustrates this mixture of rebellion, praise and resignation is called simply "The Introduction." It did not appear in the 1713 volume but stands second (after "Mercury and the Elephant") in Myra Reynolds' edition. (pp. 4-6) Murry places it after "The Appology" in his edition. Again, it is a poem that follows the conventions of introductory verse--particularly the modest disclaimer about the quality of the author's work. Probably because she did not intend to publish this poem, Lady Winchilsea writes here more openly than she did in "Mercury and the Elephant." The poem is too long to quote in full, but the first verse paragraph speaks for itself:

Did I, my lines intend for public view,  
 How many censures, wou'd their faults persue,  
 Some wou'd, because such words they do affect,  
 Cry they're insipid, empty, uncorrect.  
 And many, have attain'd, dull and untaught  
 The name of Witt, only by finding fault.  
 True judges, might condemn their want of witt,  
 And all might say, they're by a Woman writt.  
 Alas! a woman that attempts the pen,  
 Such an intruder on the rights of men,  
 Such a presumptuous Creature, is esteem'd,  
 The fault, can by no vertue be redeem'd.  
 They tell us, we mistake our sex and way;  
 Good breeding, fassion, dancing, dressing, play  
 Are the accomplishments we shou'd desire;  
 To write, or read, or think, or to enquire  
 Wou'd cloud our beauty, and exhaust our time,  
 And interrupt the Conquests of our prime;  
 Whilst the dull mannage, of a servile house  
 Is held by some, our outmost art, and use.

To be decorative in the drawing room or to direct the servants--these are the uses of woman. The poem continues, "Sure 'twas not ever thus," and calls upon the authority of the Old Testament for evidence that talented women could exercise their talents in by-gone days. Lady Winchilsea concentrates on the wit of women as demonstrated in poetry and the allied art of music, first mentioning the women playing before the ark as it returns to Israel (II Samuel 6); next describing the song of greeting sung by the women to welcome David after he had killed Goliath (I Samuel 18: 6-7), and finally telling the story of Deborah (Judges 4, 5). Deborah's prowess as poet and lawgiver is praised but her skill in battle is barely mentioned; and Jael, who did the dirty work in the same campaign by driving the tent peg through Sisera's head, never appears. Perhaps Lady Winchilsea wanted only lady-like models for female behavior; perhaps she was concerned with the unity of her poem about poetic women. At any rate, her female contemporaries suffer by comparison with the heroines of the Old Testament, as the poem concludes:

How are we fal'n, fal'n by mis-  
taken rules?  
And Education's, more then  
Nature's fools,  
Debarr'd from all improve-ments  
of the mind,  
And to be dull, expected and  
dassigned;

And if some one, wou'd Soar above  
the rest,  
With warmer fancy, and ambition  
press't,  
So strong, th'opposing faction  
still appears,  
The hopes to thrive, can ne'er  
outweigh the fears,  
Be cautioned then my Muse, and  
still retir'd;  
Nor be dispis'd, aiming to be  
admir'd;  
Conscious of wants, still with  
contracted wing,  
To some few friends, and to thy  
sorrows sing;  
For groves of Lawrell, thou wert  
never meant;  
Be dark enough thy shades, and be  
thou there content. (ll. 51-64)

After the rebellion, the resignation--the sense that as the world is now, her candle must be hidden under a bushel because the forces that would blow it out are too strong for her to combat.

The mood alters radically in "The Circuit of Appollo," (pp. 92-94) written in a bouncy, comic meter, basically anapestic:

Appollo as lately a Circuit he  
made,  
Throo' the lands of the Muses  
when Kent he survey'd  
And saw there that Poets were not  
very common,  
But most that pretended to Verse  
were the Women. . . .(ll. 1-4)

Apollo plans to crown the best female poet with a wreath; he mourns briefly for Aphra Behn before he turns to the four women who take turns reading their verses to him. He is just about to render a decision when he suddenly remembers the fate of Paris when he judged the beauty of the three goddesses, so he defers to a higher court, the Muses themselves, saying that the women can only be judged by those of their own sex. Apollo's vanity, cowardice and cleverness are amusingly drawn, and the poem implies that Aphra Behn and the four competitors are good poets and that women in general are valuable creatures. Yet, consciously or unconsciously, the bias of the male world is there. The meter of the poem, delightful as it is, trivializes the subject; the women compete only with each other; and Apollo defers his judgment because he assumes that "itt never was heard, / One female cou'd yield t'have another preferr'd." (ll. 60-61) The primary tone of the poem is light and confident but the pressures and attitudes of the world are tacitly acknowledged.

The high value placed on women's beauty, to the exclusion of other qualities, appears in many poems. Sometimes, as in the complimentary verses to the Countess of Hartford and Lady Worsley mentioned above, Lady Winchelsea appears to agree that beauty is important. Elsewhere, she attacks that idea, usually in an indirect man-

ner. In "An Epilogue to the Tragedy of Jane Shore," (pp. 100-101) designed to be spoken by the actress playing the title role, she laments the decay of "handsome Ladies" who, when they have lost their beauty, have nothing else to offer the world: "having on such weak foundation stood," (l. 35) it is time then to retire. Men are more fortunate: when a "pretty fellow" loses his physical attraction, he can become, or attempt to become, a wit, a free-thinker, a music critic or a politician; he "Maintains some figure, while he keeps his breath, / And is a fop of consequence till death." (ll. 45-46) Obviously, these lines imply considerable contempt for the foppish man but, equally obviously, they indicate that he has had enough of an education at least to go through the motions of being a wit, while women have not. The occasion of the "Epilogue" and the actual history of Jane Shore determine much of the poem, but the passage I have mentioned here can be taken out of context without altering its meaning--indeed, it almost jumps out of the context of the rest of the poem by itself.

The same idea appears in "Timely Advice to Dorinda" (p. 135) in the form of a serious statement of the problem but with a backhanded slap at men, who determine that beauty shall be of supreme value:

Dorinda since you must decay  
 Your lover now resign  
 As Charles that Empire gave away  
 He saw wou'd soon decline....  
 (ll. 1-4)  
 For Witt but faintly will inspire  
 Unless with Beauty joyn'd  
 And when our Eyes have lost their  
 fire  
 Tis uselesse in the Mind....  
 (ll. 9-12)

The tone here is that of facing the facts of life; one cannot do anything about the attitude of men, so one had best adjust one's actions accordingly.

Several rebellious strands are woven together in the introductory section of a long poem, "A Description of One of the Pieces of Tapistry at Long-Leat . . . ." (pp. 47-50) In days gone by, the art of weaving was employed to depict the exploits of heroes in the field of battle, and was honored as highly as those exploits:

No longer, Females to such Praise  
 aspire,  
 And seldom now We rightly do admire.  
 So much, All Arts are by the Men  
 engross'd,  
 And Our few Talents unimprov'd or  
 cross'd. . . . (ll. 10-13)

Women's talents are now left uneducated when the potential is there and frustrated if they attempt to exercise them. The tapestry she admires was not made by a woman but was copied from Raphael's cartoons, an implicit

example of the way men "engross" even those arts which used to belong to women. Yet she persists in following her inclination to describe the tapestry and goes on with eighty lines of analysis of the woven scene. But she concludes in a fashion discouraging to those who would applaud her rebellious persistence: she wishes that "Theanor" (Henry Thynne, the owner of the tapestry) would describe and analyze the scene and

. . . open to our Sight  
 What to his nicer Judgment gives  
 Delight;  
 Whose soaring Mind do's to Perfections climb,  
 Nor owns a Relish, but for Things  
 sublime. . . . (ll. 106-109)

Only then, she says, could we really understand and appreciate the tapestry. The poem is "inscribed" to Henry Thynne; it is a compliment to him and perhaps a thank-offering to him for his hospitality to her at his stately home. It belongs in the genre of occasional and complimentary verse, which explains its conclusion. The attitude of the conclusion is at such variance with that of the introductory lines, however, that the poem falls apart.

Such criticism cannot be levelled at Lady Winchilsea's most sustained satire, "Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia, who has invited her to come to her in town--reflecting on the Coquetterie and detracting humour of the Age."

(pp. 38-46) Here are no problems of conflicting attitudes, no puzzles of mixed tones. It is a forthright and vigorous attack on the idiocies of fashionable ladies. Lady Winchilsea has no mercy on her erring sisters; indeed, she is so fierce that she later felt some uneasiness about this poem. In the prose "Preface" to her manuscript volume, she expressed a dislike for "Lampoons, and all sorts of abusive verses," saying that the only poem of hers which tends that way is the "letter to Ephelia." She hastens to add that it was written some time ago and the main characters bear no relationship to particular people. But she does not exclude it from the collection, and even wishes that such exposures of "Censorious humour, foppishness and coquetterie" were "oftener done." (pp. 10-11)

"Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia," though forthright, is not a simple satire. Lady Winchilsea must establish a highly moral character for her persona; she gives her speaker a strong distaste for the "ill nature" that would "passe a gen'ral censure on mankind" (ll. 12-13) as the foolish wits of the town do, and then proceeds to censure mankind herself--and manages to do so without losing her detached and elevated position. The problem she thus sets for herself is similar to Pope's in "Arbuthnot" and she solves it with skill.

In the first section of the poem (ll. 1-23), Ardelia refuses an invitation from Ephelia to visit her in London because she has "no businesse, or diversion there." She goes on to describe the ill-natured "conversation of the Town" of which she herself is not morally capable, putting herself above all that. The remainder of the poem, Part II (ll. 24-247), describes a visit to London--a visit made some time earlier, the distance in time being another device for detaching herself from the scene she is condemning. On that visit she spent an afternoon with her friend Almeria, dining with her and jaunting about town and Hyde Park in her carriage. Lady Winchilsea increases the sense of the persona's detachment by giving almost half of this section to Almeria's conversation, a display of ill nature which is made to condemn itself or is condemned by Ardelia's "asides."

Some of the specific objects attacked by these methods are the vapidness of women whose "vast genius" lies in the ability "To place a patch, in some peculiar way," (ll. 60-62) who overvalue fine china and fine clothes, who break confidences and so forth. One woman in the crowd particularly draws Almeria's fire: "Now what's that thing, she crys, Ardelia, guesse?" The "thing" is a woman "and a Poetesse, / They say she writes, and 'tis a common jest," (ll. 194-196) Almeria exclaims. Ardelia's answer is inter-

esting as a possible clue to Lady Winchilsea's own sense of the proper use of her talents; she agrees that the poetess is rightly scorned if she takes pride in her gift, or if she writes lampoons and has her portrait painted with a crown of laurel on her head. However,

If no such flyes, no vanity de-  
file  
The Helyconian balm, the sacred  
oyl,  
Why shou'd we from that pleasing  
art be ty'd,  
Or like State Pris'ners, Pen and  
Ink deny'd? (ll. 206-209)

It is all right for a lady to be a poet if she is modest about it, Ardelia says--an attitude that recurs a number of times in Lady Winchilsea's poetry. "Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia" concludes with her refusal to accompany Almeria to the drawing room in the evening; Almeria satirizes the statesmen who will be there to be laughed at and is about to begin on the churchmen when Ardelia, always moral and devout, can stand it no longer and departs for her lodging. The next day she returns to her home in Kent where she will stay until she can be as critical as Almeria is, that is, forever. And yet, of course, the whole poem is extremely critical, the difference being in the objects of criticism and the moral character of the critic. Lady Winchilsea has solved the problem of the satiric persona and vigorously lambasted her foolish and ill-natured sisters.

### III

"Ardelia's Answer to Ephelia" is particularly interesting as an attack by a woman on other women; Lady Winchilsea makes similar though briefer attacks elsewhere, while in still other poems she seems to concur in the worldly attitude that beauty is a woman's chief claim to fame. All of this leads to the intriguing but perhaps unanswerable question: how does knowing an author's sex affect a reader? Do we react differently to praise, blame or other attitudes in a poem when we know that the writer is a woman--or a man? The question is not limited to the work of Lady Winchilsea or other women; it might legitimately be asked about any writer's work. It is an especially complex question to deal with when a writer might be assumed to be making use of a persona most, if not all of the time, rather than being an overtly autobiographical poet. Lady Winchilsea's practice varies. Sometimes the speaker in a poem is obviously a woman whose closeness to Lady Winchilsea herself can only be guessed at; sometimes she adopts a male voice; occasionally the voice is sexless--but in every case we know that the author behind the persona is a woman. In some instances, this knowledge raises interesting possibilities of interpretation.

For example, in the following "Song," (p. 133) a male persona dominates:

If for a Woman I wou'd dye,  
It shou'd for Gloriana be,  
But lovers, you that talk so high,  
Inform, whilst in the Grace I lye  
What reward can reach to me?

If, I my freedom wou'd resign,  
That freedom, she alone shou'd  
have,  
But tell me, you that can define,  
If I, by Marriage, make her mine,  
Which may be call'd the greater  
slave?

Then Gloriana, since 'tis plain  
Love, with these two, can  
n'er agree  
Since death and Mariage, are his  
bane,  
Those melancholy thoughts we'll  
flee,  
And chearfull Lovers, always  
bee.

This little "Song" could almost have come from one of Dryden's early Restoration comedies, except for the question asked in the second stanza. Those comedies, with which Lady Winchilsea was familiar, were usually based on the assumption that men wanted sex and women wanted marriage, that marriage was a trap that enslaved men but freed women from many of the restrictions that surrounded them as virgins. Lady Winchilsea's "Song" questions that assumption. It is startling to find a male persona even raising the possibility that marriage may mean slavery for women; he asks

the question but does not answer it. The reader, knowing that a woman poet stands behind the male persona, may take the poem as a denial of the assumptions of Restoration comedy, that is, as a suggestion or even a statement that marriage enslaves the woman as well as, or rather than, the man. A similar idea is expressed overtly in "The Unequal Fetters," (pp. 150-151) in which a female speaker claims that Nature intended to make women free and that marriage is the invention of men; the poem concludes:

Mariage does but slightly tye Men  
Whil'st close Pris'ners we  
remain

They the larger Slaves of Hymen  
Still are begging Love again  
At the full length of all their  
chain. (ll. 16-20)

Obviously, a woman's point of view. And yet, not autobiographical: all the evidence points to a remarkably happy marriage between Col. and Mrs. Finch, Earl and Countess of Winchilsea. (14)

The wit is elegant in "The Answer [To Pope's Impromptu]." (pp. 102-103) Pope's poem praises Lady Winchilsea but dispraises other women poets. (15) Lady Winchilsea concludes what was apparently an exchange of several poems with an assertion of the power of women, a dire threat to Pope, and then a final turn into compliment to the author of "The Rape of the Lock," without relinquishing her claim that women too have wit. She begins:

Disarm'd with so genteel an air,  
The contest I give o'er;  
Yet, Alexander, have a care,  
And shock the sex no more.  
We rule the world our life's  
whole race,  
Men but assume that right;  
First slaves to ev'ry tempting  
face,  
Then martyrs to our spite.

Elsewhere she has lamented the passing of a woman's power with the passing of her beauty; here she claims perpetual power and a reversal of the orthodox doctrine of male supremacy. She goes on to threaten Pope with the story of Orpheus who, having left his wife in hell, was punished for his "scoffing rhymes" about women by being torn apart by the "Resenting Heroines of those times" and tossed into the river. The poem concludes graciously:

But you our follies gently treat,  
And spin so fine the thread,  
You need not fear his aukward  
fate,  
The lock wo'n't cost the head.  
Our admiration you command  
For all that's gone before;  
What next we look for at your  
hand  
Can only raise it more.  
Yet sooth the Ladies I advise  
(As me too pride has wrought,)  
We're born to wit, but to be wise  
By admonitions taught.

(ll. 25-36)

The poem achieves a fine balance between compliment and warning, self-assertion and modesty.

Other examples could be cited in which Lady Winchilsea's personae claim that women are superior or at least equal to men, or that women are culpable daughters of Eve and justifiably the inferiors of their lords and masters, but I hope I have given a fair enough sampling of her work to illustrate the variety of ideas she expresses. What I cannot do is draw all her poems together into a coherent system of ideas that commits her to a single stance on the questions of the relationship between men and women and on the position of women in general. She sometimes does, as Virginia Woolf said, burst out in indignation against the position of women, and yet she often accepts their position; she writes poems deploring the shackles of marriage, but she also writes poems to her husband full of tenderness and devotion. She praises women for their beauty and blames them for their vanity about it. She accepts women as being part of weak, fallen humankind; sometimes she considers them to be twice-fallen, sometimes to be more powerful than men. In other words, except for her constant assertion of her own right to compose verses and the importance of being modest about her work, Lady Winchilsea made no

"commitment" in her poetry. Instead, she tried out a range of possible attitudes by a variety of direct and indirect methods, advancing towards more radical positions and retreating again to more conventional ones. She was not liberated by personal eccentricity as was her older contemporary,

Margaret of Newcastle, nor by the spirit of adventure and perhaps greater intellect of her younger contemporary, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu. (16) But she was a woman of considerable talent who dared, in a hostile atmosphere, to exercise that talent.

#### NOTES

1. A Room of One's Own (1920; rpt. London: The Hogarth Press, 1954), p. 88.
2. The Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea, ed. Myra Reynolds (1903; rpt. New York: AMS Press Inc., 1974), pp. 3-4 (ll. 27-33); this edition includes a long and valuable introduction. References appear in the text wherever possible.
3. She and Anne Kingsmill (later Lady Winchilsea) were both Maids of Honour to Mary of Modena, wife of the Duke of York (later James II). Dryden's ode, "To the Pious Memory of the Accomplish'd Young Lady Mks. Anne Killigrew . . .," cannot be taken as an objective critical evaluation.
4. "The Circuit of Appollo," pp. 92-94 (l. 14).
5. For a summary of the controversy, and a contribution to it, see Robert C. Elliott, "Swift's 'I,'" The Yale Review, 62 (March 1973), 372-91.
6. Poems by Anne, Countess of Winchilsea 1661-1720 (New York and London: Harper & Brothers [1928]). See Woolf, pp. 89 and 91. Reynolds' edition of 1903, much larger though still incomplete, contains even more "dark" poems, but Mrs. Woolf does not mention it.
7. Lady Winchilsea suffered severely from melancholia or spleen; see Woolf, p. 90, and Reynolds, pp. xliii-xliv. Also, she and her husband were debarred from court life and suffered financial reverses when they refused to swear allegiance to William and Mary in 1688; see Murry, p. 10, and Reynolds, p. xxviii.
8. In "Fanscomb Barn," pp. 210-213.
9. Eric Smith, Some Versions of the Fall (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1973), p. 27, compares Milton and Genesis on this point.
10. "A Poem, occasioned by the sight of the 4th epistle. . . of Horace . . . by Mr. Rowe," pp. 98-100 (ll. 65-73).
11. Lady Winchilsea often called herself (or her persona) "Ardelia" as Katherine Philips had called herself "Orinda."
12. For an extensive study of Stoic and Epicurean doctrines in the poetry of pastoral retreat, see Maren-Sofie Rostvig, The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal, 1, 1600-1700 (Oslo: Akademisk Forlag, and Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954); Rostvig discusses Lady Winchilsea (pp. 410-416) but does not mention "On Myselfe."
13. Reynolds places it after two other introductory poems and a prose "Preface," apparently following one of Lady Winchilsea's manuscript books. The exact relationship between Reynolds' edition and the manuscripts, especially in the matter of ordering, is unclear. Murry prints "The Appology" first. It does not appear in the 1713 edition. Much bibliographical and editorial work on Lady Winchilsea's poems remains to be done. The job has been started by D.G. Neill in "Studies for an Edition of the Poems of Anne, Countess of Winchilsea, Consisting of a Bibliography of her Poems and a Study of All Available MSS," Diss. Oxford 1954.
14. See Woolf, p. 90, and Reynolds, pp. xxvi-xxvii.
15. For Pope's poem and a partial account of his verse correspondence with Lady Winchilsea, see Alexander Pope, Minor Poems, ed. Norman Auit and John Butt, Twickenham edition, VI (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., and New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 120-122.
16. Even Lady Mary expressed contradictory attitudes about the position of women from time to time; see the useful and graceful essay by Robert Halsband, "Ladies of Letters in the Eighteenth Century," in Irvin Ehrenpreis and Robert Halsband, The Lady of Letters in the Eighteenth Century (Los Angeles: University of California Press and William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1969), pp. 31-51, especially p. 35.



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