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### TRANSLATING THE SELF AND AESTHETICISM IN WORKS OF APHRA BEHN AND ANNE FINCH: A CRITICAL STUDY

Sambhunath Maji<sup>1</sup> and Tapas Das<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, W.B.

<sup>2</sup> Independent Research Scholar, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Purulia, W.B.

#### ABSTRACT

Lighted writings are sunny, but those unlighted are, to some certain extent, aglow. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century numerous writers sparkled, but the writers like AphraBehn and Anne Finch were dimly visible in that era. Their writings had its own gleam and glint. But, they were shadowed and engraved. This paper tries to dig out the brilliance and luminosity of those writings of



AphraBehn and Anne Finch and thereafter, a close and comparative study is made upon their works to ensure if Finch is a counterpart of Behn in the matter of aestheticism.

**KEY WORDS:** Brilliance, Aestheticism, Counterpart, Right, Hedonism

#### INTRODUCTION:

Presently known as the mother of female voice in the history of British literature, Aphra Behn peeped in the publishing houses of Restoration era when a curtain of prevention in writing was drawn before the woman writers. Germaine Greer calls her 'a palimpsest ; she has scratched herself out'. Her works are said to be the sparks in the unextinguished hearth of Restoration writings by women. Those sparks inflamed the heart of Anne Finch, countess of Winchilsea. The body of literature carved by Behn is primeval mould of feminism. Virginia Woolf tributed "all woman together ought to let flowers fall upon the tomb of AphraBehn...for it was she who earned them the right to speak their minds." Like Behn, Finch also soared a voice in the favour of woman. They both struggled to come out of the engravement and to smooth the path of writing for woman. Finch insisted upon the right of woman in writing literature in her poems like *The Apology* and *The Circuit of Appollo*. Reversal of gender roles was also a cry in their works. Behn endeavored to inscribe woman as lapis lazuli in every aspect of life. The works of Behn contemplated on sex, the hunger of woman and the futility of man to gratify woman. The poems like *The Willing Mistress* and *The Disappointment* are the portrayals of woman's castle of desire for sex before weak masculinity. On the other hand, the appeal of sex in Finch's poems is not so strong as in the poems of Behn. But, her works are, to a greater extent, concerned with reciprocity.

#### DISCUSSION:

AphraBehn was writing about love and sex in an era when revelation of sexual feelings by woman in the pages of literature was strictly prohibited. Female was regarded as the "coy mistress...and female sexuality was not an acceptable topic for women to write about; it was task left to the male poets such as Robert Herrick, Andrew Marvell"(English Literature: Aspects of female passion and love in a selection of

*AphraBehn's poetry*, 28). So, the female persona in Behn's poem *The Willing Mistress* cannot express her sexual feelings in full throated ease. She goes on to describe her lover's feelings and activities: 'A many kiss he did give/...He did but kiss and clasp me around', but avoids her own feelings as she says: 'That which I dare not name' and 'ah who can guess the rest?' However, such preventions and images created by patriarchal society cannot deprive Behn of the enjoyment regarding love and sex in poetry. The love making between Lisander and maid Cloris begins in the thicket in the poem *The Disappointment: 'In alone Thicket, made for love, / Silent as yielding Maids Consent, '(line no.11&12). The Dream, Love Arm'd and On Her Loving Two Equally* all celebrates amorous activities of lovers. One thing is very clear from these love poems of Behn that the sexual encounters grow either in a grave or in a thicket. Such love making behind public eye is Behn's art of creating ambiance of the forthcoming sexual storm. But, ironically the durability of sex is short-lived, but not effective and strong as storm.

Where there is female sexuality untamed and full in brink there is Behn to bubble them. All the love poems of Behn are together a joyous song of female sexuality. Behn presents their amorousness as a source of the desire of man for sex and a where to be lost. There are exposition, rising action and climax for female sexuality, but no falling action and catastrophe until male sexuality decreases. That is to say, loss of vigor of man is the cause of woman's catastrophe of sex

### **.Exposition :**

'She with a charming Languishment.  
Permits his force, yet gently strove?  
Her Hands his Bosom softly meet,  
But not to put him back design'd,  
Rather to draw him on inclin'd,'

(*The Disappointment*, line no.13-17)

### **Rising action:**

'Each touch her new Desires alarms!  
...  
While she lay panting in his Arms!  
All her unguarded Beauties lie'

(*The Disappointment*, line no.35,38,39)

### **Climax:**

'Her balmy Lips encountering his,  
...  
Her tim'rous Hand she gently laid  
Or guided by Design or Chance,  
Upon that Fabulous Priapus,'

(*The Disappointment*, line no.51,103-105)

Catastrophe after the decrease of male sexuality:

'Then Cloris her fair Hand withdrew,  
finding that God of her Desires  
Disarm'd of all his pow'rful Fires,  
And cold as Flow'rs bath'd in the Morning -dew.'  
(*The Disappointment*, line no.111-114)

In the poem *Love Arm'd* the speaker claims that "But 'twas from mine he took desire". *The Willing Mistress* talks about Amyntas's attempt to prevail the maid servant's desire that 'was already fir'd'. And even in *The Disappointment* Cloris is providing 'fresh vigor to Lisander'. The poem *The Disappointment* thrives the maid's sexuality by slow degrees. Each stanza gathers the sexual hunger of maid and thereby, a sea of desire

is created in the poem and in that sea, Lisander's desire is lost and turned into 'vain', 'inactive frigid', and 'dull'.

Behn prefers to sing a song of reversal. She wrote to bring forth a revolution in gender role. Her poems let woman forerun in the race of sex. Before Behn, it was man who provoked woman in the sex as in the poems of Donne and Marvell. But, Behn overturned the system as in her poems there are woman like Cloris, 'lovely maid' in *The Disappointment*, Aminta in *The Dream* who instigate their lover's desire by willingly coming in their arms: 'while she lay panting in his arms!' (*The Disappointment*, line no. 38) and 'All trembling in my arms Aminta lay' (*The Dream*, line no.1) and there are no such coyness on the part of women as the following lines express: 'All her unguarded Beauties lie' and 'She do's her saftest sweets dispense,/ offering her virgin-Innocence' (*The Disappointment*, line no.66,67). Throughout the poem *The Disappointment* the impotence of Lysander is emphasized when Cloris designs "not to put him back" rather 'to draw him on', 'he lay( lays) trembling at her feet;' and is 'unable to perform the sacrifice'. In the poem *The Dream A song* the boy confesses 'Alas I am undone'. That is to say, Behn renders man powerless. Woman has become an obsession and her beauty has become the object of dream to the man in the poems of Behn like *To The Fair Clarinda* and *The Dream*. The man is struggling for 'lovely charming youth'in vain in the poem *To The Fair Clarinda* and in the poem *The Dream* the man finds her 'new charms'in his dream. That is to say, Behn has emphasised once again on the superiority of woman. She can be called the D.H.Lawrence of Restoration era in the light of sexism. She is a philogynist.

Behn's short fictions characterise romance with love, though desire remains obscure in her fiction. According to Jacqueline Pearson, 'desire is essentially problematic in Behn's fiction' (*The Cambridge Companion To APHRA BEHN*, p.197). Again, to Helen Hackett *The Unfortunate Happy Lady*' is a romance in its plot', though 'differs from not only in its brevity and its contemporary London setting, but also in its obsessive interest in its characters' bank balances'. Love is eulogized as the 'most noble and divine passion of the soul' and 'without it, man is unfinish'd and unhappy (iii,p.7) in the introduction to *The Fair Jilt*. Robert Adams Day retrieves in Behn's fiction 'clashing levels of diction, setting, plot, description, narrative voice - the reader's expectations are constantly being aroused and defeated in the most surprising ways'. Unlike *Oroonoko* woman is placed in the centre of the story with all unattainable charms in fictions. Miranda in *The Fair Jilt* is described as 'something divine... universally adored... the most wondrous object of beauty'. On the contrary, men are presented as less constant in *The History of the Nun*: 'Women are by nature, more constant, and just, than men'. In *The Unfortunate Bride* Behn has defined Frankwit as 'softer' and 'humble'. Behn has bloomed even in her fiction 'anima' in man while 'animus' in woman. In *The Unfortunate Bride* Belvira says 'pleasure is but a dream... women enjoy'd, are like Romances read... which, when found out, you only wonder at your selves for wondering so before at them.' 'Tis expectation endears the blessings' (iii, p.328) while Frankwit says 'that expectation were indeed a monster which enjoyment could not satisfy' (iii, p.329). That is to say, there is masculine tone in Belvira's speech whereas feminine tone in Frankwit's speech. Jacqueline Pearson remarks it 'reversal of gendered voices' (*The Cambridge Companion To APHRA BEHN*, p.199).

Anne Finch, countess of Winchelsea is hailed as "arguably the best woman poet of the Augustan period" in *English women's poetry* by Carol Barash. Her works are mostly pastoral. But, "her pastorals are characterized by a personal sincerity that is unparalleled by those of her contemporaries" (*Ladies of the shade: The pastoral poetry of Aphra Behn, Anne Finch, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe*, 76). She takes Nightingale, a pastoral element as the subject of her poetry *To the Nightingale*, but she identifies herself with the bird as she utters 'Free as thine shall be my song'. She has related her personal sorrow through the object of nature. On the contrary, to Behn pastoral is a mere place of amorous enjoyment of lovers. Behn has a kinetic look at pastoral as in the lines '...the winds that gently rise/ Does kiss the yielding Boughs' (*The Willing Mistress*, line no.7,8) whereas Finch has a static look at pastoral. She finds resemblance between her own plight as a writer and the possibilities of her writings, and that of the Nightingale and its song: 'Till thy business all lies waste,/ and the time of building past!' (*To the Nightingale*, line no.28,29).

Finch adores love in her poetry. Unlike Behn, this love is between husband and wife, and between two friends of female sex. Here, in Finch's poetry *An Invitation to Dafnis* wife is inviting her husband to have mutual and equal love: 'come then, my Dafnis, and the fields survey,/ And throo' the groves, with your Ardelia stray.' The love of husband and wife described by Finch is legal and moral one. But, Behn's poetry

eye on the love outside marriage, the love between master and maid servant. What aligns both the writers is their ability to present the feelings of woman in the pages of poetry. Like Behn, Finch shows that woman has passions and desires similar to man. Finch celebrates friendship in her poetry. The poems like *Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia* draw the friendship between two females in one such level where 'love' has become the only word to express their affinity. That is to say, it is not mere friendship, rather in Freud's words lesbian complex. Finch believes in single standard morality whereas Behn believes in double standard morality. In Finch's poem one woman is eager to die upon the grave of another woman because of love: 'Tis to die upon a grave,/if a friend there in do lie.' (*Friendship between Ephelia and Ardelia*, line no.12, 13). But, in Behn's poem *On Her Loving Two Equally* the woman speaker is thinking of Damon before Alexis: 'when my Alexis present is/ Then I for Damon sigh and mourn!' (line no.7,8). That is to say, her love is divided. She is not happy with one of them. To Behn love making is nothing but a play where woman with 'unguarded Beauties' is the all time's winner. But, to Finch love making is a tied game where one bears respect for another and vice versa.

Melancholy pervades the poems of Finch. In other words, Finch has succumbed to the Melancholy which she has addressed as 'spleen' in the poem *The Spleen* and as 'old inveterate foe' in the poem *Ardelia to Melancholy*. She has tried utmost to come out of the clutch of Melancholy and practised 'a thousand other arts' like 'sweet mirth and musick' and invoked Muse to provide her lifetime relief and freedom, but they have convinced her with short reprieve to surrender: "Alas! in vain, for all agree/ To yield me captive up to thee," (*Ardelia To Melancholy*, line no.34 &35). She is at a loss under 'thy (the spleen's) black jaundice' and found all objects 'as dark and terrible' (*The Spleen*, line no.77 &78). Finch realizes that 'in ev'ryone thou (Melancholy) dost possess' (*The Spleen*, line no.44) and 'heav'n, alone, can sett (set) me (her) free' (*Ardelia To Melancholy*, line no.36). She feels herself imprisoned within the 'Fort' of Melancholy. Due to her humble submission to Melancholy all the poems of Finch undergo fettered freedom and pleasure with gravity. It is to be noted that poems of Finch lack intense and continuous appeal. In her poems like *The Cautious Lovers* and *An Invitation to Dafnis* the lovers are cautious and tender. The female persona is inviting the male figure to have sex, but in her appeal there is no vivacity, spontaneity and deep fervidity. Haunted by Melancholy and patriarchal oppression Finch has asked for a natural space where she wants to enjoy utter freedom in the poem

*The petition for an Absolute Retreat:*

'Give me, o indulgent Fate!  
Give me yet before i die.  
A sweet but absolute retreat  
'mongst paths so lost and trees so high  
That. the world may ne'er invade  
Through such windigs and such shade  
My unshaken liberty.' (line no.1-7)

Behn and Finch both have written woman centered poetry. Behn portrays woman as a figure of perfection whereas Finch says, 'Each woman has her weakness; mine indeed.' (*The Apology*, line no.15) in Finch's poetry men are addressed as 'first slaves to ev'ry tempting face,/ Then martyrs to our spite' (*The Answer*, line no.7, 8), but unlike Behn their ability is acknowledged as in the line '...but to be wise/ By admonitions taught' (*The Answer*, line no.35, 36). It must be said that Finch, like Behn, places the woman above the man when she utters: 'we rule the world our life's whole race,/ men but assume that right;' (*The Answer*, line no.5, 6). Yet, equity is the urge of Finch's poetry while inequity is the urge of Behn's poetry. Behn presents one man and woman in the intercourse, but the woman with 'already fir'd' and 'new Desires', and that's why, man fails to reach the level of woman. On the other hand, in Finch's poetry the woman, ruler and owner of wit, steps to man for wisdom. Again, man unlike woman gathers wit after birth. That is to say, he also steps down to woman for wit. In other words, both are coming down from their respective position to a certain level.

Behn's aestheticism is torrid zonal aestheticism whereas Finch's aestheticism is temperature zonal aestheticism. There is no change of youth and hunger on the part of woman in the torrid zonal aestheticism. There is only the eternal omnipotent woman. But, in temperature zonal aestheticism woman is as potent as

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man. Behn showers vigour and vitality on woman throughout the poems while Finch drizzles on both sex. Melancholiness falls on the aestheticism of Finch at an angle and that's why, the languages of her poems are not as uproarious as the poems of Behn, rather they are soft.

### CONCLUSION :

In a nutshell, Behn inaugurates radical feminism while Finch initiates liberal feminism. Behn cages feminine voice in her poetry and provides supreme authority to the woman. She tastes the pleasure of queenship in her works. Sex, though the central object of her works, is the only medium to suppress patriarchy and to express matriarchy. She believes in 'hedonism'. All her love poems are looking for sexual satisfaction. On the other hand, Finch's aestheticism is printed on the same page but on the opposite side. In other words, her destination is the very destination of Behn. She also wants to establish the voice of woman as regular one, but the only difference is that she never claims supremacy until man demands it rather claims the coexistence of both sex in literature and society.

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