

Three things conspired to keep Finch's poems in the shade: she was an aristocrat, her nature was retiring, and she was a woman. Any one of these might have made her shrink from exposing herself to the jeers that still, at the turn of the century, greeted any effort by a "scribbling lady." Many of her best poems, for instance "The Petition for an Absolute Retreat," celebrate the joys of solitude. Nevertheless, remarkably, she chose to publish. The reason for Finch's push to publish may be found in her contempt for the notion that women are fit for nothing but trivial pursuits. In "The Introduction" (to her poems) she insists that women are "education's, more than nature's fools," and she often comments on the damaging exclusion of half the human race from public life. But Finch is her own best example of what a woman can be: keen-eyed and self-sufficient and a poet.

A Nocturnal Reverie

In such a night,¹ when every louder wind
 Is to its distant cavern safe confined;
 And only gentle Zephyr fans his wings,
 And lonely Philomel,^o still waking, sings; *nightingale*
 5 Or from some tree, famed for the owl's delight,
 She, hollowing clear, directs the wanderer right:
 In such a night, when passing clouds give place,
 Or thinly veil the heavens' mysterious face;
 When in some river, overhung with green,
 10 The waving moon and trembling leaves are seen;
 When freshened grass now bears itself upright,
 And makes cool banks to pleasing rest invite,
 Whence springs the woodbind, and the bramble-rose,
 And where the sleepy cowslip sheltered grows;
 15 Whilst now a paler hue the foxglove takes,
 Yet checkers still with red the dusky brakes:^o *thickets*
 When scattered glow-worms, but in twilight fine,
 Show trivial beauties watch their hour to shine;
 Whilst Salisbury² stands the test of every light,
 20 In perfect charms, and perfect virtue bright:
 When odors, which declined repelling day,
 Through temperate air uninterrupted stray;
 When darkened groves their softest shadows wear,
 And falling waters we distinctly hear;
 25 When through the gloom more venerable shows
 Some ancient fabric,^o awful in repose, *edifice*
 While sunburnt hills their swarthy looks conceal,
 And swelling haycocks thicken up the vale:
 When the loosed horse now, as his pasture leads,
 30 Comes slowly grazing through the adjoining meads,
 Whose stealing pace, and lengthened shade we fear,
 Till torn-up forage in his teeth we hear:

1. This phrase, repeated twice in this poem, echoes the same repeated phrase in the night piece that opens act 5 of *The Merchant of Venice*.

2. Probably Lady Salisbury, the daughter of a

friend. The sense is that this lady differs from others more trivial, who like glowworms look fine only one hour a day.

When nibbling sheep at large pursue their food,
 And unmolested kine rechew the cud;
 35 When curlews cry beneath the village walls,
 And to her straggling brood the partridge calls;
 Their shortlived jubilee the creatures keep,
 Which but endures, whilst tyrant man does sleep;
 When a sedate content the spirit feels,
 40 And no fierce light disturbs, whilst it reveals;
 But silent musings urge the mind to seek
 Something, too high for syllables to speak;
 Till the free soul to a composedness charmed,
 Finding the elements of rage disarmed,
 45 O'er all below a solemn quiet grown,
 Joys in the inferior world,³ and thinks it like her own:
 In such a night let me abroad remain,
 Till morning breaks, and all's confused again;
 Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed,
 50 Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued.

1713

3. The world of nature (compared to the world of the soul).

JONATHAN SWIFT

1667-1745

Jonathan Swift was born of English parents in Dublin. His father, a lawyer, died seven months before he was born, and his mother and sister went to live with relations in the English Midlands. An uncle helped see Jonathan through an excellent education at preeminent institutions in Ireland, Kilkenny School and then Trinity College, Dublin. Before he could fix on a career, the troubles that followed upon James II's abdication and subsequent invasion of Ireland drove Swift along with other Anglo-Irish to England. Between 1689 and 1699 he was more or less continuously a member of the household of his kinsman Sir William Temple, an urbane, civilized man, a retired diplomat, and a friend of King William III, who took the throne in 1689. During these years Swift read widely, rather reluctantly decided on the church as a career and so took orders, and discovered his astonishing gifts as a satirist. In 1696-97 he wrote his powerful satires on corruptions in religion and learning, *A Tale of a Tub* and *The Battle of the Books*, which were published in 1704 and reached their final form only in the fifth edition of 1710. When, at the age of thirty-two, he returned to Ireland as chaplain to the lord justice, the earl of Berkeley, he had a clear sense of his genius.

For the rest of his life, Swift devoted his talents to politics and religion—not clearly separated at the time—and most of his works in prose were written to further a specific cause. As a clergyman, a spirited controversialist, and a devoted sup-