

Anne Finch

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Anne Kingsmill Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (1661–1720), was a major poet shaped by the political upheavals of late seventeenth-century England. Raised in privileged circumstances despite being an orphan, Finch received a solid education that supported her literary accomplishments. While serving as a Maid of Honour to Mary of Modena, the queen consort of James II, Finch became a poet and witnessed the dramatic impact of the Glorious Revolution of 1688, which led to the exile of the Stuart monarchy. Finch and her husband, Heneage Finch, remained steadfastly loyal to the Stuarts, a commitment that resulted in their own exile to the country estate that belonged to his family. This period of displacement deeply influenced her personal life and literary expression, as much of her poetry was written from exile. Facing political and social marginalization, Finch infused her work with themes of loss, resilience, and hope, reflecting the turbulent times. Encouraged by male writers such as Jonathan Swift, Finch eventually published her work in 1713, contributing to early women’s published literature at a time of societal constraint for female writers. In her later years, Finch remained connected to England’s literary circles, with notable figures such as Alexander Pope visiting her townhouse. Upon her passing in 1720, her husband, Heneage Finch, honored her in an obituary by writing, “The Court of England never bred a more accomplished Lady, nor the Church of England a better Christian” (quoted in McGovern 192). His tribute underscores both her literary achievements and her unwavering faith.

Published in *Miscellany Poems* in 1713, Anne Finch’s “Hope” engages deeply with themes of faith and redemption. The poem begins with an allusion to the Tree of Knowledge, whose forbidden fruit triggered humanity’s fall from grace, leading to the loss of innocence and expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Written in heroic couplets, its iambic pentameter establishes a formal, measured rhythm. Finch incorporates Christian symbolism reflecting her Anglican beliefs, aligning with the early eighteenth century’s literary focus on providence and human struggle. Through this symbolism, the poem offers hope as a treatment for life’s trials.

Further Reading

- McGovern, Barbara. *Anne Finch and Her Poetry: A Critical Biography*. U of Georgia P, 1992.
- Sain, Barbara. “What Is This Hope?: Insights from Christian Theology and Positive Psychology.” *Journal of Moral Theology*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2020, pp. 98–119.
- Kennedy, Deborah. “The Radiant Throne: Religion and the Poetry of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea.” *Women's Writing*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, pp. 423–440.

Hope¹²²

THE Tree of *Knowlege*¹²³ we in Eden prov'd;¹²⁴
 The Tree of *Life*¹²⁵ was thence¹²⁶ to Heav'n remov'd:
Hope is the growth of Earth, the only Plant,
 Which either Heav'n, or Paradise cou'd want.¹²⁷
 Hell knows it not, to Us alone confin'd,
 And Cordial¹²⁸ only to the Human Mind.
 Receive it then, t'expel these mortal Cares,¹²⁹
 Nor wave¹³⁰ a Med'cine, which thy God prepares.

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¹²²*Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions: Written by the Right Hon[ora]ble Anne, Countess of Winchelsea.* J[ohn] B[arber], 1713, pp. 262–263; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*

¹²³ *Tree of Knowlege* whose forbidden fruit led to humanity's fall from grace, resulting in the loss of innocence and expulsion from the Garden of Eden

¹²⁴ *prov'd* tasted, tested

¹²⁵ *Tree of Life* symbolizes eternal life and was moved to heaven after the Fall to represent the separation between humanity and immortality

¹²⁶ *thence* from that place

¹²⁷ *want* lack

¹²⁸ *Cordial* alcohol-based “drink with medicinal or health-giving properties” (*OED*)

¹²⁹ *mortal Cares* concerns of being human, such as family or politics

¹³⁰ *wave* waive, to deny oneself an advantage