Teaching Finch and / in Performance: A Media Studies Approach (With Toolkit)

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol14/iss1/10

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Abstract
Teaching the birdsong poems and compositions for musical settings of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, through media theory allows students to connect their own social-media-based expressive arts practices with the multimedia practices of early modern women writers.

Keywords
birdsong, early modern literature, media theory, poetry, social media

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At the University of California, Santa Barbara, I teach a course for the English Department called “Early Modern Women Writers and Media.” Our upper-division courses, typically capped at 38, enroll a majority of English majors along with undergraduates from across the College of Letters & Sciences seeking to complete General Education requirements in literature and analytical writing before graduation. These students are not necessarily looking for a course on women writers who published before the nineteenth century, and the title of this one may seem to present a perfect storm of challenging and off-putting features on two fronts, both of which the class is designed to counter:

-- First, many students arrive in college literature courses with the mistaken notion that printed literary texts are intended for – and therefore should be received by – silent, absorbed, and respectful readers. In the centuries since the early modern rise of print in the West, those who were literate increasingly did become this kind of reader. But historians of print culture remind us that early print supported a much wider range of literacy practices, from pre-printed legal forms to playbills and admissions tickets to bills of lading, labels, and receipts to cheap prints of engravings to – the case in point – musical scores and lyrics, as we would call them today, associated with the performance of vocal and instrumental music by both professionals and amateurs.  

-- Second, in a class that offers a survey of women’s writing from the 1650s to the 1760s, students assume that they will encounter language and forms that are unfamiliar and technically difficult, while also lacking the cultural cachet of, say, Shakespeare or Austen, which might motivate them to persevere through the confusions of scansion or free indirect discourse.

I look to counter these twin assumptions by proposing that the expressive-arts practices of someone writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, when examined through the lens of performance, might in fact resonate with the creative choices students make themselves as writers and artists. The good news is that focusing on the multimedia aspects of early modern women’s writing through media studies often succeeds in re-routing students’ experience of these writers’ arts practices across a wider sensory range, one that may more closely resemble their own work as content-creators for social-media platforms.

The primary texts assigned in “Early Modern Women Writers and Media” do feature language that students find difficult: elite poetry written in the contexts of the slow and uneven shift from manuscript to print publication (Philips and Finch); Restoration and early-eighteenth-century plays (Behn and Centlivre); and long prose fictions (Scott, Lennox) of which there are (as yet!) no film adaptations. A performance-oriented approach to Anne Finch’s poetry, encountered early in the term, provides students with a rich framework for...
engaging with early modern writers, and also allows them to put this work into
dialogue with their own expressive work. Concepts from media studies
provide a bridge between the early modern poetic and musical genres that
were part of elite women’s education, Stuart court culture, and commercial
theater of the period, on the one hand, and twenty-first-century multimedia
and performance practices, on the other. These concepts allow us to explore
both twenty-first century and early modern notions of authorship and
creativity, so that students recognize Finch’s poetry as a critical-creative
performance that resembles, in ways worth examining more closely, their own
expressive-arts practices.

The three media-studies concepts I introduce as we approach Finch’s work are
intermediality, remediation, and the paired terms immediacy and
hypermediacy, which constitute the oscillating twin or double “logic of
remediation” described by media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard
Grusin. I define them briefly here, with further discussion and examples
below. Intermediality refers to the concept that any one medium exists only in
relation to other media, and that the movement of material between media is
worth examining. The term remediation proposes that new media take shape
by absorbing precursor media; the new medium may or may not explicitly
acknowledge precursor forms. Immediacy and hypermediacy describe
contrasting poles of the remediation spectrum: immediacy indicates a
remediation in which the original or earlier medium is ignored, suppressed, or
erased, fostering the reader/viewer’s impression of having direct access to the
represented object; in hypermediation, the older medium is marked and
preserved within the new medium, so that while viewing the representation we
are simultaneously made aware of a history of the object’s representation.

These concepts allow students to recognize, trace, and play with two sets of
issues that are important for understanding Finch’s work: first, the intense
multimedia interrelations among poetic and musical forms of the early modern
period; second, how writers weave new matter out of familiar cultural tropes,
saluting while sometimes critiquing precursor work. At the conclusion of this
essay, I show how these concepts can help students develop their own
readings of, and responses to, Finch’s poem “To the Nightingale,” which
dramatizes a singing competition and raises questions about our ideas of
originality, imitation, translation, and “natural” art-making.

Concepts in context

At our first meeting, I ask students to take an informal inventory of their
collective resources for encountering these writers, understood as elite writers
but also as musicians, poets, and performers. The goal is to demonstrate that,
contrary to students’ expectations, their own expressive-arts practices provide
an excellent framework for encountering the material on the syllabus. The
exercise usually reveals that a handful of people in the room have taken a pre-
1800 literature course (our major has a history core sequence, and Shakespeare courses remain popular lower- and upper-division options). It’s less likely that anyone in the cohort will be familiar with early modern European performance histories and musical genres. In contrast, almost everyone in the class is knowledgeable about present-day expressive-arts practices on social-media platforms, and almost everyone in the class is familiar with contemporary examples of multimedia art-making.

On the first of our three days devoted to Anne Finch’s work, a brief introduction to the Stuart court culture of amateur and professional musical performance prepares students to recognize and explore the intermediality of the short poems Finch composed under the title word “Songs.” To engage Finch’s critical remediation of tropes of birdsong, on the second day we discuss a selection of early modern ideas about birds and birdsong, drawing on what I call the Birdsong Toolkit: a collection of digitized texts, musical clips, and images that document a variety of ways in which birds and birdsong signified in early modern English poetry. The Toolkit’s resources support media-studies, visual-arts, literary, musicological, and cultural-critical approaches to early modern poems about birds.

On the third day, students produce collaborative multimedia-informed readings of Finch’s poem “To the Nightingale.” This complex poem features a competition between a bird, designated by feminine pronouns, and a human narrator, a poet whose proxy or assistant in the contest is a Muse (the sex of the human poet and the Muse are not specified but readers often take both to be female). Here Finch deploys and reconfigures existing tropes of birdsong to make a point about women’s art and authority, engaging and then questioning tropes of birdsong familiar to her readers, so as to challenge and recast their possible meanings. Exploring in detail the intertextual allusions of the interspecies encounter described in this poem means students are invited to consider art-making as a gendered practice, in line with the focus of the course. Following Bolter and Grusin’s allusion to the oscillating double logic of remediation discussed above, Finch’s expressive practices do not necessarily suppress the original meaning or meanings of these tropes, but rather mobilize them simultaneously with new meanings to expose their contradictions. In this way, “To the Nightingale” exemplifies the effects of hypermediation and showcases Finch’s critical-creative ingenuity.

**Intermedial Songs: Finch Day 1**

Finch’s publication history shows students the complicated media ecology of the decades during which she was actively writing and circulating her work, roughly 1685 to 1720 – years during which print was not the only option for publication. Finch’s writing was *published* from the 1680s forward – but until 1713, for the most part, it was circulated only in manuscript. Students are fascinated to learn that many of Finch’s poems were not *printed* for the first
time until 1903, with the publication of Myra Reynolds’s PhD dissertation; we spend some time comparing the title pages of Finch’s extant manuscript and printed collections. Finch’s title pages show the interplay of old and new forms and suggest how older forms continue to shadow or haunt new ones, which never fully displace them – and sometimes vice versa.

The intermediality of Finch’s work is showcased by the digital-humanities project Anne Finch Digital Archive (AFDA), an online complement to the new two-volume Cambridge Edition of the Works of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea (CEAF). The AFDA’s section on “Finch's Songs in Performance” allows us to experience the musical arts and practices that, as Claudia Thomas Kairoff and Peter Kairoff show, were central to Finch’s expressive work. For students, I summarize the scholarship in the AFDA’s “Introduction to Finch, Music, and Song,” which notes that many Stuart courtiers composed and performed music: “Courtiers were often musically educated and composed lyrics for the professional composers of the day. … In the court while Finch served [as Maid of Honor to the Duchess of York], musical entertainment was ubiquitous, sophisticated, and practiced by courtiers and professionals alike.” Discussing the specific genre of the song, the “Introduction” notes, “Songs formed a major portion of courtier-poets’ compositions. Their songs were performed privately, in homes and during courtly gatherings, and publicly in plays, concerts, and music-meetings.” Finch’s commitment to the form is evident in the Index of Titles in the first volume of the CEAF, which includes no fewer than twenty-one short pieces with a title beginning “A Song …” or including the word in another way, as in “Jealousie A Song” (CEAF1: 815-19).

As a feature of contemporary theatrical performances, songs were often fully staged elements associated with the specific characters who performed them, but they might also circulate independently, in manuscript and print, with or without musical settings. Published as freestanding pieces, they might be “credited to professional or courtly poets and composers” rather than to the playwright (“Introduction”). Finch’s two plays, The Triumphs of Love and Innocence: a Tragecomedy and Aristomenes or the Royal Shepheard, A Tragedy, include a variety of musical forms, both occasional music (the “flourish” of military trumpets; the comedic sung exit lines of a drunken drummer) and in each a featured “Song” that is set off in the playscript under this title. These and other dramatic songs are flagged in the “General Introduction” as confirmation of Finch’s “mastery of the Restoration theater’s lyric idiom” (CEAF1: lxxvii).

Students learning about manuscript publication and limited playhouse seating often ask about readership or audience numbers, and how these might compare with the ‘views’ or ‘followers’ for a performance posted on a social-media platform. We can begin to answer by pursuing Finch’s work across the
various media in which they circulated: research databases such as *Early English Books Online* and *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* allow students to trace how the lyrics, for the most part unattributed, moved from printed collections of poems to printed musical miscellanies and back again. For example, neither of Finch’s plays is known to have been staged, which means that neither of the two featured songs mentioned above would have been performed in a theater as part of her playscript. But we do know that a different Finch “Song” (“Love, thou art best …”) was performed in Thomas Wright’s play *The Female Vertuoso*’s (1693), which was dedicated to Finch’s nephew. This song circulated in print independently of the playtext; its text and a musical setting by Raphael Courteville were printed in *A Collection of New Songs Sett by Several Masters* (?1695). It was also set as a duet by Henry Purcell and printed in the fifth book of his *Comes Amoris; or The Companion of Loves* (1694). The performance ‘life’ of these and other Finch texts was further extended and expanded intermedially when they were printed again with their musical settings in compendia like the *Collection of New Songs and The British Musical Miscellany, or, the Delightful Grove* (1735), which supported instrumental and vocal performance in private or public settings. Attention to the performance life of Finch’s songs allows students to expand their exploration of intermediality to vocal and instrumental performance manuals, which then return us to individual literary texts with a richer awareness of their musical allusions: for example, the appealingly illustrated title page for Christopher Simpson’s *The Division-viol, or the Art of Playing ex tempore to a Ground* uses a term, “division,” that we’ll find again in “To the Nightingale.” Signaling in this way her own extensive training in music performance, Finch’s poem about lyric creativity thematizes vocal and instrumental performance theory and practice and refers to specific musical performance techniques.

Further extending their exploration of intermediality, students can use the *AFDA* to experience Finch’s lyrics as musical performance, as Finch’s contemporaries could. At the *AFDA* site, the print and performance history and musicological discussions provided in the “Introduction to Finch, Music, and Song” are complemented by the recordings hosted at the “Finch’s Songs in Performance” page, featuring performances of six Finch lyrics set to music by early modern composers. By accessing the site, we can hear the sonic-performance elements of what readers encounter only on the page: how literary phrases and musical passages interacted for early modern audiences. These digital resources help us reconstruct the intermediality of Finch’s expressive works across the different platforms of printed text, theatrical stage, and musical performance.

Examining the full media presence of Finch’s works confirms that early modern poets worked fluently and sometimes collaboratively across multiple media. In the case of the song genre, the musical setting, typically contributed
by a composer, expanded the tools available to an artist to define character; to
signal or effect plot developments in longer pieces, such as plays; and to set up
rich intertextual allusions on both verbal and sonic levels. Circulating in
manuscript and in print as poems, set to music for professional and private
performances, and featured in performed theater and printed playscripts,
Finch’s “songs” are by definition intermedial. This realization counters the
notion that early modern women’s writing is best experienced through silent
engagement with printed words on the page. It also highlights how these
writers’ arts-practices resemble students’ own expressive practices as content-
creators for social-media platforms.

“To the Nightingale” as remediation case study

On Days 2 and 3 of our work with Finch, we shift our focus from the
intermediality of the early modern song as a multiplatform genre to exploring
Finch’s active practices of remediation. To do so we closely engage a single
poem, “To the Nightingale,” which highlights her ingenious play with literary
and musical conventions. Building on what students have learned about
musicality’s tropes, we zero in on a double hypothesis:

-- First, not only was Finch keenly aware of the literary and material
conventions for laying claim to expressive-arts authority, she was also
aware of how staking out such a claim might be problematic for a woman
writer.
-- Second, Finch’s authorial practices intentionally played with media
available to her to explore and challenge this issue through remediation.

We begin the second class by reviewing Bolter and Grusin’s concepts of
immediacy and hypermediacy as contrasting modes of remediation. The key
points: an immediate mode produces the illusion that we have direct access to
what is being represented; this facilitates an absorptive engagement with the
substance or content of the representation precisely by erasing its media
history. In contrast, hypermediacy keeps us aware of the medium in which the
representation is reaching us, disrupting our absorption in the content.
Hypermediacy involves the continued co-presence within the work of different
media: rather than the new medium displacing and erasing the previous one,
we experience a layering of media allusions such that the new medium co-
habits with the original medium, which is never entirely superseded or erased.
(Students quickly get this idea of media shift if we look at a few stills from
recent Austen films that show the protagonist avidly reading or scribbling
away with a quill pen.)

Students put these media-studies concepts to work in examining the imagery
and intertextual allusions of a single poem. I select Finch’s “To the
Nightingale” for this intensive study because it complexly mobilizes a
constellation of tropes about birdsong, poetics, and gender—then abruptly abandons them, leaving the reader to resolve the contradictions that have been exposed by that abrupt disalignment of bird, muse, and poet. Over the last four decades, critics have offered brilliant readings of Finch’s bird poems as allegorizing the experiences of women writers, who had to negotiate the structures of prescriptive class and gender roles that were multiply muting or suppressive of their work, and students are quick to grasp these interpretations.\(^{16}\) As we attend to Finch’s remediation of tropes, however, in particular tracking shifts of narratorial position and genre signals, students gain a more nuanced understanding of Finch’s play with precursor texts. Finch’s remediating strategies flag some of the complexities of elite early modern women writers’ ambivalent relation to authorship and authority, power and charisma – complexities that will return later in the term when students read *Millennium Hall* and *The Female Quixote*.

To begin to demystify Finch’s richly allusive apparatus for meaning-making, and to encourage students to bring their own social media-based creative practices into the classroom, I post the Bird Toolkit at our course website. The Toolkit assembles a multimedia set of texts, images, and tools that map out how birds and birdsong signified in early modern English poetry. The array of materials invites students to explore intermediality along with intertextuality to develop a more nuanced understanding of what it meant for an early modern artist to engage with the trope of birdsong. Here are the elements of the Toolkit:

1. A selection of **English early modern lyrics about birds** that Finch and her contemporaries might have known. Carew, Crashaw, Dryden, Marvell, Milton, Philips, Sidney, Spenser, and Shakespeare all wrote about nightingales; Elizabeth Singer Rowe published a collection in 1696 under the pseudonym “Philomela.”\(^ {17}\) These precursor texts consistently explore one or more of **four tropes of birdsong** that were familiar to Finch’s contemporaries: the bird as nature’s ‘wild’ artist; Pliny’s account of a birdsong competition-to-the-death; the lovesick bird singing to the rose as a thorn pierces its body; and lastly the bird as a figure of sexual transgression: the Ovidian material of sexual violence and problematic female art-making in the story of Philomela and Procne.\(^ {18}\)

2. A short glossary of relevant **terms for vocal and instrumental techniques** of the long early modern period: “division”; “shake”; “trill.” Along with Simmons’s 1659 “Division-viol” mentioned above, I also cite Charles Burney’s *A General History of Music from the Earliest Ages to the Present Period* (1776-89).

3. Recordings of modern **musical performances** that showcase the motif of the **bird / human singing contest**: soprano Kathleen Battle and flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal performing Handel’s setting of “Sweet Bird” from
Milton’s “L’Allegro, il penseroso ed il moderato” (Sony 1993); Giacomelli’s “Quell’usignolo” describing (and imitating) a nightingale “in love” from La Merope, 1734, with the mezzo-soprano Viveca Genaux adapting the vocal ornamentation performed by the famous soprano-castrato Farinelli (Harmonia Mundi, 2022); Norah Jones’s “Nightingale” from her album Fly Away (Muthajones Music, BMI, 2002) which returns to the question of what stories the nightingale allows women artists to tell.

4. **Texts of two other Finch poems:** “The Introduction” (CEAF1: 33) and “The Bird” (CEAF1:51). Showcasing other ways Finch used bird imagery, these two poems extend the exploration of art, desire, gender, and authority in Finch’s work.

To prepare for our third and final class on Finch, students are assigned to study individually one of the Toolkit resources and think about how it might contribute to our understanding of the poem; two or three students divide up the early modern lyrics among themselves. In class they work in groups of four or five toward a rich collaborative engagement with the text. After reading aloud “To the Nightingale,” they develop a set of questions about the poem, with each student contributing insights based on the tool they selected. The Bird Toolkit resources facilitate the process of arriving at nuanced research questions, informed by a range of media, about how Finch is negotiating the complex meanings of the bird.

Here are some of the questions students have produced through this exercise:

+ Who is speaking when the poem opens? Does the speaker shift over the poem’s sections, and if so, how do we describe the different speakers?
+ Does the speaker here resemble speakers in earlier birdsong poems by other writers?
+ Finch draws on a vocal-performance vocabulary of “shakes,” “trills,” and “division” to describe the nightingale’s song. What does it mean to link human and non-human vocalization in this way?
+ Birdsong is beautiful, yet ‘only’ natural – so is it inferior to human art … or superior?
+ If birdsong stands for creativity and artistry – why is it also traditionally associated with grief, loss, and self-sacrifice for beauty?
+ Why and when is the nightingale female / feminine, and when is its femininity defined in relation to eroticized pathos and violence?
+ How does Finch use the tropes of wild artist and musicians’ competition differently from how Crashaw, Philips, and Sidney used them?
+ Who wins the contest?19
The Toolkit and a reading of “To the Nightingale”

Student engagement with the question “Who wins the singing competition?” is more complex and nuanced thanks to the more open-ended and collaborative approach to the poem that the Toolkit facilitates. I value the Toolkit approach for teaching “To the Nightingale” in part because it supports my own reading of Finch’s staging of the woman writer’s complicated relationship to the nightingale as trope. Unquestionably, Finch is aware that the nightingale’s vocal charisma is a dangerous emblem for women’s art-making. In response, her poem hovers between and among the bird’s existing connotations, refusing to settle with any of them. In place of the nightingale emblematically fixed in its bower of roses and thorns, or beautifully and tragically dead of exhaustion after its competition with the human musician, the poem instead strategically adapts a mobility that, if we were to continue the avian analogy, resembles the hovering and darting characteristics of hummingbird flight. The rapid genre shifts among the four sections of the poem allow Finch to mobilize a variety of personae. The initial address to the bird includes the reflective passage on human poets, closing with an alexandrine – for Finch, always the formal marker of poetic authority. The middle section dramatizes the bird and muse competing, with the bird always excelling. In the abrupt change of tone in the third section, Finch ventriloquizes a different human reproving the bird for wasting time in merely singing. But this figure of “we poets that have speech” doesn’t get the last word; the earlier narrative voice returns to reflect on that reproof, attributing it to the jealousy of the human poet who “cannot reach” the “fluent,” “transcendent,” and infinitely sweet music of the bird. Through these shifts, Finch remediates the nightingale trope: the poem both confirms the bird’s victory in the contest and at the same time opens up another route to poetic achievement that bypasses the gendered competitions so often ending in the feminized bird’s defeat or death staged in precursor nightingale poems. Returning to the broader goals of the class: it’s my hope that Finch’s media experimentation will inspire students’ own arts practices, using whatever media platforms they find most compelling. The course offers students the opportunity to respond to our assigned readings through their own creative work: one of the optional final exercises for the course is to produce a short video for a social-media platform that responds in some way to course materials, accompanied by a written analysis of the project that draws on media-studies terms students have encountered over the term. Just as Finch’s nightingale poem imagines new directions for a familiar set of stories through remediation, twenty-first-century expressive artists can redeploy the scripts they encounter in work by early modern women writers to make their own critical-creative intermedial works.
Notes

1 This essay contributes to Part II of the “Concise Collection on Teaching the Works of Anne Finch,” guest edited by Jennifer Keith, *Aphra Behn Online*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2024. To read the essays in this part, follow this link: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol14/iss1/. To read essays in Part I, follow this link: https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/abo/vol13/iss2/.

Some of the readings for “Early Modern Women Writers and Media Studies” were inspired by a syllabus generously shared with me years ago by Professor Jill Campbell, Yale University.

2 For a corrective account of what was printed on the presses of early modern Europe, nuancing earlier broad claims about the democratizing effects of print culture as a mass medium, see Stallybrass, “‘Little Jobs’: Broadsides and the Printing Revolution” in a collection whose title highlights its distance from the “agent of change” story of print as a technology. Kate Van Orden’s “Introduction: Music Among the Bibliographic Disciplines” similarly criticizes the generalizations of earlier accounts of print culture by pointing to the relatively limited circulation of printed music texts.

3 For the birth story of the term “remediation” see *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, p. viii; for the oscillation or “double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy,” see p. 19.

4 “Intermediality” and other terms used by media theorists are usefully defined in Mitchell and Hansen’s *Critical Terms for Media Studies*. See also the introduction by Bruhn and Schirrmacher to *Intermedial Studies: An Introduction to Meaning Across Media*.

5 For discussions of “immediacy” and “hypermediacy,” see *Remediation*, pp. 33-34.

6 *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea*, Volume 1 (*CEAF1*), pp. 387-88. All citations from Finch’s works in this article are taken from *CEAF* Volumes 1 and 2.

7 For these historical and cultural contexts, I draw on the excellent “General Introduction” (*CEAF1*), by Claudia Thomas Kairoff, Jennifer Keith, and Jean I. Marsden; the complementary online resource *The Anne Finch Digital Archive* (AFDA); and James Anderson Winn’s monumental study of performance arts at Queen Anne’s court, *Queen Anne, Patroness of Arts*. The digital databases *EEBO* (and its free version *EEBO-TCP*) and *ECCO* (and *ECCO-TCP*, also free) allow students to trace the print and performance history of Finch’s songs across media platforms.

8 The title page of the manuscript “Poems on Several Subjects Written By Ardelia” (Finch-Hatton MS 283) and the title page of “Miscellany Poems with Two Plays by Ardelia” (Folger Ms N.b.3) are reproduced in *CEAF1*, p. clxv and p. 20, respectively. The print-edition title pages can be found by searching the database *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (*ECCO*). The fact that *ECCO* omits Finch’s manuscript publications highlights the need for plurimedia approaches to early modern women’s writing.

9 See the discussion in the “General Introduction” to *CEAF1* as well as “The Song” (*CEAF1*: lxviii-lxxi, lxxv-1xxxvi). The magisterial *Queen Anne, Patroness of Arts* also discusses the “omnipresence of musical performances, among other arts, in Stuart court life” (xvii-xviii).

10 In *Triumphs*, the protagonist Marina, disguised as a pageboy, renounces her love for Blanfort in a “song” (*CEAF1*: 141). In *Aristomenes*, “The Song [A yong Shepheard his life]” is performed just before the announcement of Aristomenes’ triumphant return (*CEAF1*: 244-45). Finch’s plays were published first in the Folger Manuscript, “Miscellany Poems with Two Plays by Ardelia.” The Prologue and Epilogue to *Aristomenes* were included, along with a song written for but not included in the play (*CEAF1*: cxxxiii). *Aristomenes* was printed in Finch’s *Miscellany Poems, on Several Occasions* (1713).
Acknowledging ‘intermediality’ avant la lettre, Charles Hinnant calls the songs that appear in Finch’s two plays “derivative” if “skillfully turned” examples of “the Restoration song” and adds, “Yet it is well to keep in mind that her songs, like those of other seventeenth-century poets, acquire meaning chiefly in relation to other songs” (The Poetry of Anne Finch, 39, 40).

As of August 1, 2020, many of the early modern texts collected by EEBO and ECCO are available via the Text Creation Partnership project without subscription fee (https://textcreationpartnership.org/).

Finch refers to a reading of Aristomenes in the “Prologue to My Lord Winchilsea, upon the First Reading the Play to Him, at Eastwell in Kent” (see the discussion at CEAF1: 585). As Jennifer Keith noted, the songs may have been performed at this kind of select-audience reading (personal communication). Wright’s play and Finch’s “A Song” (“Love, thou art best”) and its settings and reprinting are discussed in CEAF1: 504-507.

Simpson’s manual was published in English in 1659 and reprinted in 1665 with Latin translations facing the English originals, suggesting the later edition’s intent to expand the range of readership beyond anglophone musicians. It names a dozen different kinds of division, including shakes, gracenotes, and diminutions.

The performers are Teresa Radomski and Peter Kairoff. https://libresearch.uncg.edu/AnneFinch/Music/Artists

Several decades of discussion of this trope include Lucy Brashear’s “Finch’s ‘The Bird and the Arras’”; Virginia M. Duff, “‘[F]allen by mistaken rules’: Anne Finch’s ‘The Bird and the Arras’ and the Subtle Indictment of Domestic Confinement and Marriage Law”; Ann Messenger, His and Hers. Jean Mallinson, in “Anne Finch: A Woman Poet and the Tradition,” argues that approaches aligning imprisoned bird and legally minoritized women are excessively presentist. Charles Hinnant sees “To the Nightingale” as “concerned in the broadest sense with the limits of poetic signification” rather than with “the anxiety of female authorship” (106, 105). Jennifer Keith looks at the disappearance of the bird trope in Finch’s later works in relation to Finch’s late embrace of print readership. Gillian Wright explores a very different set of associations with the nightingale in her examination of the publication history of Finch’s fable “The Nightingale, and the Cuckoo.”

Ann Messenger assembles a list of relevant nightingale images in her article “Selected Nightingales,” focusing on Sidney’s “The Nightingale, as Soone as Aprill Bringeth”; Richard Crashaw’s “Musicks Duell”; and Ambrose Philips’s “Fifth Pastoral.” A longer but by no means complete list would include works by Carew, Dryden, Marvell, Milton, Spenser, and Shakespeare (“The Rape of Lucrece”). The making and remaking of the nightingale topos continues into the nineteenth century through Romantic and nineteenth-century English literature. Coleridge’s poem “The Nightingale: A Conversational Poem, Written in April 1798” summons up a whole grove of male “merry nightingales” – a masculinization of the birdsong trope that challenges its association with the feminine. Returning to the associations of the nightingale with femininity, Norah Jones’s “Nightingale” (recorded 2002) suggests that the gendered trope retains cultural power.

Scholars have noted that the Ovidian material is not explicitly invoked in this poem, but I suggest that the pathos and violence that saturate three of these four tropes of birdsong almost certainly would have mobilized the Ovidian associations as well.

Messenger notes that out of all the precursor singing-contest poems Finch’s contemporaries would have known, only in “To the Nightingale” does it appear that the bird wins the contest (“Selected Nightingales,” Note 12, p. 153). Richard Crashaw’s 1646 “Musicks Duell” is typical of how these contests ended: his nightingale sings herself to death and collapses on the human musician’s lute, which is described as “so sweet a Grave!”
Works Cited


Simpson, Christopher. The Division-viol, or the Art of Playing ex tempore to a Ground. 1659.

