

## Teaching Poetry with Anne Finch: Manuscript Culture as Early Modern Social Media

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## Teaching Poetry with Anne Finch: Manuscript Culture as Early Modern Social Media

### Abstract

This essay discusses two approaches I use to teach Anne Finch's—and others'—poetry. Drawing on certain habits of early modern manuscript culture, I make visible to my students ways that reading and writing are socially embedded practices, which may variously involve exchange, reciprocity, or censorship. By adapting the "quaint" habits of manuscript culture practiced by Finch and many others to specific assignments, I encourage students to experience poetry as living, sociable occasions of reading and writing. To augment my students' engagement with early modern poetry I connect it to frameworks from their twenty-first-century reading and writing worlds. These exercises in "early modern social media" provide students with an intimate structure for studying a poem that resonates with many of their interests in creative writing and with their participation, *mutatis mutandis*, in one or more kinds of twenty-first-century social media.

### Keywords

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

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For many years, I have taught Anne Finch's works to both undergraduate and graduate students in various sixteen-week, semester-long courses.<sup>1</sup> In, for example, a pre-1800 British literature survey, an advanced undergraduate course on Love Poetry, a methods and bibliography course for MA students, and a course for PhD students on reading and teaching poetry, Finch's works accompany those by other writers (which vary according to the course topic, focus, and level). The University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where I teach, has a long-standing Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program; many students here are interested in the role of gender in shaping their worlds. Hence, it is not hard for me to "sell" the study of women-presenting writers per se, but as a white British writer of "long ago," with an aristocratic title appended to her name, Anne Finch may initially seem alien to my students. They may also balk at poems that use rhyme, classical allusions, pastoral frameworks, or other unfamiliar conventions.<sup>2</sup>

Finch's tumultuous life, however, fascinates students at all levels. She was born into privilege, well educated, but orphaned very young.<sup>3</sup> She served at court and then married Heneage Finch. Their world changed with the Revolution of 1688. She and her husband remained loyal to James II, their exiled king, whose crown, in their view, was usurped by William and Mary. The Finches' Jacobitism removed them from positions of privilege, with consequences that included their financial dependence on family and friends. In 1690, Heneage was charged with treason; although he was eventually released from charges, the couple would live in England as internal exiles, subject to government surveillance. For Anne Finch, this was a double internal exile, as both a woman under patriarchy and a Jacobite opposed to the government in power after 1688.

Like Finch's biography, her manuscript contexts appeal to students and inform these assignments. The earliest authorized manuscript of Finch's work to have survived was compiled soon after the Revolution of 1688 (*CEAFI*: cxxviii–cxxxi).<sup>4</sup> For most of her career, she preferred manuscript to print, in part because of the relative control that she retained over circulating her work, especially by overseeing the compilation of her work in manuscript books, transcribed in part or whole by Heneage (*CEAFI*: lvii–lxi). By circulating her work in manuscript, Finch could, among other things, choose her readers (except in cases when the manuscripts strayed beyond the immediate recipient) and engage in a literary community that prized conversation and letters, in prose and verse (Hunter). Such conversations especially exploited the use of personae to reveal and conceal a range of passions. The assignments described below help students hear and converse with these poetic voices and personae, thereby enhancing students' critical, creative, and personal engagements with her work.<sup>5</sup>

From the foundation of students' interest in Finch's compelling biography, I developed assignments that teach students to avoid biographical fallacies while engaging directly with her poetry. Likewise, from the foundational contexts of Finch's manuscript practices, I developed assignments that encourage students to understand the differences between modern and early modern socioliterary cultures, discussed below. These assignments have worked well in surveys and specialty courses at all levels, and I have applied them to many other writers, including Aphra Behn and Phillis Wheatley Peters. I include here two assignments based on a generative analogy between early modern manuscript culture, which is unfamiliar to most students, and contemporary social-media culture, which is very familiar to them. The point is not to equate the two very different textual contexts, nor to indulge in presentism; these direct, historicized engagements with poems lead students to interrogate the processes and conventions of textual production and circulation in two distinctive periods of literary history. By describing the assignments as exercises in "early modern social media," I invite students to contrast their own reading-writing practices with the early modern manuscript practices under study.<sup>6</sup> The assignments, "The Reply Assignment" and "The Coterie Assignment," appear here in italics, followed by my comments for instructors.

### **The Reply Assignment**

*Reading a poem is a creative and intellectual activity that, especially, but not only, in centuries past, often expressed itself in writing. In cultures that regularly circulated poetry in manuscript to friends or family members, a reader might, for example, write a reply to a poem shared with them (sometimes in a letter), often responding to the original by assuming the perspective of the poem's addressee—whether or not the reader was the intended addressee. This assignment asks you to participate in this aspect of reading-as-writing by composing your reply to one of the poems listed beside its due date.*

*The assignment does not require that you reply in verse to the work (or specifically follow the structure of the poem to which you respond), but I certainly encourage you to do so. Your grade will not be penalized, however, if you choose to write your response in prose. Please feel free to talk with me about the assignment: I am happy to help you consider some directions you might take.*

*Be sure to include these two parts for the assignment:*

- 1. Your reply.*
- 2. A reflection of at least 300 words that discusses*

- a. specific choices you made in your reply (whether in verse or prose), including language, images, and formal elements, and how these choices contributed to your “conversation” with this poem;*
- b. how, if at all, the assignment resulted in your reading the poem differently than before you wrote the reply—for example, noticing things that you might not have noticed had you not replied to the poem;*
- c. how writing this reply compared with and contrasted to an instance of your use of twenty-first century “socioliterary intercourse.”*

*Please upload parts 1 and 2 to our shared Google Doc for the assignment two hours before our class meets: during our class meeting, I will ask you to make a brief presentation (approximately five minutes) to the class about your reply and field questions about your work.*

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In composing a reply to a poem (whether by Finch or another writer), students develop an active and personal way of reading a poem, but it does require some scaffolding. I introduce both assignments described here with information about early modern manuscript culture, in which reading and writing were socially embedded practices that often drew on elements of speech, especially conversation (Sitter 9–11; Hunter), and could involve exchange, reciprocity, or censorship.<sup>7</sup> Poems might be shown to friends and family members, at times accompanying letters; many poems were composed as responses to others; and many readers transcribed (with changes intentional or not) for themselves and others the manuscripts that passed through their hands (see examples in Justice and Tinker). I introduce a term that captures this dynamic: Arthur Marotti’s “socioliterary intercourse” (39). Margaret Ezell’s concept “social authorship” also underscores writing and reading as socially embedded activities while providing a crucial alternative to the students’ most familiar model of single-authored works (21–44).

Having emphasized historical manuscript-culture practices in which acts of reading often prompted writing to beget another cycle of reading and writing—and of circulation and exchange—I point out the conversational and dialogic aspects of individual poems and kinds of poems. The reply poem is one such kind: a poem that responds to another poem, whether intra-authorial (as when Finch composes a reply to one of her own poems), or inter-authorial (when writers respond to poems written by others).

Because the concept of voice can be elusive to students, regardless of their academic level, I provide in-class exercises to prepare for the Reply Assignment. In my experience, the best exercise for helping students understand voice is simply to ask several students to read aloud—give voice to—the same passage or poem. I encourage each reader to “try something different” from the previous readings, and, above all, to avoid the infamous having-to-read-aloud-in-class voice. After several students have read the same passage aloud (depending on the results, I may also read the passage aloud), class members are ready to describe certain qualities of voice and discuss which reader performed the poem’s voice or voices best. Poems that feature personae, especially with names drawn from pastoral characters, can help students hear that voices in poems are always constructed (i.e., not equivalent, or restricted, to the biographical author; see also Richards; Sitter 7). As context for these names drawn from pastoral characters, I pre-circulate a handout describing some characteristics of pastoral, and I explain the significance of poets, especially women poets, using pastoral sobriquets. Since sobriquets were often used in exchanges among poets who knew each other, anonymity was usually not the function of these names, as scholars have established.<sup>8</sup> I ask students about the effect of using pastoral names rather than “real” names for characters and personae.

Conveniently, Finch offers a masterclass in conveying voice and constructing a reply in a pair of poems. “A Song for a Play Alcander to Melinda” (composed no later than c. 1702) and “A Song Melinda to Alcander” (composed no later than c. 1696) clearly display distinctive voices and the dramatic effects of reply, as well as the techniques that produce them (*CEAFI*: 68–69; *CEAFI*: 496–98; Hinnant 44–45, 51). Labeling both poems as songs, she establishes in the title of the first that Alcander and Melinda are characters in a play, which in Finch’s era often included songs. That their names are typical of pastoral literature and that both poems treat the topics of love and poetry, so frequent in pastoral, heighten the poems’ blatant artifice. Alcander’s avowed love for Melinda, supporting his attempt to seduce her, uses hyperbolic and hackneyed language to rehearse the worn conventions of love poetry:

More then [*sic*] a Sea of tears, can show,  
 Or thousand sighs can prove,  
 Then fault’ring speech, can lett [*sic*] you know,  
 I fair Melinda love. (1–4)

Alcander burnishes this attempt at seduction with conventional flattery: the female beloved, Melinda, inspires his love and words. I ask students to read aloud Alcander’s poem, using tone and pauses to convey this character’s speech.

Depending on the students who read the poem, it may take several readers before someone is willing to express Alcander's extravagance, idealism, and egotism.

"Melinda's" song, positioned immediately after "Alcander's" in Finch's second manuscript book, "Miscellany Poems with Two Plays by Ardelia," ignores Alcander's boast of great love.<sup>9</sup> Instead, Melinda expresses outrage at his insinuation that women are saddled with the role of inspiring men's writing:

Witt, as free, and unconfind [*sic*]  
As the universal air,  
Was not alotted [*sic*] to mankind,  
Leaving us, without our share;  
No, we posesse [*sic*] alike that fire,  
And all you boast of, we inspire. (1–6)

Driving home her assertion, Melinda concludes: "Witt, and love, we give, and claime" (12). When I ask students to characterize Melinda's reply, they readily detect the character's angry tone and insistence on women's equality (or superiority). But I usually need to prompt the class to identify how the *structure* of Melinda's reply is part of her opposition to Alcander.

Alcander's song comprises sixteen lines of four stanzas, four lines each, with alternating rhymes (*abab*) and alternating 4/3 iambic feet, all elements common in songs of Finch's era. Melinda's song-reply is more concise than Alcander's: its brevity and structure serve her firm rebuttal of Alcander. Melinda replies with twelve lines, each consistently 4/4 iambic feet, of only two stanzas (six lines each) that rhyme *ababcc*. Compared with Melinda's song, Alcander's seems rambling and irrational. In opposition to Alcander's expressiveness, Melinda unfolds a series of statements that suggest a genealogy of beauty and creativity ("witt"):

Fancy, does from beauty rise,  
Beauty, teaches [*sic*] you to write,  
Your flames are borrow'd from our Eyes,  
You but speak, what they endite.  
Then cease to boast alone, that Fame,  
Witt, and love, we give, and claime. (7–12)

With the song's first line beginning with "Witt" and final line ending with "claime," Finch tightly organizes Melinda's rebuttal of Alcander's self-absorbed misogyny. Melinda's song begins with the premise that "Witt" (also signified by "fire") is "as free, and unconfind / As the universal air" (1–2); thus, it cannot be

allotted to men only. Her longer stanzas—of uniform line length and alternating rhymes concluded in each stanza with a couplet—convey authority and clarity. In the second, final, stanza, this structure supports her syllogistic argument: lines 7 and 8 serve as premises, followed by the unquestionable conclusion, in lines 9 and 10, that women are the source of what men boast of as their exclusively male powers of wit. She goes farther than this; notably, Melinda repeats only one of Alcander's rhyme words—"Eyes." By reconceiving the power of women's eyes (they are flames of their own inspiration) Melinda claims the power of wit for women.<sup>10</sup> In Melinda's reply, then, we can trace her dramatic address and defiance of restrictive gender norms that would deny women's creativity, girded by poetic techniques that support her artistic claims. By asking students to examine such structures in addition to features such as tone, word choice, and imagery in these two poems, I expose them to some of the tools they, too, can (and do) use in their replies. I do not require the students to compose such carefully structured replies, but many students successfully adopt the strategy of re-using certain rhyme words from the original poem. Although the assignment does not specify that replies be in verse, all students, except one, have chosen to write them in verse.

I typically assign one or more of the following epistles by Finch as the basis for students' replies: "To My Sister Ogle Decbr-31-1688-," "A Letter to Flavio" ("Sure of successe, to you I boldly write"), or "To a Fellow Scribbler." Poems that address abstractions or nonhuman beings can also yield fascinating results for this assignment (e.g., "The Tree" or "To the Eccho, in a Clear Night upon Astrop Walks"). I do not assign one date for the entire class to complete the assignment because their replies are central to our discussions of the poems throughout the semester. For nearly every class meeting, two or three students present their replies, accompanied by a reflection. Because the students will have already uploaded their work to a Google Doc, they refer to their work (which I project from the computer) in a presentation that takes six to eight minutes for each student.

### **The Coterie Manuscript Assignment**

*For centuries groups of readers often circulated manuscripts of works composed by themselves or others, and when they received these manuscripts, they responded in a variety of ways. A reader might (1) simply transcribe the work or of a portion of the work for herself to preserve it in her personal library (perhaps making a few changes either intentionally or unintentionally as she transcribed), (2) annotate or expand on the work, (3) reply to the work, often providing a different perspective on a theme in the work, (4) imitate the*



*work—making substantial changes to certain aspects of the work, changes that could also create a parody of the work—or (5) illustrate the work with visual designs that respond to certain elements in the poem.*

*In our time, we see this circulation and variation with materials exchanged and modified on the Internet, but this assignment attempts to recreate and discover the features of readerly and writerly experience that emerge with manuscript circulation as distinct from electronic circulation. I encourage you to take advantage of the creative possibilities of the manuscript medium in this assignment.*

*We'll begin with a poem I've transcribed (but not composed). Each week, following the schedule below, one member of the coterie will respond to one (or more) manuscripts in the envelope. If you wish to respond to the original manuscript by writing on it, please make a copy of the original transcription and write on your copy so that we can follow the variations produced by the work's circulation. Likewise, if you wish to write on a coterie member's response, please copy it, and make your changes on this copy. Thus, with each member of our coterie, the manuscript will gain another manuscript added to the envelope. When you've completed your response to the manuscript, please hand the envelope to the next person on the list.*

*Please: do not put your name on your manuscript.*

*Sample Schedule:*

*Student A gives the envelope with manuscripts to student B by the Friday of week 2;*

*Student B gives the envelope with manuscripts to student C by the Friday of week 3;*

*(and so on, through week 11).*

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Like the Reply Assignment, the Coterie Manuscript Assignment asks students to participate in certain practices associated with manuscript culture but extends this participation by asking them to respond to handwritten manuscripts circulated among members of the class. Instead of asking that the student reply “one-on-one” to a given poem, this second assignment engages students in the multiple, often multi-directional, paths of manuscript circulation as a material phenomenon.<sup>11</sup>

I introduce the assignment and begin circulating the manuscript in our first meeting, when I provide a brief account of the circulation of manuscripts in

Finch's era. Inviting students to approach our work on the assignment as a coterie, despite our twenty-first-century academic context, I also note that in many cases "network" better describes a looser social structure when manuscripts extend beyond readers known directly by the writer and after the work's initial circulation.<sup>12</sup> I require that all work on the assignment be done on paper and handwritten—for some students, an infrequently practiced condition of reading and writing. For this assignment, I often choose Finch's "To a Freind [*sic*] in Praise of the Invention of Writing Letters" (composed no later than c. 1696; *CEAFI*: 48–49). This 40-line verse epistle, composed in couplets, directly addresses the unnamed friend only in the final paragraph (ll. 31–40). Treating the topic of the power of correspondence to defy absence and loss, Finch insists on certain aspects of letters' materiality in a series of scenarios that today might be called thought experiments, a paradoxical perspective that connects physical with imaginative flights (*CEAFI*: 463–66; see also Hinnant 130–31).

Without indicating who wrote the poem, although I explain that I am not the author, I present a manuscript that I have inserted into an envelope (a manila envelope measuring 10 x 13 inches) as one that "came across my desk." To suggest the work's context as an object of circulation and social reading, I transcribe the poem by hand in advance, making heavy creases in the paper (often seen in early manuscripts inserted in letters) to suggest its travels. A bit of spilled tea or coffee in a corner of the paper adds to the poem's "lived-in" appearance. In a recent use of the assignment, I transcribed only lines 2 to 14 (omitting the first word in line 2), tearing the beginning and end of my transcription to suggest it was part of a longer poem. The fragmentary state of the transcription seems to put members of the coterie at ease in responding to it; moreover, its material aspects (folds, stains) inspire students to participate creatively with the poem's materiality. I specify that every coterie member's response should be written on a new piece of paper so that when the circulation is complete, we can see everyone's contribution. (Alternatively, one could ask coterie members to respond on the original manuscript, resulting in a palimpsest.) Every week, the envelope gains a new manuscript page from a coterie member as the envelope circulates to the next member. The last person listed in the coterie returns the envelope to me.

Near the end of the semester, I schedule one class period for "the great reveal," spreading out the contents of the envelope and asking students to examine the results. I ask them to keep in mind the following questions at this stage:

- a. How did the coterie assignment shape how you read the poem, especially in contrast to other, more traditional reading and writing assignments about poems?

- b. What conclusions about the practices—both writing and reading—of manuscript circulation in coteries do you draw from your work and the other contributions you see today?
- c. In what ways does this exercise in early modern social media compare with your participation in a twenty-first century online social media community? Identify the affordances of each.

On examining the envelope's contents, students discover the range of their coterie's responses to the following lines I transcribed to launch the circulation:

. . . found the art, thus to unfold his breast,  
And taught succeeding times, an easy way  
Their secret thoughts, by letters to convey;  
To baffle absence, and secure delight,  
Which 'till that time, was limmitted to sight.  
The parting farwell spoke, the last adieu,  
The less'ning distance past, then losse of view,  
The freind was gone, which some kind moments gave,  
And absence, seperated like the Grave.  
The wings of Love, were tender too, 'till then,  
No quill, thence pull'd, was shap'd into a pen,  
To send in paper sheets, from town to town  
Words, smooth as they, and softer then his down. (2–14)

The varied results of circulating this transcription to the coterie included one member's exact transcription of the lines with the addition of scholarly editorial glosses and queries. Another member took a cue from Finch's fanciful account of the state of Love's/Cupid's wings to assert the materiality of this mythological god by illustrating—with surreal results—Finch's figurative language, including "baffle[d] absence" and words smoother than Love's wings "and softer then his down." Still another member of the coterie re-transcribed without changes the fragment first circulated but surrounded that transcription with elements that developed the original lines' attention to form, medium, fragmentariness, and transmission. Among these elements were a postage stamp affixed in the margin (with the suggestive "forever" designation); a headline cut from a newspaper that read "There's No More 'Unfinished Business'"; and a brief comment in free verse, written with the antique technology of the typewriter. All coterie members embraced the materiality of the assignment, not simply following the requirement that they write by hand, but also selecting different (often larger) paper formats and exploiting, at minimum, the liberty of handwriting with variations in letterforms.

In concluding, I distribute hard copies of Finch's complete authorized version of the poem. After giving students time in class to read the whole poem, I ask them to consider what in the complete state of the poem is surprising to them or consistent with their participation in the assignment. Although the poem's title and early sections praise the long-ago inventor of letters, *in toto* the poem provides an imaginative excursion from the ancient past to the future. In lines missing from the fragment provided, Finch's speaker asks for more than what letters can give:

Oh might I live, to see an art arise  
 As this, to thoughts, indulgent to the Eyes,  
 That the dark pow'rs of distance, cou'd subdue,  
 And make me see, as well as talk to You,  
 That tedious miles, not tracts of air might prove  
 Bars to my sight, and Shaddows [*sic*] to my love . . . (31–36)

Coterie members often remark that Finch's imaginative leap in these lines prefigures online meetings. Her leaps escalate to what is today still in the realm of science fiction when, in a desire for something like teleportation, the speaker admits that she would ask for still more: "an art, to help us to embrace" (40).

Coterie members are often surprised by not only the poem's futuristic direction, but also its reimagination of the past, especially in connecting love letters to affairs of religion and state. Such historical, political, and biblical contexts were, of course, compelling to Finch's contemporary readers. Envisioning an alternative biblical history that could have unfolded had letters been invented earlier, the poem recalls the episode when Abraham sent his servant with objects such as jewelry and a "wealthy Equipage" to woo a future wife for his son Isaac (Genesis 24:10; see notes in *CEAFI*: 464). But of all these gifts, there was "not a line, that might the Lover show" (20). The poem asserts that love letters, more powerful than the gifts sent by Abraham, could have changed dynastic history. Finch places the woman reader of such a letter at the center of this transaction, her body responding to the "melting words, the charms, / that under secret seals, in ambush lye / To catch the Soul, when drawn into the Eye" (22–24). Such an alternative seduction, albeit an imagined one, yokes intimacy and even pleasure with the daring exercise of imagining a different biblical history.

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These assignments offer students an interactive structure for studying poetry that resonates with many of their interests in creative writing and with their participation, *mutatis mutandis*, in one or more kinds of social media. Such

assignments can demonstrate that making a poem involves acts of compositional creation as well as the pragmatic, social acts involved in producing and distributing it; and motivate students to bring writers' historical contexts, both biographical and textual, to their study; and transform what some students may see as the stultifying study of remote artifacts into acts of relishing poems as sociable occasions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> 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/>.

<sup>2</sup> I wish to thank A. E. B. Coldiron for her generous and astute suggestions that were crucial to developing this essay.

<sup>3</sup> McGovern's biography of Finch is the source of all biographical information in this paragraph; for a detailed account of Finch's early life, see McGovern, especially chapters 1–4. The open-access [Anne Finch Digital Archive](#) includes a brief account of Finch's life among other resources for teaching and scholarship.

<sup>4</sup> Citations of Volume 1 of *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea* are abbreviated throughout as "CEAFI: [page number]."

<sup>5</sup> This intimate quality is more overt in certain poems; when we first meet to discuss Finch's work, I choose poems strong in that quality (e.g., "The Introduction" [CEAFI: 33], and "Ardelia to Melancholy" [CEAFI: 53]).

<sup>6</sup> Typical questions posed include: What are the differences between how an early modern manuscript circulated and how a work now circulates in a specific social media platform? How do those differences in circulation define the readerships and affect written content? How does the experience of reading a work on paper contrast with reading a work on a screen?

<sup>7</sup> See Beal; Ezell *Social Authorship*; Havens; Justice; Kathryn R. King; Rachael Scarborough King; Love; Marotti; Zwicker.

<sup>8</sup> Mermin 347; Hinnant 19; Ezell, "Reading Pseudonyms" and "'By a Lady'"; Rainbolt.

<sup>9</sup> On the sequence of these poems, see CEAFI: 68–69; CEAFI represents all works in Finch's second manuscript book in the order of their appearance there.

<sup>10</sup> Finch also participated in several inter-authored replies: her best-known exchange is that with Alexander Pope (Pope's "To the Right Honble: Ann Countess of Winchilsea Occasion'd by Four Verses in the *Rape of the Lock*" and Finch's "To Mr Pope in Answer to a Coppy of Verses, Occasion'd by a Little Dispute, upon Four Lines in the *Rape of the Lock*"). Ideally, teaching Finch's reply to Pope's poem would involve assigning part or all of *The Rape of the Lock* (the five-canto version). These two poems are, however, only part of this exchange. Pope's poem seems to respond to Finch's initial objection (which has not survived) to his lines (probably lines 59–62 from the five-canto version). Pope responds to Finch's initial objection by joining condescension with flattery, which Finch counters in her reply by joining condescension with

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violent imagery. The exchange did not end there: when Pope printed Finch's reply to him, he "replied" by replacing and removing passages that offended him (*CEAF2*: 379–384).

<sup>11</sup> Although this assignment should be effective at the undergraduate level, I have only taught it at the graduate level: since the pandemic, student attendance (despite attendance policies) has been very uneven. If too many students are absent when scheduled to hand off the coterie manuscript, then the arrangement falls apart. My university's graduate courses typically enroll with no more than fourteen students, an ideal number for transmission among the class-as-coterie in a sixteen-week semester. If assigning the Coterie Manuscript to an undergraduate class, I would divide that class into several coteries (roughly ten members each) and would use the same poem for all coteries.

<sup>12</sup> For studies that counter assumptions about the relative unity of coteries, see, for example, Ezell, "Late Seventeenth-Century Women Poets"; Gerrard; and Scott-Warren.

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