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## **The Conflict Between Day and Night in Anne Finch’s “A Nocturnal Reverie”: An Eco-critical Study**

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### **Abstract :**

In this research the poem of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, “A Nocturnal Reverie” will be analyzed from an ecological perspective. Ann Finch’s contribution to understanding nature will be examined within ecocritical viewpoint and how her vision of nature is reflected in the poem. This study attempts to prove that Anne Finch was highly aware of the importance of nature in humans’ life and believed that humans are responsible for both nature and humans' welfare. With her poem Anne Finch tried to convince man that nature is a beautiful and living community that should be respected in order to reach inner harmony and to make the world a better, freer and kinder place. In the poem Finch represents nature as a united society, every part and aspect of which has its feelings, wishes and goals. Finch finds in natural society freedom and equality, but this is possible only at night. The day is the time of the “tyrant-man”, that belongs to a superior world and man suppresses the call of nature in himself. Still the tyranny of human cannot suppress nature completely because of the following reasons: a) man is not an authority, b) man feels the need in nature, and thus nature is superior to him.

**Keywords:** Day and Night, Conflict, Human Tyranny, Ecocriticism, Superior World.

### **Introduction**

Ecocriticism is an expanding scientific direction that outgrew the post-structural and the postmodern criticism and has gradually transformed into a multifaceted and interdisciplinary study (Seema, 2017). Ecocriticism can be considered both as a way to find solutions for some modern ecological problems and as a step for understanding the origins of modern attitude toward nature. Examination and analysis of literature from ecocritical viewpoint helps to understand the causes of man's destructive attitude towards nature and to prevent or correct it at the baseline.

Herewith ecocriticism is an important movement as it tends to bring out the part which nature plays – either in writings or in general purview. Taking into consideration that literature is a powerful tool for the formation of human consciousness and taking into account the ecological problems of modern world, ecocriticism as an interdisciplinary study is extremely important and relevant.

A significant example of ecocritical literature is a poem “A Nocturnal Reverie” of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea (1661 – 1720). The author is in general often perceived as a natural writer, as nature is one of the most frequent images of the Finch's writings. What is more important about Finch's poems is that nature is not only an aesthetic setting for the events, but an independent character with its own will and ways.

Thus, the aim of this research is to point out the ecological implications of the poem and to specify the ecological message that is formulated by the author. The achievement of this goal is organised in two stages: 1) Line by line analysis of the poem and assessment of natural images on their own; 2) systematisation of the first-stage results and systematic approach to nature as a single system, represented by the author.

The structure of the research includes several elements: an abstract, where the main points of the research are shortly delineated; an introduction, where the significance, goals and stages of the research are presented; the main part, where a short biography of Anne Finch and a short description of her writings are presented in addition to the analysis of the poem “A Nocturnal Reverie”; conclusion, where the main results of the study are summarized; and the list of references, where all the works cited are arranged.

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**The Conflict between the Inferior and the Superior in “A Nocturnal Reverie”**

On the whole, Finch's poems cover a wide variety of genres and subject matter. In addition to religious verse and love lyrics, she wrote fables, nature poems, verse plays, odes, songs, pastorals, and occasional poems to friends and relatives (McGovern, 2018). Such a wide variety of forms is united by 2 main topics of Finch's poetry. As C. Pickard states on the basis of literary review, Finch is usually presented in one of two distinct ways – either as a nature poet or as a poet preoccupied with issues of gender (Pickard, 2006, p. 28). Definitely, women play a prominent role in her poetry, from satirical poems that deal with gender issues and the inequality of women in contemporary society, to numerous poems that celebrate women's intelligence and resourcefulness (McGovern, 2018).

But within the research the main focus will be on the “nature-oriented” part of Finch's literary career. H. Laudien believes that it is possible to read Finch as a pastoral poet. The pastoral appears throughout the entirety of her career, and it dominates her poetic oeuvre. Through close textual analyses of several of her pastoral poems, Laudien illustrates that Finch's poetry requires the kind of detailed scrutiny that has been given to the pastorals of her contemporaries, by affirming the importance of her contributions to the genre. Finch's pastorals offer a powerful revision of the pastoral tradition. She flirts with “romantic” ideals with an emphasis on feelings and genuine imagination while maintaining an Augustan sense of decorum and precision. She writes in the usual Augustan verse forms, particularly heroic couplets, and yet her pastorals are characterized by a personal sincerity that is unparalleled by those of her contemporaries (Laudien, 2004, p. 76).

One of such works is Finch's the most famous poem “A Nocturnal Reverie” that got a lot of attention from critics (Poetry Foundation, 2018). The poem appeared as the concluding poem in Finch's first and only contemporary collection of published verse. It is one of Finch's most popular poems from then until now, in part because it spans so smoothly the trajectory from the Cavalier to the Romantic tradition in English poetry (Quinsey, p. 64). As C. R. Miller – one of the first researchers of Finch's poetry – admits that her choice of the word “reverie” has important bearing on the volitional nature of

the poem. By calling her poem a “reverie”, Finch mediates between wide-awake deliberateness and extravagant sensory drift. The word implies a stream of impressions, but Finch organizes them with a lucid syntax of wakeful observation (Miller, 2005, p. 614).

The entire poem consists of one strikingly long, sinuous, and flexible sentence punctuated by a repetition of the opening phrase’s refrain – ‘In such a Night’ – an echo of the elopement scene in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* (Ballaster, 2010). The poem is structured substantively rather than lineally, piling up adverbial and adjectival phrases and clauses describing ‘such a night,’ gradually unfolding sensory experience, to culminate in a suggestion of experience beyond the senses and beyond language, in a union of soul and body, seer and things seen (Quinsey, p. 71). The text ultimately addresses the issue of how the individual who seeks to withdraw from a corrupt world – a world such as that presented in the fables and the other political texts in *Miscellany Poems* – functions in her retreat. In effect, the work seeks to imagine an ideal society that operates as both an alternative to and a critique of Finch’s own world (Pickard, 2006, p. 78).

Though, some authors find political and social implications in the poem (for example, Young, 2015), the researchers believe that the poem itself was created as a critique of the world of men’s (=humans’) tyranny of nature. The author from the very first line glorifies the beauty and sensitivity of a calm night when nature is alive and opposes it to the cruelty of the day time when humans are awake.

Before considering this opposition more closely, it is necessary to notice that this motive is closely connected with ideas of men’s (=male humans’) tyranny that makes the poem an excellent example of eco-feminism. Ecofeminists traditionally relate women to the inferior world as the poem declares “the daytime domination of ‘tyrant Man’ over both women and animals” (Quinsey, 2007). But H. Laudien admits that Finch roots herself in the shade which liberates her from the masculine world that she associates with the poetry of men. She is free to blur the systematic distinctions that Enlightenment writers sought; situations are not black and white for Finch, but grey in this fluid space of the shade (Laudien, 2004, p. 83). C. Pickard also underlines that “her [Finch’s] passive position in relation to both Providence and the external world in the poems considered above is

that it appears to have little to do with her gender” (Pickard, 2006, p. 85). The reference to “Tyrant-Man” in “A Nocturnal Reverie” works as an expression of the oppression of both women to men and animals to humankind.

'Tyrant Man' had better be understood in a wide sense as both men and women – a human, because, it is clear that within this poem such a meaning is more appropriate. This idea may be supported by the following line: “The free soul ... finding ... Joys in th' inferior world, and thinks it like her own” (Finch, 2018), where the author underlines apartness of the speaker's soul from this inferior world. Opposing inferior and superior worlds the author speaks about the soul that does not have gender. Thus, it is reasonable to consider the man as a human being rather than a male. The speaker's soul is positioned as a part of superior world, though it enjoys being in the inferior one.

One more important thing that should be regarded in the first place is the opposition of two worlds, created by Finch: inferior (“Joys in th' inferior world” (Finch, 2018)) of animals, and superior world of men (“whilst tyrant man does sleep” (Finch, 2018)).

Talking about the inferior and superior worlds is necessary to notice that there are two possible concepts of it, based on the understanding of “the free soul” (Finch, 2018). If we would consider “the free soul” as a simple representation of the human-being (both physical and psychological), then the hierarchy of the worlds supposes division on humans as superior world and nature (wind, tree, river, moon, grass, wood bind, cowslip, glow-worms, horse, sheep, kine, etc.) as inferior world. Thus, the human is represented as a tyrant that cruelly suppresses nature's life. This cruelty is expressed by the opposition of the day (when man is awake) and night time (when man is asleep) that will be discussed a little below.

To consider “the free soul” directly – as a non-material substance, is to see the other hierarchy. In this case, the inferior world will be represented by material objects – animals, plants, humans, and the superior world will consist of non-material ones, such as, soul. Here, a human is divided into physical and psychological components that belong to different worlds. This division supposes including human's physical part in the world of nature, what is very important for ecocriticism, as bringing together humans and nature is one of the

key ideas of this study. The researchers believe that in the poem Finch supported the second approach. This thought is instilled by the authors' usage of words "spirit", "musings" several lines above, especially the line "Something, too high for syllables to speak" (Finch, 2018), that makes the reader think of non-material and inner substances. Such an approach suggests that the conflict of day and night is not a conflict between nature and human, as it exists inside the human. The humans' material part dominates over natural one (as it "thinks it like her own" (Finch, 2018)), and this begets the state of unhappiness and sorrow, loneliness and regret. Only being a part of the natural world can make the spirit feel "a sedate content", "urge the mind to seek / Something, too high for syllables to speak" (Finch, 2018).

Within the universe of the poem, the researchers may proceed with the analysis of the natural world within the poem. Here one can admit the close connection of the nature representation with modern Gaia Theory. The theory describes the earth as analogous to a giant self-regulating organism instead of being a set of discreet Newtonian mechanisms (Somers, 2011, p. 27–28). It is supposed by theorists that the world and its organisms operate through co-regulation and relation, and the readers can vividly see such a cooperation in "A Nocturnal Reverie", what is admitted not only by the researchers of this study, but also by other researchers. For example, M. Reynolds points out that Finch introduces a new concept of nature as "a vital and separate entity" (Reynolds, 1974, p. cxxxix).

Anne Finch, as an aristocratic, should logically have very few complaints, but she knew something big was missing from her life. She was in search of "the lost element" or "the lost chord" in her poetic lyre. She found it in 1) reveries dreams 2) Nature 3) at night (Somers, 2011).

Thus, Nature in the poem is represented through the scenes of night life of different creatures – plants and animals – that creates the image of living peaceful community: the tree is famed for the owl's delight, the river is overhung with green, the grass makes cool banks to rest invite, the glow-worms show trivial beauties – altogether "their shortlived jubilee the creatures keep" (Finch, 2018). Here the researchers underline that the author intentionally personifies all the creatures: a wind is not a natural phenomenon, but a Zephyr that "fans

his wings” (Finch, 2018), a nightingale is not a bird, but a Philomel that “still waking, sings” (Finch, 2018). Nature is alive and conscious: the owl directs the visitor where to go, the grass intentionally stands up straight, the glow-worms enjoy showing off their light, the aromas choose when they will float through the air, the night sky and the hills have faces, and the portrayal of the entire scene as one in which all of nature celebrates together (Encyclopedia, 2018). Ultimately, Finch's use of personification intensifies the theme of nature as a living community. Nature exists, not as a lifeless material, but a living creature. Hence, it lives and feels; it has its goals and wishes. The message behind this approach is that nature is alive and has much more to offer than mere aesthetic value. From the point of view of axiology, nature creatures are represented in the poem not as a system of characters, but as an integral part of the natural world; as manifestations of nature's unity and independence.

One more feature that makes to perceive nature more alive is its fluidity and movement. H. Laudien admits that fluidity is a common feature of Finch's pastoral (Laudien, 2004, p. 92). It may also be seen as similar to the example of “A Nocturnal Reverie”, where “waving moon”, “falling waters” is observed and “the woodbind springs”, “air uninterrupted stray” (Finch, 2018). The fluidity of Finch's pastoral landscape works to her advantage as it allows freedom and space to articulate a host of desires and progressive ideas. She is unconfined to and unlimited by the space, but rather encouraged to express herself in an environment that moves and winds about. For example, a fluid pastoral space allows for more authorial freedom and distance, and subsequently less authorial responsibility and accountability (Laudien, 2004, p. 92).

Finch's world (its natural part) is characterized by movement, thus making it difficult to locate. Nature is in motion, drawing the “thinly veil”. Even the moonlight is associated with the motion of the “passing clouds” and the “waving moon and trembling leaves are seen” (Jung, 2003, p. 154).

Humans in this system are represented by the only observer and are passive and have zero effect on nature. S. Jung describes this passivity with the following image. The owl has a voice and uses it to guide the wanderer. The tension between the “wand'rer” depending on guidance and the guiding owl is determined in favour of the owl, for

the owl assumes an active character, defined in terms of active verbs whereas anything connected with human existence is passive and silent. So, although the wanderer is associated with motion, yet he has to rely on the active bird whose voice rather than its appearance has to guide him through the night darkness. Visibility is given up completely in favour of sound and aural perception, and the wanderer who would be assertive and self-confident at daytime, has lost his sense of orientation and will have to follow the “invisible” voice (Jung, 2003, p. 154). Thus, the main poetic implication is that when man is awake and moving through the world, nature's full glory is suppressed. It also implies that man really has no idea how alive nature is when he is out of the way.

Finch presents humans as tyrants that do suppress life of all the creatures, including plants and animals. This idea is rendered, as it was already mentioned, by the opposition of the day's and night's time. Describing the night's time Finch uses the lexis that render the feeling of peace, comfort and serenity: “cowslip sheltered” (Finch, 2018), “softest shadows” (Finch, 2018), “loosed horse” (Finch, 2018), “nibbling ship” (Finch, 2018), “unmolested kine” (Finch, 2018), “sedate content” (Finch, 2018), etc. Also the author shows that without humans' oppression animals have time to do what they want or need freely: “grass now bears itself upright” (Finch, 2018), “Shew trivial beauties, watch their hour to shine” (Finch, 2018), “sheep at large pursue their food” (Finch, 2018), “kine rechew the cud” (Finch, 2018), etc. The author directly names a man – tyrant, because of which all the living creatures do not live, but endure the day. The freedom of natural world consists solely in the fact that no men are near.

It is quite interesting, that the day is presented by the author in a very hostile way: it brakes the dusky, its fierce light disturbs creatures, it arms elements of rage, and what is more important is that it wakes up the tyrant man. But the day is a bad time not only for nature creatures, but also for humans themselves (their psychological parts) – “let me abroad remain, / Till morning breaks, and all's confused again; / Our cares, our toils, our clamors are renewed, / Or pleasures, seldom reached, again pursued” (Finch, 2018). With the appearance of light in the break of day, images of order and peace are changed to images of chaos. It is because of day they feel discord and confusion,



though the other creatures in the poem are presented quite collaborative and reasonable. Finch uses the figures of speech that humanize the natural elements but she endues them with other characters and qualities. The wind is not merely a lucky turn of the weather, but an act by the Greek god of the west wind himself. The owl sounds in the night for the purpose of leading the speaker to the right place. Clouds do not randomly float across the sky but act to hide and reveal the mysterious night sky. Grass stands tall of its own accord. The cowslip is sleepy, and the foxglove goes pale. Glow-worms seize the right moment to show off their light, knowing that they can only do so for a limited time. Odours intentionally wait until evening to come out, when the air is more suitable. An edifice is both venerable and resting, and hills have expressions hidden by the night (Encyclopedia, 2018). Thus, it can be seen that all the creatures live in peace with each other and they fulfill their own wishes and needs, until “confused” humans do spoil everything in the day.

In the same way S. Jung admits, that the voice of Nature cannot be heard within humans’ day time, it may only be perceived in a non-human context, that is a context not corrupted by human vice and civilization and resembles a pre-lapsarian Arcadian state of existence. The voice of nature, unlike the voice of man, is able to “free [the] soul to a compos’dness charmed, / Finding the elements of rage disarmed” (Finch, 2018). The “fierce light” of human (urban) society is destructive to the voice of nature that essentially depends on twilight to have sufficient intensity and strength to be discerned. This “fierce light” is essential to ordinary human existence because man is afraid of the dark, for there he will lose his identity and individuality. In that respect, night is a taboo that man must not describe in human terms since his description would culminate in an acknowledgement of human helplessness and lack of authority at night (Jung, 2003, p. 156-157)

Though humans are “superior” and “tyrannical”, there is no authority in the poem: “no goddess Melancholy or divine or masculine presence to whom she is praying” (Miller, 2005). Simultaneously, the human-speaker strives for nature that allows to feel free and happy. In this way nature is superior to humans, and it is placed upon them in the world’s hierarchy. So the human is represented as a part of nature,

not its proprietor. Thus, human dominant position over nature is an illusion that someday will be destroyed.

Man in the poem fails to enjoy the imaginary domination. The poem is a more melancholy work on the whole. Its atmosphere is characterised by gloom and, ominously, it features the song of the “lonely philomel”. The poem is dominated by a sense of unease. This tone is created not simply through the evocation of melancholy but also through the fact that, although the external world is excluded from the retreat, both the speaker and the reader are aware that this exclusion will be broken with the return of the day (Pickard, 2006, p. 83). Here, Finch describes nature as a remedy solitude to cure and grief. She who was once oppressed by anguish now finds safety and freedom within the “inferior world”. She discovers the security needed to experience absolute freedom in the company of animals and plants within this pastoral space. Finch engages the country house as a personal retreat from, or bastion against, a hostile human environment. They also explore the country estate as a source of support, practical and emotional (Young, 2015, P. 161)

Having summarized the above-mentioned, Nature can be considered as an example for humans and they should learn from it to live calm and harmonious, what can be read in the following line: “from some tree, famed for the owl’s delight, / She, hollowing clear, directs the wand’rer right” (Finch, 2018). Here the owl is presented as a guide for the human. One more example is a scene with glow-worms, interpreted by S. Jung. The researcher states that the term “twilight” alludes to the position the evening assumes between night and day. The scene is further enlivened by the “glow-worms” which highlight several spots of the scene. Although these glow-worms’ light is not very strong, it can nevertheless focus on “trivial beauties” man would pass by at daytime without taking notice. As such, the glow-worms possess a voice in that they may project their light onto those objects that are commonly ignored and considered “trivial” (Jung, 2003, p. 155)

Thus, though humans hold the power over nature, they display a large lack of reason. It also lacks all the peace and sensitivity of the natural setting the speaker enjoys at night. Moreover, the human strives for these feelings (“Joys in th’ inferior world” (Finch, 2018)), for unity with nature, human feels need in his natural origin. Contact

with nature and life in harmony with it is represented as a value, basic need, directly connected with human life. Namely nature gives humans the feeling of true freedom and renders the value of world's contemplation.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, and in her search for the lost chord, the lost element of tranquility, Finch finds the answer in Nature at night. Finch was a strong woman that received brilliant education alongside support from her nearest surroundings which helped her to become a great poet. In her works she reflected the problems of her epoch, as well as the perennial problems of humans as social and natural creatures. The topic of nature has become an integral part of her writings, especially with the example of "A Nocturnal Reverie".

Nature in that poem of Finch is neither a mere setting for the events nor a contrast for the world of humans. Nature is an infinite number of animals and plants, gusts, gales, breezes and rivers that form a unified system which functions harmoniously. Its every element is vibrant with life and has its own will and wishes, its every element is active and dynamic. But with the end of the night this unique system is suppressed by humans that awaken by the daylight. Humans' activities prevent the natural world from living and force them wait until humans are again asleep. The reason for such a contrast is the belonging of the humans to both inferior and superior worlds, that represent both material and non-material worlds. The nature also belongs to both of these worlds, but both its parts are balanced and harmonized. In humans the material part dominates, that is why they are unable to feel the beauty of nature, to understand the importance of life and be happy and free. Moreover, humans believe that the inferior world – non-material one – belongs to them, yet this is an illusion as humans are unable to control their human nature let alone nature itself. Anne Finch demonstrates that humans need to listen to nature and to learn from it, as it would help them to balance the "inferior" and the "superior" worlds inside.

Thus, the reader can clearly see that aesthetic and axiological components of nature description in the poem instill in people the love of nature as to ir retrievable value and understanding that Nature is the most beautiful and important part of human life.

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الصراع ما بين النهار والليل في قصيدة الشاعرة آن فينتش، الموسومة  
"ذكرى ليلية"

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ملخص

في هذا البحث، يتم تحليل قصيدة الشاعرة آن فينتش، كونتيسة ومنتشيلسي، الموسومة "ذكرى حقيقية" من منظار ايكولوجي. كما يسلط البحث الضوء على إسهام الشاعرة آن فينتش في فهم الطبيعة ضمن سياق المنظار الايكولوجي وكيف انعكست رؤيتها للطبيعة في القصيدة المذكورة. تسعى الدراسة الى اثبات أن الشاعرة آن فينتش مدركة جدا لأهمية الطبيعة في حياة الانسان تعتقد أن البشر مسؤولون عن سلامة ورفاه الطبيعة والانسان على السواء. حاولت الشاعرة آن فينتش في قصيدتها المذكورة أن تقنع الانسان أن الطبيعة جميلة وهي مجتمع حي يجب احترامه من أجل الوصول الى الانسجام الداخلي وجعل العالم مكانا أفضل، وأكثر حرية ورحمة. وتجد أن فننتش الحرة والمساواة في المجتمع الطبيعي، ولكن هذا لا يتاح إلا في الليل. فالنهار هو "وقت الانسان – المستبد" الذي ينتمي الى عالم متفوق يكبح نداء الطبيعة في داخله. لكن استبداد البشر لا يمكنه أن يقمع الطبيعة بشكل تام، وذلك للأسباب التالية: (١) الانسان ليس سلطة، (٢) الانسان يشعر بالحاجة للطبيعة، بمعنى أن الطبيعة أسمى منه.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الليل والنهار، الصراع، الطغيان البشري، آن فينتش، النقد البيئي، العالم المتفوق.