

**A STUDY IN CONTRASTS: MARY COLLIER AND MARY LEAPOR'S DIVERSE
CONTRIBUTIONS TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH LABORING-CLASS
WOMEN'S POETRY**

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department

of English

University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Kathy G. Fellers

August, 2013

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ABSTRACT

Mary Collier and Mary Leapor (two of the first laboring-class female authors) share many characteristics, least of which is their desire to be writers and to depict and comment on gender and class dynamics more accurately than had been done before. This artistic focus on “the gap between the ideal and the real” (Messenger 172-174) is partly rooted in the mode of satire where writers create irony by contrasting more realistic images or situations with idealized ones (often implicitly). Part of satire’s purpose is amusement, but equally important is its social critique. Hence, Collier and Leapor are very much writers of their age, yet while they both reflect the writing impulses of the eighteenth-century, they draw from a mixture of different writing traditions. Moreover, their differing economic, creative, and educational circumstances make for significant differences in their writing, despite their common laboring-class backgrounds. Resultantly, the differences in their work are considerably more pronounced than most discussions of it lead us to believe.

These life circumstances include Collier’s limited access to reading materials and critical guidance versus Leapor’s extensive access to culturally dominant works and active mentorship. In addition, Collier was able to devote considerably less time to writing as she supported herself as a washerwoman. In contrast, Leapor worked several years as a kitchen-maid and then returned to run her father’s household and assist him in his nursery business (he had been a gardener). They also chose different poetic models: Stephen Duck for Collier and Alexander Pope for Leapor.

As result their aesthetic choices are considerably different. These include Collier’s use of the georgic versus Leapor’s extensive deployment of the pastoral; Collier’s limited

ABSTRACT (contd.)

experimentation with poetic forms versus Leapor's experimentation with mixing poetic forms and techniques; as well as Leapor's revision of the country-house poem and the mock-epic. These textual and aesthetic differences correlate with two different models of the laboring-class female writer, established by authors writing within ten years of each other. Collier and Leapor's life circumstances and aesthetic choices also force scholars to reconsider how we evaluate the significance of historically marginalized authors in literary history.

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For my Father, Memoria in Aeterna

I. Introduction

When Roger Lonsdale was chosen as the editor of *Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse* in 1984 he drew a wide net, and instead of including solely works by the most canonical writers (like Pope, Swift, Finch, and Thomson), he introduced readers to works by minor poets, female poets, and many others whom no one had read since the eighteenth century. In doing so, Lonsdale provided a picture of the eighteenth-century where people wrote poetry about everything and anything, not just politics or social commentary. He demonstrated that poetry was not just a highbrow activity, but one shared by almost all members of the literate population in eighteenth-century Britain. He also demonstrated that the rise of the novel did not mean that poetry ceased to be written. Further, his anthology helped scholars rethink the guiding principles used when studying the poetry of this time period. Ever since Lonsdale's anthology was published, when studies of eighteenth-century British poetry now appear, their authors consider more variables, provide more social, historical, and philosophical contexts, and are less likely to generalize about the verse across the period. Instead, they respect the overall mosaic of eighteenth-century British verse.

For that is what eighteenth-century British poetry is – a mosaic. There is an overall picture, but when we look closely we see individual tiles that make up the whole. Each tile has its own provenance and contribution to the picture. We also see clusters of color(s) that make up specific parts of the overall picture. The overall picture consists of poets describing and analyzing the world around them and how people, events and ideas in the world relate to each other. The clusters reflect the mixture of different writing traditions, and when we look closer still at them, we see individual tiles next to each other that are similar but slightly different. In the overall picture, these differences allow gradual shifts in color and pattern. In poetry, these

differences reflect the poet's socio-economic background, education, gender, race, and sexuality, for example. They also represent the poet's contribution to the writing tradition(s) and genre. Mary Collier and Mary Leapor are two tiles that lie next to each other in this mosaic of British poetry.

Mary Collier and Mary Leapor, two of the first British laboring-class female authors, share many characteristics, not the least of which is their desire to become writers and to depict and comment on gender and class dynamics more accurately than had been done before. This artistic focus on "the gap between the ideal and the real" (Messenger 172-174) is rooted in part in the mode of satire where writers create irony by contrasting more realistic images or situations with idealized ones. Part of the point of satire is amusement and entertainment, but an equally important part is to critique practices and concepts the writer finds problematic—a didactic purpose. Thus, Collier and Leapor are very much writers of their age, and while they both reflect the writing impulses of the eighteenth-century, they draw from a mixture of different writing traditions to achieve this goal. Moreover, their differing economic, creative, and educational circumstances made for significant differences between their writing, despite their common laboring-class backgrounds. As a result, the differences in their work are considerably more pronounced than most discussions of it lead us to believe. These differences include Collier's use of the georgic, in contrast with Leapor's extensive deployment of the pastoral; Collier's limited experimentation with forms versus Leapor's experimentation with mixing forms and techniques; and Leapor's revision of the country-house poem and the mock-epic. These textual and aesthetic differences correlate with two different models of the laboring-class female writer, established by authors writing around the same time.

These differences have significant implications for how literary scholars evaluate and categorize the work of historically marginalized authors. In addition to concerns about whether to maintain a canon at all, and who to include in it if we do, comes the question of how do we make these decisions, what criteria do we use. Also do we retain a kind of hierarchy wherein more value is placed on traditionally valued aesthetics, or cultural and sociological values are privileged? Can we combine both approaches? Collier and Leapor are key to answering these questions because their differences reflect the difficulty of these choices.

My attempt in this project is to balance context and form, to examine the aesthetic choices these authors make in their poetry based on their models of authorship, while at the same time considering the impact their social origins and other circumstances have had on their aesthetic choices. I want to provide a model of analysis that combines the historical context so necessary for understanding earlier writing with a return to the examination of these earlier writers' aesthetics.

In the rest of this introduction, I provide an overview of the major scholarship that has discussed Collier and Leapor, while outlining some characteristics of the laboring-class and female writing traditions. In addition, I will discuss a poetic form used by both authors, and concepts significant to understanding these authors. I will also discuss in more detail the implications of studying their work. At the end of the introduction, I will lay out a brief description of each chapter in the study.

1. Major Scholarship on Eighteenth-Century Laboring-Class Writers

While Donna Landry justifiably receives credit for being one of the first literary critics to write a book-length study on eighteenth century laboring-class writers, we also need to identify the work of scholars that her pioneering work drew on, and a few scholars who have since

written about a laboring-class writing tradition in the eighteenth century. This section will sketch out some of Landry's sources and competing accounts, before I turn to Landry's own readings in the next section.

Robert Southey is probably the first literary critic to write about laboring class writers of the eighteenth century, albeit briefly, in an introduction to laboring-class poet John Jones' work which he sponsored in 1831. The introduction is titled "The Lives and Works of the Uneducated Poets" and it gives biographical as well as a small amount of literary criticism on each poet. Of all the poets discussed, Ann Yearsley is the only female poet Southey examines. Southey justifies his publication of Jones' poetry for the pleasure of "its natural images and the natural feeling in [its] poor verses" (8). He concedes that the popularity of such poetry is past, but says he wants other readers to have the opportunity to enjoy the "innocent" pleasure apparent in Jones' poetry about nature and natural objects, as well as Jones' satisfaction with the lot dealt to him. Such poetry is uplifting to readers and they will also be interested in "at seeing how much intellectual enjoyment had been attained in humble life, and in very unfavourable circumstances," a life tempered not exacerbated by intellectual development. Southey concludes his thought that now that humanity had reached the "Age of Reason" that "Mr. Jones would in all likelihood be the last versifier of his class" (8, 11-12).

Why Southey thinks Jones is the last laboring-class versifier (who identified himself as such) may very well be dependent on his belief in a breaking down of barriers for writers of any class, but instead we may find the reason to be Southey's belief that laboring-class poetry was waning in popularity; the fad was past but it was an important part of literary history that we should note and examine for the record, which Southey proceeds to do. At the end of his introduction Southey argues that even if the poetry of laboring-class writers is bad or inferior to

conventional aesthetic standards of poetry, yet “bad poetry” is better than “bad” criticism, which seems to want to diminish the poet’s work to increase the critic’s reputation. Also Southey argues that if the poetry is helpful in making a laboring-class poets life a bit easier financially and philosophically, then the poetry only seems to exist for the good and that is reason enough for its existence (164-166). Southey’s response to Jones’ work is typical of earlier reception to the work of laboring-class poets. However, unlike earlier commentary, he criticizes the position of authority that critics place themselves in when evaluating the work of laboring-class authors. He cannot hope to avoid being in this position himself however, like any other literary critic. The most literary critics can hope to do is to acknowledge our privileged positions, and to be honest about how our subjectivity influences how and why we examine the work of any author.

After Southey, there is virtually no comment on this writing until Rayner Unwin’s *The Rural Muse: Studies in the Peasant Poetry of England*, published in 1954. In contrast to Southey’s belief in it as a fad, Unwin argues that a laboring-class writing tradition first develops in the eighteenth century. Unwin discusses the foundations of this tradition focusing on factors such as increased access to education, better communication networks, and better roads. In addition, Unwin emphasizes the influence of rural adulation seen in Thompson’s *Seasons* and *McPherson’s Ossian* resulting in Arthur Young’s study of the English and Welsh countryside. He also points to the novelty of a laboring-class person writing poetry in the burgeoning literary marketplace. Unwin claims that later in the century the curiosity in the phenomenon is “replaced by” a “determination that no poetic merit should escape unnoticed,” thus linking the phenomenon to the Enlightenment tradition of a thirst for knowledge, and the development of the sentimental philosophy which encouraged natural genius and empathy for the less fortunate (31-35). Unwin also asserts that “artisans” as opposed to rural laborers, “never [were] recognized as

unconscious heir[s] of poetry. No bucolic tradition supported [them] and for the most part [their] attempts in verse were grudgingly received by the eighteenth-century public” (69). From the research I have done this last assertion seems to still be the case. If we understand Stephen Duck as the model of a rural laborer, which is based in turn on the natural imagery and representations of laborers in pastoral and georgic poetry, then it is not surprising that the texts that were most popular were written by those who seemed closely affiliated (or were represented as such) with the country. Certainly both of the authors in my study were laborers from rural areas (albeit working in mostly domestic capacities).

After Unwin, the next literary scholar to address the topic of laboring-class poetry is Raymond Williams in his *The Country and the City* (1973). While he does not discuss the poets as a group, he does address John Clare and his representations of the country. Further Williams’ study provides a framework for scholars examining the question of how country laborers and the country were represented and that representation’s connection to the city. Williams argues that the “country” as it was represented in pastorals, georgics, and other poems was idealized and inaccurate, and depictions of the country romanticize the past, creating representations that never existed. In fact he argues that the country was manufactured in the arts and in real life. Citing the work of John Barrell, Williams argues that in pictorial art the country was idealized as a landscape filled with open fields and forests, and sometimes seas of hay and grain, mostly before harvests began. If laborers were depicted they were beautiful, and not ragged in appearance or sunburned, and the work they did is not shown but implied (120). Drawing on his own upbringing in a rural part of Britain, Williams lets us know that in real life the country is filled with walls of various construction, that divide enclosed land and fields. Over the course of time,

forests and “rough” land decreased with deforestation and crop cultivation. The country was a “working” one, with laborers sweating and dirty from their work.

Most importantly, he argues for a “manufactured” division between the “wicked city” and the “innocent country.” For Williams, in actuality the city was an extension of the country’s needs in the form of providing a venue where properties (and profits) could be consolidated by marriage, hence the marriage market and “the season” were developed to facilitate these alliances. Also landowners needed to sell their product both domestically and internationally, and so were dependent on the “City” and its financial system to facilitate lending as well as the sale of their commodities. With Adam Smith’s “morality of improvement,” wherein improvement and capitalization are given social acceptance, landowners sought methods to increase yields, as they saw prices falling for their product. Yet, though the city was clearly important to the maintenance of the country, this linkage needed to be obscured, so that the effects of capitalization and profit would not be linked to the country. Thus the emphasis on improvement focused not only on more fields for grain, some of them formerly communal, but also the beautification of estates with “artificial landscapes.” So the line was blurred between profit and country, and country becomes associated with the ideal, with art, and with beauty. Hence, for Williams the reason that pastorals depict idealizations of the country is so that people forget the actual toll that the work made on the country itself and country laborers (53-54, 79, 101-103, 115, 120). Not surprisingly, he devotes several pages in the middle of the study to a discussion of John Clare, who wrote in the 1820s, but who was very concerned with the effects of enclosure and used his laboring-class status to critique the world around him. Clare has since become a canonical figure, and Donna Landry subsequently attempts to build a case for the beginnings of a

female laboring-class writing tradition in the eighteenth century, utilizing in part, Williams' theoretical framework.

By 1985 and beyond the scholarship concerning labor and class and their relationship to literature increased and includes *The Literature of Labour*, by Gustav Klaus. Klaus argues for a tradition of literature written by laborers, and in one chapter discusses the development of "plebian" poetry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. His study excludes Scottish and Irish laboring class poets. His arguments concerning eighteenth century laborers focus on two "waves" of poets, themes, poetic forms, and critical reception. He argues for a first wave occurring in the 1730s and a second wave in the latter quarter of the century (3, 6, 10). The first wave includes Duck and the poetry focusing on the "portrayal of work and the proclamation of a literature with laws of its own" (11). He contends that in both periods, laboring-class poetry really was not different in composition and technique from the poetry of their social betters, but was different thematically (19). He also stresses the ability of the second wave to publish more than a volume or two of poetry, and he attributes this phenomenon to the artists having "a greater confidence in their artistic abilities." (6). Like Unwin, Klaus discusses several factors in the ability for these authors to publish in the first place: increased access to education, polite interest in the common person, and Stephen Duck's royal patronage. While Unwin noted novelty as a factor, Klaus elaborates that polite readers were surprised that laboring-class people could not just write poetry, but could write coherently at all, indicating polite conceptions about the intelligence of the laboring classes. In addition, Klaus indicates the importance of a laboring-class poet's discovery by a local scholar, who would in turn use his or her connections to find the poet a patron or patrons (3, 6, 10, and 20). In 2001, William Christmas contributed to laboring-class writing studies with his *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in*

English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830. Christmas' study examines not just plebeian female poets, but also plebeian male poets, and he argues for a tradition of plebeian poetry that begins with Stephen Duck. For Christmas, Duck sets the model of the laboring poet, a model that evolves over the course of the eighteenth century, and includes the concepts of novelty and natural genius. Like Donna Landry, Christmas makes a Foucauldean and discursive argument, one which focuses on these poets' cultural awareness and resistance; he frames his discussion in terms of how they took conventional ideas such as natural genius and physical labor, and conventional poetic forms such as the pastoral and the georgic and "molded" or adapted "available poetic discourse to meet his[their] individual thematic ends" (83). He maintains that while retaining traditional poetic forms and images, and then conventional ideas, these poets commented, albeit often indirectly, on social and political norms, but that the traditional images and forms disguised poetic intention. Significantly, Christmas argues that these authors were attempting to redefine writing itself as work, and this theme pervades their poetry and their representations of themselves, as well as the reception to their writing (20-27, 49, 62).

Sarah Jordan's 2003 study *The Anxieties of Idleness* is the next contribution to this body of scholarship. Jordan argues that the "comfortable class" (38, 227 nt. 6) in the eighteenth-century were obsessed with the idea that idleness would damage Britain socially, morally, and economically, especially on the part of the laboring classes. In her second chapter, using contemporary tracts, letters, and literature from the time, Jordan articulates that the laboring classes were always expected to remain occupied. More specifically, they were always supposed to be laboring for their social and economic betters in a physical capacity. Even if laborers were tending a small garden of their own in order to help feed their families that would have been considered idle, because the work did not benefit their betters, only themselves (39-40).

Additionally, the upper orders believed in paying a subservience wage for the grueling, physical, and dangerous work laborers did on the premise that paying them more would lead them to become idle, and “to waste money on drink and inappropriate luxuries” (45). Jordan deduces that the comfortable class was also concerned that congregating in alehouses and other public places might lead laborers to discussions of their resentment and possible plans for action, thus these activities were linked to idleness and discouraged (49).

Illogically, despite the grueling, dirty and dangerous work they did, laborers were still expected to appear clean and to live in a clean habitation, and to dress in intact clothing, albeit darned. One assumes working time would have been taken to clean themselves, their clothing and living spaces and to darn the clothing. Jordan postulates that these contradictions indicate the comfortable class disliked the sight of the probable effects of such wages and working conditions (72-74). To make these effects seem less “threatening,” images of the laboring classes that were circulated often centered on their “useful parts,” in particular their hands (75). Laboring-class writers responded to these depictions, in particular Stephen Duck and Mary Collier (80, 81). Jordan concludes that Duck and Collier “fiercely insist both on seeing the laboring-class body whole and on seeing how economic exploitation was affecting the body” (83).

Finally, a study encompassing German and British laboring-class writers came out in 2008 which focuses on the “self-taught” characteristic of these poets. In *The Poetry of the Self-Taught: An Eighteenth-Century Phenomenon*, Julie Prandi, a German literature scholar, argues that these self-taught poets’ lack of “mainstream education” differentiates them as a group from “mainstream poets” (8), more so than their gender or class. Prandi attributes her approach to the work of John Goodridge, particularly his studies on John Clare as self-taught. Examining

German self-taught poets as well as Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, Robert Burns, Thomas Chatterton, and George Crabbe, Prandi also explains her rationale for including male self-taught poets in her study: it is partly based on her concern that anthologizing and creating studies solely around self-taught female poets will further ghettoize them. Prandi's work adds another dimension to laboring-class writer studies, that of emphasizing the ability to write and publish by inculcating poetic forms and ideas through unguided exposure to them rather than by any formal training.

To demonstrate this inculcation, Prandi examines how the self-taught manipulated conventional poetic forms as well as the thematic differences between the work of mainstream poets and self-taught poets. Like previous scholars, Prandi notes that much of the poetry written by laboring-class writers defends their ability to write poetry, and that laboring-class writers were attracted to the mock-pastoral, georgic, and the fable, these writers often subverting the latter two "poetic traditions" (39). Unlike mainstream poets, Prandi further asserts that the self-taught, due to their lack of classical education, used contemporary authors as poetic models. In contrast mainstream poets often focused on how classical sources inspired their own writing (39, 44).

Prandi relies heavily on the work of poets from the second half of the century (like Yearsley and Burns), integrates the work of German poets in her analysis (many of whom wrote in the second half of the century like Anna Louisa Karsch and Friedrich Muller), and utilizes German aesthetic commentary (like Herder) in her analysis. Not surprisingly, several of her conclusions have limited relevance to Collier and Leapor's work. For instance Prandi claims that "Self-taught poets do not labor those points ['presenting truth and imitating nature'], but are instead convinced that success in moving the audience emotionally is the best way to gauge the

quality of verse.” Prandi then demonstrates this point by referring to a poem by Ann Yearsley in which Yearsley passionately defends her ability to write as an uncultivated genius (89).

Uncultivated genius and passion are more characteristic of the sentimental aesthetics present in the second half of the eighteenth-century. Neither Leapor nor Collier would passionately defend their lack of education, which Prandi acknowledges (73). Moreover, Leapor and Collier tend to deploy satire and irony in their work, and Collier defends the necessity for women’s education in the poem “To an Exciseman.”

Significantly, Collier utilizes the verse epistle here, and in much of her poetry. The same can be said of Leapor, facts that Prandi highlights. In contrast to previous scholars who discuss laboring-class poetry, Prandi devotes significant space to laboring-class authors’ use of verse epistles. I will discuss her conclusions below in my section on the verse epistle.

Before moving on to Landry’s foundational reading of these writers, I want to extract the major characteristics attributed to the laboring-class tradition identified by these scholars. These are the poets’ laboring-class origin; their lack of formal education; their link to nature (often indicated by their use of the georgic or pastoral forms); their ironic use of conventional poetic forms and images; their extensive use of the verse epistle; their patrons’ and their own representations of themselves as examples of natural genius (a concept I will define below); their stated desire to continue physical work despite publication, and their reinforcement of the idea that writing was not work, but idleness. Finally, their ability to publish their work relied on appealing to either Enlightenment sympathy or commercial novelty.

2. Donna Landry and Scholarship Focusing on Laboring-Class Female Writers

Donna Landry published *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women’s Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* in 1990. Landry wrote her study at a time when the canon wars were being

vigorously fought.¹ She was the first scholar to dedicate a book length study to the work of eighteenth-century laboring-class women poets. However, Landry argues not just for their inclusion in the literary canon, she also is responding to arguments about a nineteenth-century working-class writing tradition that claims this tradition began with the poetry of John Clare and Robert Burns. She is not content with solely focusing on the work of eighteenth-century male laboring poets, however. She realizes their poetry is important to the beginnings of the nineteenth-century tradition, but she argues that now, i.e. 1990, is the right moment for a study focusing on the important contributions to this tradition by laboring women poets of the eighteenth-century. Landry positions herself within a feminist socialist framework that argues for the inclusion of those voices that have been traditionally excluded, in this case laboring women from literary studies of the eighteenth-century.

Landry utilizes theorists such as Foucault, Derrida, Irigaray, Spivak and Williams to ground her arguments. Utilizing Foucault, she articulates these laboring-class women poets' work forms a discourse, where they are responding to each other's ideas about gender and class. She uses Irigaray and Derrida's theories about language to argue for a "double-language" that allows resistance and seems non-resistant at the same time. Drawing from Irigaray and Spivak, she argues for a female laboring consciousness that is the "other," and that these poets resisted prevailing social norms about eighteenth-century women and laborers through their discourse. Raymond Williams' work on materialism is also important to her study as she examines the links between ideology and literature. In her study, Landry examines the work of the most well-known eighteenth-century plebian female poets: Mary Collier, Mary Leapor, and Ann Yearsley, as well

¹ For an excellent analysis of the canon debate and its repercussions, see John Guillory's *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*.

as the work of Elizabeth Hands, Elizabeth Bentley, Janet Little, and Phillis Wheatley, highlighting their contributions to the discourse.

Landry's work has opened up a forgotten cache of literature to other scholars, including Moira Ferguson, who published her *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class and Gender* in 1995. Ferguson focuses on the nexus of nation, class and gender and how class and gender, as well as the protestant majority played a vital part in the formation of the concept of Britishness in eighteenth-century Britain. Ferguson examines Mary Collier, Mary Scott, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little and their contributions to the connection between literature and identity. Ferguson became one of the first eighteenth-century literary scholars, along with Felicity Nussbaum to use nation as a lens in the 1990s. By focusing on class, gender and religious identity and how these poets used these perspectives to comment on nation, Ferguson has taken Landry's basic argument about resistance based on social identity, and pushed it to examine the formation of nation in marginalized groups.

The last study, which focuses on the writing of plebian female writers of the eighteenth century is Susanne Kord's from 2003. In *Women Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century England, Scotland, and Germany: Milkmaids on Parnassus*, Kord, a German literature scholar, compares the work of German female laboring poets with their English and Scottish sisters, in order to make cross-national assertions about the concept of natural genius and its development and evolution. She argues that a "bourgeois aesthetic" developed in eighteenth-century Britain and Germany in which art was seen as divorced from real life. She posits that the "bourgeois" developed the concept of genius initially to account for male middling order writers who wrote without a classical or formal education. She argues that this concept of genius evolved to natural genius to comprehend the increasing publication of writing by women and the lower orders, and

to account for their popularity. This concept in turn validated and reinforced bourgeois aesthetic theory by explaining the presence of “lower-class” female poets as an anomaly, so Kord’s emphasis is on the promotion, the reception, and the compromises the authors made in their work to fit the paradigm. Tailoring one’s writing to the existing paradigms of women’s and laboring people’s writing is of a characteristic of laboring-class poets as well as women writers of all social classes in the eighteenth-century, as we will see below.

3. The Female Writing Tradition in the Eighteenth Century

To establish the trajectory and major components of this tradition, I will focus on the indispensable scholarship of Susan Staves and Jane Spencer. Susan Staves in *A Literary History of Woman’s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* provides a thorough history of the British female writing tradition in the eighteenth-century, dividing it into seven segments. Staves argues that over the course of the century, a tradition of female writing develops beginning in the Restoration with women circulating manuscripts amongst themselves (and often among their male friends and relatives).

With the rise of print, women increasingly published their work, often anonymously, or it was published posthumously. Aphra Behn met mixed success as the first published female playwright. Over the course of her career as she went from being an exception or novelty to part of the literary scene, she experienced increasing resistance and backlash to her writing. Commentators felt free to negatively link her female sexual identity to her writing: her writing was public, and so was any morality related to her body (18-19, 61). By the reign of Queen Anne, under the banner of the “party of virtue,” women like Mary Astell, and Lady Mary Chudleigh published their writings and encouraged other women to become educated, to write and to publish in order to become good Protestant role models and to counter Libertine

philosophies. After Queen Anne's death, the marketplace and party politics appropriated much of the "cultural centrality" of the court, and satire "triumphed" over panegyric. Women writers took advantage of this shift to critique male authority, in particular Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (20). Thus women writers and receptors to their work established at least three intermingling threads foundational in the eighteenth-century women's writing tradition: virtue, transgressiveness, and critique of male authority.

Staves argues that by 1737, women had become accepted as part of the "literary family", but at a price (229). Increasingly, they needed to model themselves to domestic roles, as daughters, sisters, wives "to literary men" for instance, and to limit their literary attempts to "less prestigious literary forms" (conduct manuals, cookery books, and novels of sensibility) and to topics thought suitable for women to discuss, such as women, children and "matters domestic." At the same time, Staves argues that Anne Finch's "non-confrontational comic poems" and "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *vers de societe* may have helped a number of mid-century women poets to understand that polished and witty poetry in lighter veins might be perceived as suitably self-deprecating and not as a challenge to higher masculine ambitions" (230).

Leapor if not Collier, may very well be one of those women. In fact, Staves places servant authors within this fifth literary division, notably Mary Leapor, who due to their position in the household derive some "cultural authority" which translates to asserting value for "household labor" (21). This cultural authority comes from the influence of empiricism with "its corollary valuation of the different experiences of different people" in order to provide fuller "truths about the world" (258).

Significantly, Staves cites the work of Jane Spencer in her chapter on women accepted as part of the "literary family." Spencer focuses on female novelists in her seminal *The Rise of the*

Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen, but her major claim holds true in discussing poetry and other writing. Essentially, acceptance into the “literary family” comes with a cost. As long as women portrayed themselves as suitably feminine (dependent, virtuous, docile, maternal, genteel) and wrote about feminine topics (love and domesticity for instance in a sentimental family dynamic context), then they could publish and have careers as writers. In considering women of the laboring class however, there are more constraints on their ability to publish.

Spencer addresses this class ramification in “Imagining the Woman Poet: Creative Female Bodies.” The focus of the article is on the evolution of how female writers were perceived, from the initial negative perception that women due to their gender could not be poets, or at best bad poets or immoral (100) to “the fertile body bringing forth poems [Abraham Cowley’s celebration of Katherine Philips]” to “good women’s poetry came from a tamed, domesticated body” (117). Spencer notes that by the middle of the century, the “dominant positive image of the woman poet” was “the modest, retired, domestic writer.” She also records that negative perceptions still existed: “the woman poet as whore,...the slovenly woman poet, her dirty clothes and ink-stained fingers standing for the sexual contamination she supposedly introduced to the literary world.” Yet, that women were not “exceptions” but “could unite womanly virtue and a poetic identity was gaining ground” (115).

In discussing class, Spencer cites both Collier and Leapor as poets for whom “the image of the working woman poet is created by adapting the virtues generally ascribed to the good woman writer...”: modesty, retirement, and domesticity (115). Spencer identifies these themes in both the prefatory material and in Collier’s poetry itself, but notes that with the exception of modesty (in which Collier downplays her learning), that retirement and domesticity are part and parcel of her class, that she has little choice in her geographic location and work. Also while she

can claim some of the “‘matron’s’ authority that had developed in the middle-class context” her position as a lowly washer-woman and thus a novelty limits that authority (115-116). Spencer seems to argue that Leapor has a bit more influence or authority, in that she is the more talented of the two, she becomes a “lady” (albeit posthumously) (116-117), and I would argue has a higher social station to begin with than Collier.² Leapor becomes elevated by her merit to a lady in the 1755 *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (117), but as Donna Landry argues, if she had lived, in order for her to have become a published writer, her social class would have needed elevation (ctd. in Spencer 117), which is essentially what happens to Ann Yearsley later in the century (and it is questionable whether another “natural genius” like Stephen Duck would have been socially and culturally permitted to exist, let alone be elevated).

3.1 Themes and Forms in the Female Writing Tradition

Staves indicates that like their male counterparts women writers of the eighteenth century wrote about everything and used a variety of poetic forms, but there are themes that appear and reappear. A good deal of the poetry was religious in nature: prayers, meditative poems, biblical paraphrases, and essay poems. As the century wore on women increasingly wrote about historical topics and political issues like slavery. Friendship and marriage were frequent topics as well. Other topics that spanned the century include education and abilities as they pertained to women, and discussions of gender roles. In addition, like all writers, women discussed writing and the muse.

The poetic forms they used vary just as much. It is impossible to argue that women routinely only used a few types of poetic forms. However, we can say that women tended to use

² At the time that Leapor was writing the bulk of her poetry, she was living at home with her father (a former gardener who owned a nursery). She had worked as a kitchen maid in two houses prior to the death of her mother (Greene 14-17 and Rizzo “Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence” 315, 318, 321-322). Collier in contrast, survived solely due to her own work as a washer-woman, sick-nurse, sometime harvester, and house-keeper (“Some Remarks on the Author’s Life” 2: iv-v). While Leapor had no assistance in household duties, and she assisted her father with his nursery, according to Freemantle (“To John ***** Esq.” 2: xxii-xxiii), she certainly had more leisure and learning than Collier, which indicates a higher social position. Had she outlived her father and the subscription for her poetry been successful, Leapor might have been further elevated, but had the subscription not been successful, it is likely she would have been forced to lead an existence like Collier’s.

some forms more than others. In the first half of the century for example (the time period of my study), they often wrote pastorals, verse epistles, Pindaric odes and translations of foreign poetry. While they were not prone to writing mock-heroics, they wrote in satiric modes. Like their male and class counterparts, women deployed contemporaneous forms.³

While literary scholars have made a concerted effort to discuss poetry written by women, until recently a poetic form that many women writers deployed has received limited critical attention. The verse epistle also plays a major part in the work of Collier and Leapor, as well as most laboring-class authors of the eighteenth century. This phenomenon occurs for both practical and cultural reasons, as we will see below.

4. The Verse Epistle and Sociability

In essence a verse epistle is a letter written in verse, but general conception of it has favored the Horatian version of the form. According to Bill Overton in his 2007 study *The Eighteenth-Century British Verse Epistle*, the Horatian familiar epistle has the following characteristics: “it is a written communication; it is in a verse form accepted as epistolary; it is addressed from a distance; its authorship is single and undifferentiated; and it has a single named addressee” (24). Overton carefully notes that verse epistles run the gamut (in no particular order) from the “familiar, humorous, dramatic, discursive (the kind...[he calls] essay-epistle), satirical,...[to the] complimentary” (31). The humorous, discursive, and satirical verse epistles are of particular interest to my study. Overton describes their relationship to readers in the

³ These forms included non-poetic ones as well: journals, plays, pamphlets, familiar letters, histories, travel accounts, philosophical or religious tracts, (auto)biographies, and scandal narratives. While many writings remained unpublished due to political or personal concerns, women wrote and published more and more prose as the century wore on. In particular, they translated French works and works in other modern languages, as well as translated some work from Latin and Greek. Staves indicates that writing translations allowed women to write meatier, and sometimes more risqué work, which they would have been unable to publish as original works (245).

As Staves indicates, over the course of the century women were increasingly restricted by “domestic” or sentimental conceptions of femininity to be accepted to and to remain in the “literary family,” so translations provided an outlet for women who wanted to write or publish less “feminine” or more controversial work (245). Yet they also wrote and published conventional work such as conduct manuals, cookery books, and children’s books. Significantly, by the end of the century, women were writing and publishing literary criticism, and editing anthologies. Equally significant is Stave’s point that literary scholars seem to forget that women not only wrote novels, but that they wrote in a diversity of forms, just like their male counterparts (2-3).

following way: the “satirical epistle...derives from [the] verse satire as well as from the essay-epistle. Indeed, some humorous epistles of the period do not appear to have been intended for publication, and so imply a single reader, while satirical epistles almost always address a wider readership, implicitly or explicitly” (24). Thus the verse epistle is often a “public” form, and not coincidentally a very popular form in the first half of the eighteenth century.

Indeed, the very sociableness of the form became its most appealing characteristic in a time when diverse groups of people could disseminate their views to a larger audience through publication. This very diversity required decorum and the ability to appeal to different audiences. David Fairer addresses this point in a chapter discussing the transformation of British eighteenth-century society from a manuscript to a print culture in his 2003 study *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789*.

Fairer argues that the epistolary form is both public and private, that “No poetic form is more obviously ‘between manuscript and print’ in the ways it entangles private and public, allowing a glimpse of the handwritten letter through the formalities of a printed page. As a sociable communication it is expected to accommodate both wit and politeness – to entertain and surprise without forgetting the presence of an addressee and the decorums that involves” (qtd. in Overton 19). Thus verse epistles are not just written for their addressees. They may address topics in common to the correspondents, but also larger issues, utilizing a polite form, which generally tempers discussion of contentious issues. This ability to discuss political and religious issues in particular without resorting to bloodshed became key with the Restoration, and the increasing participation of those from the middle orders and women of the middle and upper orders in public discourse.

While neither Collier nor Leapor discuss national politics in their verse epistles, they certainly discuss the effects of gender and class dynamics which have implications beyond their own lives, as we will see. These discussions and to whom they address the poetry link them to the laboring-class and female writing traditions. For example in Collier's case, she responds to Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour," publically but playfully (maintaining sociability) taking him to task for his negative representation of the contribution of laboring-class women. So in this case we have topic of labor and an addressee who made a public statement about his own labor and those of other rural workers. In Leapor's case, many of her poems are addressed to Artemisia (her friend and patron Bridget Freemantle), and they often critique gender roles and expectations, thus thematically and stylistically linking them to the female writing tradition. Further, while Artemisia is not a public figure, the close friendship that the real Artemisia and Leapor shared becomes apparent, demonstrating an alliance across class lines, a result of sociability in its most ideal form.

Collier and Leapor utilize the Horatian verse epistle as a way to tap into sociability, to bring their experiences into and to become part of the larger discourse on social mores despite the fact they were not actually "ladies." While Donna Landry and William Christmas focus on their contribution to the creation of female laboring-class literary discourse and laboring-class literary discourse respectively, Collier and Leapor's broader appeal to sociability does not exclude them from these two discourses. In fact, the three discourses overlap.

In attempting to become part of public discourse via the verse epistle, they were not the only women or laboring-class authors to do so. In fact, Bill Overton argues that these two groups deployed the verse epistle more than male middling and upper order writers (48, 50, 59), and offers several explanations for this phenomenon.

First the verse epistle is an “occasional” form (43), so one in which content and approach is determined by the circumstance, allowing flexibility with poetic conventions. In addition, Overton cites Moyra Haslett’s argument (*Pope to Burney* 43) for its use by women: ““it does not require elevated diction or classical learning, nor does it rank highly in the hierarchy of poetic genres”” (48). These characterizations allow similar flexibility as with the occasional nature of the form. Overton also notes that over the course of the eighteenth century, “it had become much more acceptable for women to collect and publish familiar and occasional verse and prose letters” (57). Undoubtedly, this acceptance parallels women’s acceptance into the “literary family.” Overton concludes with two other explanations: first, “the verse letter was not just a literary genre but an occasional social practice, even at non-genteel social levels [, and second]...that, as print publication expanded in the 1730s, it became clear that occasional verse, including familiar epistles, could be printed for profit” (59).

A caveat, non-genteel does not necessarily mean laboring-class. Yet the novelty and hence potential profit of publishing verse letters written by the laboring-classes should not be overlooked. Also contemporary readers and critics often made allowances for the writers’ lack of formal education and lower level of adeptness with accepted poetic form and technique.

At the same time, in spite of (and perhaps because of) these allowances, their writing was often considered inferior. Julie Prandi discusses this perception of female and male laboring-class writers’ work generally, and it can be applied to their verse epistles in particular. Similar to Overton, Prandi notes that the occasional nature of much of laboring-class writers’ work left it open to criticism, with critics commenting on its rushed quality and other formal faults. This is despite the fact that natural genius and sentimental aesthetics often privilege spontaneity and “naturalness” (57, 73). In addition, as Haslett argues the relative technical ease of the verse

epistle meant it fell lower in the poetic form hierarchy, so poets who tended to write them tended to earn lower poetic status.

The verse epistle's relatively low status may have also had much to do with who was writing it. Susanne Kord would certainly agree with this claim. Another factor in the perceived inferiority of laboring-class authors' verse epistles involves how these authors varied the form. Prandi uses William Dowling's definition of a verse epistle in his book *The Epistolary Moment* as a baseline to compare both "mainstream" and self-taught poets' verse epistles. Dowling characterizes the Augustan verse epistle as "a space where 'a male speaker, educated in classical values and seeking refuge, in a company of a few kindred souls, from a fallen social reality, addresses a male friend in a way meant to be exemplary for their society as a whole'" (qtd. in Prandi 88).

Prandi frames her response by highlighting writers of "mainstream verse['s]" tendency to "idealiz[e] and generaliz[e]" while self-taught poets tended to "attempt to come to terms with concrete daily experience." In particular she argues that self-taught poets create verse epistles which are "more closely tailored to the occasion and the recipient than...Augustan epistles" (50). Attributing this specificity to the necessity for patrons, Prandi posits "This penchant [for occasional verse] is related to their being anchored in a social context: audience, patron, circle of friends" (57). Thus in return for financial support and encouragement the production of a continual stream of occasional verse to patrons and friends is necessary.

In addition to this specificity, Prandi notes that self-taught verse epistles often have female addressees as well as female speakers. While this seems like a significant break from Dowling's characterization, Karina Williamson in "Voice, Gender, and the Augustan Verse Epistle" argues that Augustan poets "fastened on the indeterminacy of gender that is central to

the genre” (76), and points out that “Women writers from the Restoration onwards were quick to seize on the freedom the verse letter allowed them to give female subjectivity a voice of its own” (80-81). Such generic-based indeterminacy could easily have influenced female laboring-class authors to further refine that subjectivity to include their lower class status. Such a move would add to the social reality that Prandi argues is so much a part of laboring-class poetry.

Responding to Dowling’s argument about an internal audience in addition to an external audience in the Augustan verse epistle (*Epistolary Moment* 6-13), Prandi argues that “the audience the self-taught poet desires is much larger than ‘a few kindred souls’—rather the larger the audience the better.” Prandi adds that self-taught poets more often deploy autobiographical personas in their verse epistles than their Augustan counterparts. Of course the personas were often manufactured based on what these poets thought recipients expected to see (89). While we might expect a generalized persona to address a larger audience represented by a generalized addressee, here we encounter the private and public tension of the verse epistle form. As Williamson claims, “epistolary discourse is necessarily personalized: a letter always has a writer (male or female) and an addressee” (77).

Prandi’s assertions about audience and authorial personas seem to balance the public and private nature of laboring-class verse epistles. While a verse epistle may include an autobiographical persona and a corresponding persona particular to a patron or friend, the verse epistle is read by a larger group, this group having expectations about the character of the author and the relationship between the author and his or her patrons and friends. This scenario could easily describe a “mainstream” verse epistle. Pope certainly had an authorial persona and wrote verse epistles to specific recipients (including women). Pope also wrote about specific instances in his literary career and life, albeit not as directly as Prandi argues that self-taught poets did.

Prandi concludes that “the truths in these epistles, though they may be exemplary do not always aspire to being so ‘for society as a whole,’ since they may be pointedly partisan: on behalf of the disadvantaged classes or for a political cause” (88).

With regards to audience and authorial personas, Prandi seems to be relying overmuch on Dowling’s definition, in an attempt to draw a stark line between the verse epistles of laboring class authors and “mainstream” ones. I would argue due to the form’s relatively straightforward conventions, and the addressor/addressee indeterminacy, that the forms’ resultant flexibility makes it attractive to laboring-class authors as Overton, Haslett, and Williamson all argue. I concur in part with Prandi’s assessment of the “partisan” nature of much of the verse epistles of self-taught poets (at least the female ones).

For example, certainly all of Collier’s verse epistles (couched firmly and vividly in social reality) seem to be written to specific recipients (all men) on behalf of “disadvantaged classes” with a distinct proto-feminist persona. Leapor is another case. With few exceptions Leapor’s verse epistles are all written to female correspondents (many of them to Bridget Freemantle). As in all her poetry, Leapor utilizes her authorial persona Mira, who is alternately playful, philosophical, and self-deprecating, as well as proto-feminist. While many of her verse epistles address Leapor’s specific social reality, they also address more general philosophical issues such as happiness, hope, friendship, and discontent. One explanation for this difference is Leapor’s attempt to write using multiple forms including different varieties of the verse epistle such as the verse essay, a form that lent itself to philosophical and ethical concerns.

Even Prandi concedes that “truths” in self-taught verse epistles may be “exemplary,” beyond the social realities of laboring-class authors. In fact, that was part of the point of publishing their work, bringing their experiences into the general discourse as part of the

enlightenment project. Thus, the verse epistle seems to become a “democratic” form at least in the eighteenth-century. Yet despite using this “democratic” form, laboring-class authors faced another obstacle. In the case of my authors, they were not ladies, they were not even “non-genteel.” Thus in order for them to publish they needed not only to emulate ladies (as demonstrated in their prefatory material), they needed to demonstrate that they were only writing as a hobby, and they needed to use the verse epistle and other conventional poetic forms of the day. Moreover, they needed to emphasize their uniqueness as laboring-class authors. Like Stephen Duck before them, they (and their patrons) used the concept of natural genius in order to seek publication.

5. Natural Genius

Natural genius is a concept that had a tremendous impact on the publication of marginalized authors in the eighteenth-century. This concept became associated with the Romantic movement, and has remained a part of our understanding of authors’ creativity and facility with language and forms. In the eighteenth century figures like Addison in *The Spectator* (no. 160.3) argued that there were two types of genius: the first was someone who knew intuitively what language, forms and ideas were beautiful and/or poetic, both in others’ work as well as his own. This type would later be called a natural genius. Addison, as a matter of course would not consider a genius, poet or a writer as anyone other than male and genteelly born, which is why the concept’s seeming expansion to include marginalized authors is so intriguing. The second type of genius Addison describes is one who has a small natural talent, but whose small talent is refined and improved through the study of others’ work. We would call this an autodidact or a self-taught poet.

As, William Christmas and Susanne Kord have argued, this distinction became problematic, particularly with laboring class authors, who often had to hide their literary learning to fit the natural genius type. Christmas indicates that by the 1780s further learning (after an author's discovery) was not encouraged, to maintain this image. Initially however, "poetic originality was not one of the essential components of natural genius." With Duck's elevation in the 1730s, "he was spurred to improve his innate talent by imitation, copying classical masters and following specific rules of art" (26).

Authors accomplished this deception in the prefaces to their work (the prefaces were often written by their patrons): these documents also stressed that these authors were laborers first who happened to write, but had a natural propensity to write, yet without much education (certainly not formal), or exposure to polite authors—this was the Duck model before his elevation. These prefaces allowed contemporary critics to categorize them as singular, and thus not a threat to class-based assumptions about aesthetic skill.

Mary Collier and Mary Leapor both fit uneasily within this category of "natural genius" precisely because they were so accomplished due to their reading and study of previous authors. Also while they discuss rural concerns, their attention to domestic ones forces them to create a new category of authorship. They are not just laboring-class authors; they are female laboring-class authors. Therefore they must grapple with gender and class-based conceptions in order to publish their work. For instance, the underlying premise of natural genius and auto-didacticism seems class-based primarily in that one must have exposure to beautiful language and objects in order to differentiate between them. The premise also has a gendered component in that most women including high-born ones also had little to no education, and therefore limited access to such writing and objects. A laboring-class person might have some exposure if he or she were a

servant, but the closer to outdoor physical labor, the less the potential access. Yet the challenge for laboring-class authors (male and female) was to demonstrate an awareness and appreciation for beauty without indicating just how much study that awareness and appreciation requires.

Where female laboring-class authors distinguish themselves from their male cohorts is in their attention to domestic concerns. It is no accident that Collier's most well-known poem focuses on the domestic life and duties of rural female laborers, and a healthy portion of Leapor's poetry addresses domestic scenes. As women, even as women who are unmarried without children, they must demonstrate their connections to domesticity to be part of the "literary family."

Yet this resulting model of laboring-class female authorship does not account for the striking differences between Collier and Leapor. With these authors we see a transition from the worker who writes as a pastime to the writer who retains her laboring-class identity while seeking a life wherein she focuses on study and writing. Their aesthetic differences, the conditions of their creativity, whom they used as their poetic models, and their relative talent have significant implications for how literary scholars evaluate and categorize the work of historically marginalized authors. In addition to concerns about whether to maintain a canon at all, and who to include in it if we do, comes the question of how do we make these decisions, what criteria do we use. Also do we retain a kind of hierarchy wherein more value is placed on traditionally valued aesthetics, or cultural and sociological values are privileged? Can we combine both approaches? Collier and Leapor are key to answering these questions because their differences reflect the difficulties of these choices.

6. Unexpected Consequences and "Semi-Canonical"

Studying the differences between two such authors allows scholars of eighteenth-century poetry to reflect upon the impact of including historically marginalized authors in the canon of literary studies. The premise behind the Recovery Project has been a noble one, in which previous aesthetic standards and cultural conceptions of “literary” have been questioned, and access to the work of female writers previously forgotten has become available and part of scholarly research and course curriculums. Unfortunately, we replaced one set of difficulties with another. We rejected a hierarchy based on aesthetics as a frame of analysis for a hierarchy based on literature’s value to demonstrate the experience of those outside dominant literary culture.

In the process of adopting this second approach, according to Germaine Greer in “The Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature: What We Are Doing and Why We Are Doing It,” due to university and marketplace pressures, literary scholars (often feminist) rushed to gather compilations of women’s writing, lacking time and resources to “to do much more than assemble the usual collection of unverified biographical details to flesh out a fairly arbitrary selection from the best-known works of women writers” (10). These initial anthologies and editions, many of them using a feminist framework, have created what Lillian Robinson calls a “female counter-canon” (qtd. in Eger 212). This counter-canon contains works that privilege female experience, but often excludes writing by women that seems to uphold the values of the dominant culture in which they lived.

Susan Staves and other early modern scholars of women’s writing have criticized this counter-canon as neglecting a substantial body of work written by women, such that many assertions we have made about women’s writing have been inaccurate and have undermined women’s attempts and achievements in conventional literary history.⁴ In the last twenty years,

⁴ See Staves introduction to her *Literary History* in particular pages 2-9. See also Elizabeth Eger’s “Fashioning a Female Canon: Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and the Politics of the Anthology,” Germaine Greer’s “The Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature: What We

however, we have seen a shift in feminist literary history. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, authors of the important *The Madwomen in the Attic*, have recognized since 1996 that rather than a monolithic female writing tradition, there are multiple female writing traditions. As a result, they not only adjusted the subtitle to the second edition of their *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* to *The Traditions in English*, but added to their selections to reflect the diversity of women's writing: "both to mirror and serve the range of scholarly, critical, and pedagogic viewpoints that have enlivened feminist studies in a globalized era." They acknowledge that:

Diversity itself has shaped the evolution of feminist criticism, from its early preoccupation with women's shared experiences to its more recent absorption in the complex issues and assumptions informing English-language texts by women writers of diverse geographical, cultural, racial, sexual, religious, and class origins and influences, just as diversity shaped the revisions of this anthology. (xix)

With the 2007 edition of this anthology (its third), Gilbert and Gubar have gone further and added works diverse "in genre, in ethnic and geographical origins and in representation of individual writers," as well as "strengthened the representation of many 'classic' or 'standard' women writers" (xxi).

Thus Gilbert and Gubar seem to have combined an appreciation for aesthetics, as well as an appreciation for women's experience and historical contributions to literary history. We see this appreciation reflected in the criteria they use to select authors for the anthology: "we continue to believe that whatever the subject, form, or provenance of our anthology's texts, we here reprint works whose historical, intellectual, or aesthetic significance clearly merits their

Are Doing and Why We Are Doing It," Jennifer Batt's "Eighteenth-Century Verse Miscellanies," Paula McDowell's "Narrative or Network?: Eighteenth-Century Feminist Literary History at the Crossroads," and Alice Eardley's "Recreating the Canon: Women Writers And Anthologies Of Early Modern Verse."

inclusion” (xxiii). They are clearly aware of the continuing value of aesthetics in examining the work of female authors.

For example, in the third edition of the anthology, they added several poets to their eighteenth-century section including Mary Leapor. The headnote to her poems provides her biographical information, while stressing her talent and poetic experimentation noting that “some scholars of eighteenth-century literature have claimed that Leapor may have been the most important female poet of her era.” They also describe her historical importance as one of the few writers to depict the experiences of laboring class women (299-300). The rationale for including Leapor’s work in this anthology is clearly not limited to her historical importance as one of the first female laboring-class poets. Gilbert and Gubar also selected four of Leapor’s poems that while relatively short exhibit her flair for tetramic couplets and pentameter couplets. Leapor deploys vivid images and allusions to aptly chosen mythological figures. Two of these poems also demonstrate Leapor’s comic self-deprecation, a feature of much of her work, and all of the poems illuminate Leapor’s penchant for social commentary.⁵

Related to Gilbert and Gubar’s combined approach to women’s writing is one which uses literary genre as its basic criteria of comparison. Alice Eardley discusses such an approach in an article exploring the continuing discrepancy between our treatment of male and female writers of the early modern period. While Eardley continues to endorse the use of historical context in understanding the work of early modern authors, she also notes that too often in anthologies or studies that compare the work of early modern male and female authors, the men are evaluated using aesthetic standards and the women are evaluated using historical standards. For Eardley literary genre as basis of comparison is one method which would allow early modern women’s

⁵ The poems are “Mira’s Will,” “The Epistle of Deborah Dough,” “Strephon to Celia: a Modern Love-Letter,” and “Prosperine’s Ragout” (300-304).

writing to be studied relative to how it conforms or diverges and why from literary genres of the time (272).

This attention to genre and context has been my approach to the work of Collier and Leapor. I have found that these authors were well aware of generic expectations from their study of poetic models. Also in order to understand much of the content of their work and how their work was promoted, it is necessary to know the historical and social context of the time. In the process, I have found that balancing my evaluation of the aesthetics and context has necessitated difficult choices due to the striking differences between the authors.

As a result I have found myself creating a definition for what I call semi-canonical authors. One of my major considerations has been to distinguish semi-canonical from canonical. The concept of centrality is especially important in this distinction. Recently, Amy Wolf reviewed a collection of essays examining Eliza Haywood's *The Female Spectator*. Wolf argues that this scholarly collection demonstrates that "*The Female Spectator* is not on the periphery, not merely a curiosity as one of the first journals for women written by a woman, not merely being described; instead, it is at the center of a cultural matrix, addressing important larger questions." For Wolf, Haywood has become "semi-canonical" (76).⁶

However for my definition of semi-canonical, the centrality of an author is not a consideration, as I want to create a broad enough definition of the term to include authors who still require much contextualization. Moreover, it is supremely difficult for an author to have such centrality unless we speak of Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, or Jane Austen. With authors

⁶ Amy Wolf argues in full: "The critical history of *The Female Spectator* reveals a dilemma that holds true for most marginalized texts and writers. When do they no longer need background and context? When can they be considered central instead of worthwhile only by comparison to something else? When does an author move from under-read to semi-canonical status? When does criticism move from descriptive, simplified, and self-conscious about whether a text is 'good' or not, into theoretical ways of seeing, ranging from materialist, to feminist, to formalist? Haywood has finally moved past the cusp of this moment, and new access to and criticism of her once-peripheral works marks this change. This seems to be a true sign of the maturity of Haywood studies—*The Female Spectator* is not on the periphery, not merely a curiosity as one of the first journals for women written by a woman, not merely being described; instead, it is at the center of a cultural matrix, addressing important larger questions" (76).

such as these, we see their influence well beyond the time they wrote. Thus the centrality of an author is dependent not just on an author's ability to influence other writers at the time he or she initially circulates his or her work, but on his or her impact on later writers. At the moment, unless another scholar proves otherwise, the authors I examine in this study lack just such centrality.⁷

In addition, rather than creating a strict definition of semi-canonical, I have created a series of categories that reflect a female author's aesthetic skill, her background, her learning and access to literary materials and guidance, and the relative intellectual content of her work. I also include authors from all sides of the female arena, i.e. those who were critical of gender roles and those who were not, to accurately reflect the diversity of women's writing.

For the moment, I have created four categories. Mary Leapor represents the first one, in which the author displays much aesthetic skill, and is often critical of the treatment of women. An author in this category also has access to literary materials and literary guidance, and shows this learning in her work.

Mary Collier represents the second category. An author in this category displays some aesthetic skill, and is often critical of the treatment of women. This author has much less access to literary materials and little to no access to literary guidance, yet still demonstrates her learning in her work.

An author like Elizabeth Singer Rowe represents the third category. This author is aesthetically accomplished, and generally supportive of existing gender roles and the status quo. She has access to literary materials and literary guidance and support. Her learning is evident in her work.

⁷ Related to this issue of influence is the tendency female authors have (at least in the eighteenth century) of not referring to the work of other women writers. They will reference male authors, however. This reticence speaks to the continued gender prejudice female authors experienced in the eighteenth-century.

Susanna Harrison represents the fourth category. An author in this category displays some aesthetic skill, and is generally supportive of existing gender roles and the status quo. This author has much less access to literary materials and little to no access to literary guidance, yet still demonstrates her learning in her work.

Obviously, with the addition of other major variables (i.e. location, ethnicity), we can create many more categories, but at least these categories allow us to consider multiple variables in evaluating the work of any female author. We do not have to rely exclusively on aesthetics or historical importance. Yet, these two variables are often still incredibly important, as we see from Gilbert and Gubar's selection criteria. Ultimately, the litmus test of an author's semi-canoncity is her appearance in literary anthologies.⁸ As I will demonstrate in my conclusion, Collier and Leapor's work is included in most anthologies now, due to their historical importance, their aesthetic skill, and moreover their gender critique.⁹

7. Different Models with Similar Objectives

In my second chapter, I will demonstrate how Mary Collier combines the laboring-class with themes similar to those found in the female writing tradition in order to reflect more accurately, yet artistically the contributions of laboring-class women. Rejecting the pastoral form, Collier follows the tradition established by Stephen Duck utilizing the georgic form with its focus on specificity. In addition Collier critiques existing gender roles in marriage, ultimately if playfully advocating the single life for women, utilizing a dialogue format in one case and verse epistle in another. Less playfully, Collier responds to an exciseman who doubts she is the author of "The Woman's Labour," demonstrating how decorum cannot always be maintained.

⁸ Alice Eardley cites the work of Margaret Ezell, who argues that "These anthologies help to 'create and confirm canons': they reflect a literary canon as it is understood at any given moment and they also shape a reader's understanding of that particular collection of texts" (271).

⁹ Like other early modern literature scholars such as Susan Staves, I want us to increase the representation in literary anthologies of figures like Elizabeth Singer Rowe who are less critical of gender roles and the status quo, but who are also aesthetically skilled, and demonstrate intellectual complexity in their writing. As an example, in Gilbert and Gubar's most recent anthology of women writers, Elizabeth Singer Rowe is not represented. However, Anne Bradstreet is, thus we are making progress in reflecting the diversity of women's writing in our course materials.

Ultimately Collier provides one model of a female laboring-class poet, one who continues to work and only writes to amuse herself, with no stated intention of seeking social elevation. I hope to demonstrate Collier's significance to literary history beyond her historical importance as one of the first laboring-class female poets.

In my third chapter, the first of two focusing on Mary Leapor, I will discuss Leapor's differing model of female laboring-class authorship in which she balances her desire to become a writer with her laboring-class origins, ultimately using irony in skillful ways to deflate her pretensions. I will also demonstrate how Leapor combines dominant literary forms and techniques such as the pastoral with its innate irony and the verse epistle along with variable couplets and vivid images to reflect more accurately, yet artistically how female alliances are complicated by internal and external class divisions. Leapor advocates them nonetheless and offers a successful model of creative alliance with Bridget Freemantle's friendship and patronage.

In my fourth chapter, the second of two featuring Mary Leapor, I will demonstrate how Leapor combines the laboring-class, and the dominant writing traditions to accurately, yet artistically illustrate the risks of social elevation to the person seeking elevation, mixing a traditionally dominant form the mock-epic with a laboring-class subtext. I will also discuss Leapor's experimentation with the country-house poem (another traditionally dominant form), utilizing incongruity to reveal more accurately the valuable contributions of the laboring-classes to landed estates. I hope to demonstrate over the course of the two chapters Leapor's significant skill and importance to literary history.

In my conclusion I will contrast Collier and Leapor's specific differences in social background despite their common social background as laboring-class women. These differences

include the conditions in which they created their poetry, especially their level of education, their access to poetry and other literature, and the level of encouragement and advice they received with their writing. They also approached writing by developing different authorial models and deploying different verse forms. While their approach may have been different, they share a desire to write and to discuss the world around them. I will close with the significance their differences make towards understanding female laboring-class authorship in the eighteenth century.

II. Mary Collier: Seeking Recognition of the Real

Mary Collier, while not the first British laboring-class female author, nonetheless identifies herself as a washerwoman who wrote *The Woman's Labour*. In this poem Collier criticizes Stephen Duck's depiction of female laborers, and then vividly counters those depictions with female laborers' domestic chores and the grueling work they do abroad to supplement the family income. As such, Collier combines elements of the laboring-class and themes found in the female writing traditions in order to reflect more accurately, yet artistically the real contributions of laboring-class women. Rejecting the pastoral form, Collier follows the tradition established by Stephen Duck utilizing the georgic form with its focus on specificity (and adding proto-feminist arguments). In addition Collier critiques existing gender roles in marriage, ultimately if playfully advocating the single life for women, utilizing a dialogue format in one case and verse epistle in another. Less playfully, Collier responds to an excise man who doubts she is the author of *The Woman's Labour* demonstrating how decorum cannot always be maintained. Ultimately Collier provides one model of a female laboring-class poet, one who continues to work and only writes to amuse herself, with no stated intention of seeking social elevation.

Collier, like other laboring-class writers, is indebted to Stephen Duck for providing a model of authorship that she was able to deploy in her own writing career. While no other laboring-class writers gained royal patronage in the eighteenth century, Duck's elevation by Queen Caroline gave other laboring-class authors an important avenue to pursue publication. The form of *The Thresher's Labour*,¹⁰ along with Joseph Spence's methods of promoting Duck, are an integral part of this process.¹¹

¹⁰ In *Poems on Several Subjects* (1736).

¹¹ This is William Christmas's argument in *The Lab'ring Muses*.

1. The Georgic and *The Thresher's Labour*, and Promoting Duck

The Thresher's Labour while labeled a "proletarian anti-pastoral" by John Goodridge can also be considered a georgic (*Rural Life* 6). According to David Fairer, the georgic originates with Hesiod and Virgil and Fairer describes it as a form that "embraced the new and the specific." Further its "capaciousness" allows "mixture and variety" in contrast to the pastoral's "ironic juxtapositions: it [the georgic] tends to look for ways of improving existing materials by combining or adding to them" ("Persistence" 274-275). Citing Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* as an example, Fairer argues that the georgic describes a world organized by nature, but a nature that provides plenty only to those who work its resources, and who understand the process is never-ending and often painful (276-277). The georgic also balances change and innovation with continuity, a model Fairer asserts that Britain needed after the 1707 Act of Union with Scotland (278).

In contrast to Fairer and Goodridge, Bridget Keegan argues that Duck integrated the rationale for the eighteenth-century neo-classical georgic form advocated by Addison, while maintaining the spirit of Virgil's classical georgic. Addison stresses the necessity for authors to maintain an elevated poetic style to counterbalance the mundaneness of the topic ("Georgic Transformations" 550), and while Virgil's model celebrates labor, it also recognizes it "as a source of joy and pain" (552).¹² Both Keegan and Goodridge seem to agree that "Duck transforms the georgic to provide the blueprint for much of the poetry produced by subsequent laboring-class and genteel georgic writers. For Duck and others after him, the georgic became the privileged but contested generic space within which they worked to claim and explore new vocational identities." (Keegan "Georgic Transformations" 552, Goodridge "Stephen Duck"

¹² Goodridge describes Duck's poem as a "proletarian anti-pastoral" in which Duck reacts to the absence of labor in the pastoral by utilizing a didactic form (the mixed-georgic) that expects depictions of labor (albeit usually less harsh ones than he depicts). The harsher depictions derive from his background and actual experience (*Rural Life* 6)

216). William Christmas takes this idea of the socio-generic “blueprint” of laboring-class authors and genres, to demonstrate how other laboring class authors created their own occupation poems, thus linking themselves to Duck and to an aesthetics of labor (not necessarily rural), that culminates in the notion of writing as labor (23).¹³

Christmas also argues that the patrons of laboring-class authors (and sometimes the authors themselves) promoted them using Joseph Spence’s method in the prefatory material to Duck’s collection, which was published by subscription in 1736. In this Preface, Spence emphasized Duck’s natural genius, as well as his moral qualities, highlighting what Christmas labels “the trinity of social values—honesty, industry, and piety” (73-76). This model presents “a docile, ‘obedient’ man, resigned to his position in the world, who cultivates a proper degree of humility and piety. These notes [of Spence’s interviews over six days with Stephen Duck and the basis for the prefatory material] provide Spence with the basis for producing Duck publicly as one of the deserving poor” (76). Collier, like other laboring-class authors deployed this method in her quest for publication.

In addition to describing her humility, honesty, industry, piety, and deservingness, Collier’s patron (M.B.) initially stresses the novelty of her publication. In the second preface Collier emphasizes her natural genius as well.

2. The “Advertisement” to the First Collection

We learn in the “Advertisement” written by M.B. in Collier’s first collection that her “Life is toilsome, and her wages inconsiderable” and that part of the reason for publishing this collection is with “the View of putting a small Sum of Money in her Pocket...” From this

¹³ These include John Bancks’ “The Introduction” (in *The Weaver’s Miscellany*) (1730), Robert Dodsley’s “An Epistle to Stephen Duck” (1731) and “The Footman” (in *The Muse in Livery*) (1732), John Frizzle’s “An Irish Miller, to Mr. Stephen Duck” (approx. 1733) and several poems in Robert Tattersal’s *The Bricklayer’s Miscellany: Parts 1 and 2* (1734, 1735). We do not know if Collier read any of these poems, but we know she read and replied to Duck’s *The Thresher’s Labour* in 1739 with *The Woman’s Labour: an Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck; in answer to his late Poem called The Thresher’s Labour*.

description Collier clearly seems deserving of benevolence and M.B. makes it clear that she works and is not lazy, and yet makes very little income, so any small sum would benefit her, without elevating her economically or socially.

But what is primarily stressed in M.B.'s advertisement is, in fact, who Collier is, her humility, the novelty of the publication, and the innocuousness of both writing and publishing poetry for a laborer: "It is thought proper to assure the Reader, that the following Verses are the real Productions of the Person to who the Title-Page ascribes them." M.B. wants the reader to clearly understand that Collier is not a male writer of better education writing in the persona of a washer woman to trick readers into buying a lie, but that she is a real laborer, like Stephen Duck, and that she wrote this poetry, despite social expectations. Yet M.B. is next careful to stress Collier's humility and her wish to provide entertainment: "Tho' She pretends not to the Genius of Mr. Duck, nor hopes to be taken Notice of by the Great, yet her Friends are of Opinion that the novelty of a *Washer-Woman's* turning Poetess, will procure her some readers." In fact, it seems Collier's "Friends" urged her to flout conventions and to publish this poetry, that she did not think of the idea herself (a point stressed in the preface she writes for her second collection in 1762 as well). Here we also see the first mention of the novelty of the publication.

At this point in the "Advertisement," when a potential reader might question the appropriateness of subsidizing Collier's literary efforts at the possible expense of her "real work," M.B. assures the reader of the morality and harmlessness of Collier and other laborer's compositions: "If all that follow the same Employment would amuse themselves, and one another, during the tedious Hours of their Labour, in this or some other Way as innocent, instead of tossing Scandal to and fro, many Reputations would remain unwounded, and the Peace of Families be less disturb'd." We are expected to visualize washer women reciting poetry of their

own or perhaps poetry or ballads they have read/heard in their precious leisure to other washerwomen while they build fires, heat water, scrub and soak clothing, and so on. Because washing was done by women, and women are reputed to gossip and spread false rumors about others, then this poetry is not only harmless but beneficial. Women would read aloud or from memory limiting the potential for unsavory conversation.

A small portion (a quarter at most) of the “Advertisement” describes Collier’s necessity for funds (quoted above), and that the “Reader’s Entertainment had its share of Influence upon this Publication”; thus M.B. again stresses the enjoyment provided for the reader is as important to Collier as the expected funds from the sale of the poems. M.B. finishes the paragraph emphasizing yet more of Collier’s humility: “And she[Collier] humbly hopes she shall not be absolutely disappointed; since, tho’ she is ready to own that her Performance could by no Means stand a critical Examination, yet she flatters herself that, with all its Faults and Imperfections, the candid Reader will judge it to be Something considerably beyond the common Capacity of those of her own Rank and Occupation.” Here M.B. reminds readers once again of Collier’s uniqueness and novelty as a laboring-class writer, making no further mention of Collier’s financial necessities. Interestingly, M.B. seems to presume that the reader is female – the she in “hopes *she* shall not be disappointed” – the implication being women are more tender and less critical. We might draw the conclusion that polite female readers were the target group for the publication from these comments, and considering one of the satirical targets in the poem, this is a plausible assumption, as I will discuss later in the chapter.

2.1 Collier’s “Remarks” in the Second Collection

Collier carefully stresses her humble origins in the first sentence of her “Remarks of the Author’s Life drawn by herself.” She declares she was born in Sussex to “poor, but honest

Parents.” She notes that her parents taught her to read when she was “very Young, and took great delight in it; but my Mother dying, I lost my Education, Never being put to School.” Here Collier emphasizes her natural genius. She received no formal schooling and yet enjoyed learning to read (at a young unspecified age). Collier makes certain that readers know she “was set to such labour as the Country afforded,” so that we understand she is not lazy and worked as she was expected to do, when work was available. Again stressing her love of reading, but not emphasizing any aesthetic knowledge gained, Collier reports, “My Recreation was reading, I bought and borrow’d many Books, any foolish History highly delighted me; but as I grew Older I read Speed and Bakers Chronicles, Fox’s Acts and Monuments of the Church, Josephus, and others” (*Poems* iii). The “Histor[ies]” she mentions were probably novels, commonly called histories, and thus her emphasis on they’re being “foolish.” Collier has to stress that the novels were foolish, and that she grew out of them.

The other texts she cites were religious and discussed the history of the church, particularly from a Protestant perspective. Speed and Baker are collections of sermons, Fox is a history of the early church, and Josephus was a Jewish historian of the early Roman era. Thus she highlights her seriousness and piety as she grew older. She concludes the first page of the preface by relating that she remained with her father until his death, “who before his Death was long sickly and infirm” (*Poems* iii).

In addition to becoming a laundress, Collier relates in her “Remarks” and in *The Woman’s Labour* itself that she brewed and did other manual labor, “still devoting what leisure time I had to Books” (*Poems* iii). Again Collier emphasizes that leisure was uncommon, but that she filled that time with “Books” (assumedly virtuous ones based on her previous descriptions of her reading), and she relates her introduction and reaction to Stephen Duck’s famous poem. She

declares: “After several Years thus Spent, Duck’s Poems came abroad, which I soon got by heart, fancying he had been too Severe on the Female Sex in his Thresher’s Labour brought me to a Strong propensity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex: Therefore I answer’d him to please my own humour...” (*Poems* iv).

Again stressing her humility about publishing or writing for profit, she declares she wrote her response, *The Woman’s Labour*, “to please my own humour, little thinking to make it Public[. It] (sic) lay by me several Years and by now and then repeating a few lines to amuse myself and entertain my Company, it got Air.” In fact Collier informs us in the next section of the preface that after adding a versification of “The Wise Sentences of the Fifth Book of Esdras,” at the request of an ill gentlewoman to whom she attended (and the “Friends” of the woman), that Collier wrote the poem on paper, having by then learned to write (“to assist my memory”). The woman’s spouse copied the poem and despite a request to keep the poem to himself, he showed it to others and “many” advised Collier “to have it printed.” Collier did this at her own cost and says, “I lost nothing, neither did I gain much, others run away with the profit” (*Poems* iv). So we see that Collier had to be urged on to not only write other poetry, but to publish it also. She maintains her amateur status as a writer, who writes for others’ and her own entertainment.

Collier also continues to use humility (albeit playfully) and natural genius to describe her talents as a writer. In describing how “The Happy Husband” came about, Collier indicates that “at the request of a Gentleman I employed my poor Genius on the Subject of the Happy Husband: And have Since made (Courteous Reader) Such as you see, which I consign to your better judgment and your Generosity to use as you please” (*Poems* iv-v). Collier strategically uses the phrase “my poor Genius” to highlight her humble and unlearned talent in creating a poem that much better informed readers can now judge the aesthetic value of. However, playing

on the term “poor” Collier reminds subscribers of her pecuniary situation, and so asks for their “generosity” in terms of aesthetic judgment and in financial assistance.

In the last two paragraphs of the preface, Collier frames herself (but without the use of emotional wording) as deserving of benevolence. She indicates that she worked as a washerwoman in Petersfield until she was sixty-three and then she worked as housekeeper at a farmhouse near Alton until she was seventy, only ceasing to work when “the infirmities of Age rendered me incapable of the labour of that place.” She concludes the preface with a joke about living in a garret: “Now I have retired to a Garret (The Poor Poets Fate [sic]) in Alton where I am endeavouring to pass the Relict of my days in Piety, Purity, Peace, and an Old Maid” (*Poems* v).

Her tone at first is matter of fact (in describing her employment), and quickly becomes ironic, and then pious. Readers can perceive from her ironic tone that she does not feel she is in fact a poor poet, but merely an old woman who cannot work any longer, and so is living peacefully and virtuously (i.e. observing the tenets of her faith including maintaining her chastity), causing little trouble to anyone. Her use of alliteration is especially effective here, reminding readers of the religious and gender expectations for women of all classes, and moreover how deserving she is of their benevolence.

Collier’s careful allusion to gender expectations for women serves two functions here. Her modesty both makes her an acceptable recipient of benevolence, and also demonstrates that she can behave lady-like or matronly even if she is not in fact a lady. Collier’s lady-like or matronly demeanor (in addition to her playfulness) palliates the social critique she deploys in several of her poems.

3. Sociability and the Verse Epistle in *The Woman’s Labour*¹⁴

¹⁴ In *The Woman’s Labour* (1739)

As I note above, Collier and her patrons were careful to frame her as modest and lady-like, thereby attempting to legitimate her participation in sociable forms. Sociability¹⁵ allowed people of various social levels (except those from the laboring-classes and the indigent), religious, and political backgrounds to discuss issues of national, religious, or social importance in a polite forum reducing the potential explosiveness of the issues discussed. Many of these discussions were in periodicals or individual pamphlets, and in various literary formats including poetry. Thus it is not surprising that Collier chooses to use a variation of the verse epistle to make her reply to Duck.

This poetic form expects, as David Fairer in *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* claims, “both wit and politeness – to entertain and surprise without forgetting the presence of an addressee and the decorums that involves” (qtd. in Bill Overton 19). Bearing in mind Lawrence Klein’s contention that politeness excludes people such as Collier and Duck based on their low social station and assumptions about their lack of education and coarseness, Collier and Duck used these polite forms because they were the ones available.¹⁶ With the democratization of print, and the ability to read and write, both authors had exposure to these forms. To the dismay of their social betters, Collier and Duck observed polite behavior and deployed those polite forms most pertinent to topics they wanted to write about. As a result, in order to publish, authors like Duck and Collier (or their patrons), depicted themselves as unusual or natural geniuses to provide an explanation to polite audiences for their literary abilities. These authors necessarily balanced contradictory assumptions.

¹⁵ See John Mullan’s *Sentiment and Sociability*.

¹⁶ See Lawrence Klein’s *Shaftsbury and the Culture of Politeness*, especially chapter 10.

In the case of *The Woman's Labour* Collier balances her respect for Duck as well her witty and thorough critique of his representation of female laborers and their real contribution to labor (rural and otherwise).

4. *The Woman's Labour*

Collier's experience of both gender and class prejudice inform her aesthetic choices in *The Woman's Labour*. Drawing on Duck's model, she chooses a poetic format that demands specificity in its depiction of work, as well as the inclusion of important social concerns. Seeming to mirror the themes of other female authors, Collier infuses this form with content critical of the male treatment of women. Her vivid images of the work women do (in particular laboring-class women) draw attention to and recognize their real contributions.

Moreover, Leapor never dismisses Duck's realistic depiction of the work he and other male rural laborers perform; rather she reminds him (and polite readers in turn) that female laborers share the burden with men during the harvest, in addition to their regular work: child care, household duties, and taking care of any farm animals her family may own. Further, just like male laborers, during non-harvest times, women do other work (like charring and washing clothes) to add to the family income. Collier does not complain that plebian women have to work or about the division of labor. Instead she asks for recognition by Duck and polite society (directing her comments directly towards Duck) that female laborers work even harder and longer than male laborers, and that their contributions to the household and rural economy are important and necessary.

4.1 Playful Beginnings

Using a mock-serious tone, she starts the poem, after her heroic compliment to Duck ("Immortal Bard! thou Fav'rite of the Nine!/
Enriched by Peers, advanc'd by CAROLINE!/
"

Deign to look down on One that's poor and low, / Remembering you yourself was lately so; / Accept these Lines: Alas! what can you have / From her, who ever was, and's still a Slave?" to provide a history of the devolution of the golden age of gender relations. She argues that like other women she received no education, and her life is "spent in Drudgery." But life was not always like this. In fact she claims that women were not designed for "Slavery", and that "Time and Custom by degrees destroy'd / That happy State our Sex at first enjoy'd." The golden age consisted of men willingly doing work for "a Female Smile" in return, gaining glory in battle or "Arts," all so they could lay "their Trophies at a Woman's Feet" and giving their "Hearts" and "Homage" to women. After all, women gave them life. She concludes by alluding to Jove "drop[ping]...Show'rs of Gold on lovely *Danae's* Lap" and that poets used to offer poems to "our Shrine" (*Woman's* 5-6). Whether Collier believed in this golden age is not important. Rather, by effectively deploying classical allusions, she establishes women's previous authority over men, creating a stark contrast to then current male treatment of women.

After she bewails the loss of this golden age, her critique continues as she mockingly asks Duck, why, when he has been so favored by talent, does he use it at the expense of women, who have been suffering in silence, in "Oblivion" even, to "throw your Scorn, / And Women wrong, your Verses to adorn." (*Woman's* 7). For the next section of the poem (about 32 lines or so) Collier maintains this mock serious tone as she lambastes Duck by using his own words against him.

Collier starts by alluding to Duck's poem and the section where he discusses hay-making, claiming that farmers will continue to use women in this process (laying out the hay to dry and turning it over often several times, then raking it and making hay-cocks). Collier argues that despite what Duck says about women not working while the master's back is turned, actually

masters know that women continue to work without supervision just like their male cohorts. In fact she says that in all the time she worked in harvests, that she never saw masters paying wages to women for “sitting on the ground.” Conceding that – yes – they rest once the work of the morning is done, with the grass drying in the sun, she jibes, “As well as you, we have a Time to dine: / I hope, that since we freely toil and sweat / To earn our Bread, you’ll give us Time to eat,” (*Woman’s* 7-8) a time dependent on when the turned hay needs to be turned again as we shall see below (Goodridge *Rural Life* 34).

After effectively parrying Duck’s insult about women sitting around, she addresses his statements about haymaking. Duck says “And little Labour serves to make the Hay; / Fast as ‘tis cut, so kindly shines the Sun, / Turn’d once or twice, the pleasing Work is done: / Next Day the Cocks appear in equal Rows” (Duck 22). As Goodridge and Christmas have noted, Duck seems to imply that the haystacks created themselves, and Collier cleverly rebuts him on this point: “That [Lunch] over, soon we must get up again, / And nimbly turn our Hay upon the Plain; / Nay rake and prow it in, the Case is clear; / Or how should Cocks in equal Rows appear?” (*Woman’s* 8; Goodridge *Rural Life* 20-21; Christmas “An Emendation” 37).

In the same mock-serious tone Collier responds to Duck’s comparison of women to sparrows. Duck describes the women talking all at once, loudly, but all of a sudden:

Till (unobserv’d before) a low’ring Sky,
Fraught with black Clouds, proclaims a Shower nigh;
The tattling Croud can scarce their Garments gain,
Before descends the thick impetuous Rain:
Their noisy Prattle all at once is done;
And to the Hedge they all for Shelter run.

Thus have I seen on a bright Summer's Day,
On some green Brake a Flock of Sparrows play;
From Twig to Twig, from Bush to Bush they fly,
And with continu'd Chirping fill the Sky;
But on a sudden, if a Storm appears,
Their chirping Noise no longer dins your Ears;
They fly for Shelter to the thickest Bush,
There silent sit, and all at once is hush. (Duck 21-22)

As Goodridge has pointed out and Collier clearly picks up, Duck (beyond his use of an epic simile), is jealous of the women's sociability. Goodridge discusses how the act of threshing, makes any conversation impossible, due to noise created by the flail when it hits the wheat or corn with the flail, as Duck notes in his poem (Duck 16-17). So Goodridge asserts that Duck was jealous of the women's ability to both work and chat (*Rural Life* 32-34). Collier detects this jealously and mockingly accuses Duck of it:

But if you'd have what you have wrote believ'd,
I find, that you to hear us talk are griev'd:
In this, I hope, you do not speak your Mind,
For none but *Turks*, that ever I could find,
Have Mutes to serve them, or did e'er deny
Their Slaves, at Work, to chat it merrily.
Since you have Liberty to speak your Mind,
And are to talk, as well as we, inclin'd,
Why should you thus repine, because that we,

Like you, enjoy that pleasing Liberty?

What! would you lord it quite, and take away

The only Privilege our Sex enjoy? (*Woman's* 8-9)

Collier returns to her earlier theme of women as slaves, and compares Duck to a Turkish master. While the comparison is prejudiced, but a not unexpected sentiment in the eighteenth century, she links Duck to a tradition of male oppression towards women, and we should notice her use of “lord” as a verb.¹⁷ Her use of “Liberty” correlates both to traditional gendered oppression and to oppression by one’s own government or enemy. Collier chides Duck playfully and persistently, pecking at him like the sparrows to which he compares the female hay-makers.

4.2 Collier’s Mid-Poem Shift

If Collier’s critique begins playfully, she soon becomes serious and transitions from using Duck’s words against him to describing many of the different types of work done by laboring-class women. Collier’s tone demonstrates the pride that she argues these women feel in their work.

Collier fills the gaps in Duck’s poem as she describes home life for women after work and before work the next morning. She begins by reminding Duck that “*Bacon and Dumpling in the Pot we boil*” (reversing Duck’s passive voice to indicate just who is preparing the supper), as well as making the beds, feeding the pigs, setting the Table, and “Then wait[ing] at Door to see you coming Home,” (again mirroring Duck’s wording) (*Woman's* 9 all italics Collier unless otherwise indicated; Duck 20). This stanza is a partial overview of the work she describes in more detail in next section of the poem. She ends the stanza by describing “her” work in the morning: “we on you attend;” dressing and feeding the children and mending their clothes, then to the field “Soon as the rising Sun has dry’d the Dew.” (*Woman's* 9-11). Other than her two

¹⁷ For a discussion of this common trope, see Staves 195.

uses of Duck's phrasing, her descriptions are fairly objective, but in the next section of the poem she seems to describe the work "we" do with pride, as Goodridge asserts in his analysis of this poem (*Rural Life* 26-27).

This work includes reaping wheat and gleaning ears of corn: "No Labour scorning, be it e'er so mean; / But in the Work we freely bear a Part, / And what we can, perform with all our Heart. / To get a Living we so willing are," (*Woman's* 9-10). Collier's tone is filled with pride and independence, in describing work these women would not willingly choose, but are happy to do, in order to make money to maintain themselves and their families, as we shall see.

Collier makes her argument that women work more than men by indicating that they must still care for the children, in this case by bringing them to the field so they can keep them out of harm. Using maternal imagery, she describes the smallest children: "Our tender Babes into the Field we bear, / And wrap them in our Cloaths to them warm, / While round about we gather up the Corn; / And often unto them our Course do bend, / To keep them safe, that nothing them offend:". The older children, who "are able, bear a Share / In gleaning Corn, such is our frugal care." (*Woman's* 10). Collier is quick to remind Duck and readers that these women waste no time, and combine child care with their work, even encouraging older children to help, in essence training them for a role they will fulfill later on. While Collier never married and did not have children, she certainly observed other female laborers bringing their children with them at harvest time.

In this section she continues to rebut Duck detailing their after-work activities. Indicating the work that needs to be done at home, Collier says the women leave before the men, carrying corn "and our Infant too; / Weary, alas! but 'tis no worth our while / Once to complain, or *rest at ev'ry Stile*; / We must make haste, for when we Home are come, / Alas! we find our Work just

begun;”. Here, Collier neatly uses Duck’s words against him, indicating the double duty expected of women, and she declares “So many Things for our Attendance call, / Had we ten Hands, we could employ them all.” Reminding Duck “You sup, and to Bed without delay, / And rest yourselves till the ensuing Day; / While we, alas! but little Sleep can have, / Because our froward Children cry and rave;” (*Woman’s* 10-11), Collier makes clear who the primary care givers are. In addition, Collier indicates that during harvest women often went to the fields before dawn and then returned home to retrieve the children and then the day continued as she describes earlier.

Interspersing two more of Duck’s phrases to his disadvantage, Collier effectively illustrates just how much more work these women did compared to their male cohorts.

Were this your Case, you justly might complain

That Day nor Night you are secure from Pain;

Those might Troubles which perplex your Mind,

(*Thistles* before, and *Females* come behind)

Would vanish soon, and quickly disappear,

Were you, like us, encumber’d with Care.

What you have of us we do not know:

We oft’ take up the Corn that you mow;

We cut the Peas, and always ready are

In ev’ry Work to take our proper Share;

And from the Time that Harvest doth begin,

Until the Corn be cut and carry’d in,

Our Toil and Labour’s daily so extreme,

That we have hardly ever *Time to dream* (*Woman's* 11; Duck 24)

Collier dismisses Duck's comparison between thistles and women as negligible, declaring that had he and his male cohorts the cares women have, men would soon forget those imaginary cares. In fact, adding yet more tasks that women perform and are ready to do so to the descriptions above, Collier justifiably claims that Duck has no right to complain.

4.3 Collier's Labor

In the final section of the poem Collier both trumps any claims Duck might have and fuses gender and proto-class critique to argue to polite readers for the real value of the work done by laboring-class women. Collier spends this section of the poem describing in such explicit detail the work of a laundress that readers find it hard to erase the images she uses. She does so by alluding to Duck's vivid descriptions of threshing with equally vivid descriptions of her own work. She also uses Duck as a stand-in for her actual audience for this poem, polite readers.¹⁸

In a smoothly executed transitional stanza, Collier challenges Duck in uncompromising terms, setting the tone for the final section of the poem: "The Harvest ended, Respite none we find; / The hardest of our Toil is still behind: / Hard Labour we most chearfully pursue, / And out, abroad, a Charing often go: / Of which I now will briefly tell in part, / What fully to declare is past my Art; / So many Hardships daily we go through, / I boldly say, the like *you* never knew." (*Woman's* 12).

From this opening salvo, Collier proceeds to describe a typical washing day in the winter months. First it is still dark when she leaves, while Duck and his brethren can stay in bed until first light (*Woman's* 12). In fact historians indicate that these women would have left at midnight or 1am to arrive to start the process and then work the whole day into the night, so perhaps eighteen hours (Goodridge *Rural Life* 52-53). No matter the weather, she must leave, even if the

¹⁸ Landry argues that Collier's target audience is male polite readers (71).

household she goes to is not ready to receive her. Collier indicates that often when they arrive, the maid of all work is still in bed “quite tir’d with Work the Day before, O’ercome with Sleep,” and so they need to attract her attention by calling to her, meanwhile waiting in the cold. It is quite likely that the maid only went to bed herself a few hours before, especially if she was the sole live-in servant. Collier is sympathetic to the maid of all work, but rueful of the time she needs to wait in the cold outside (*Woman’s* 12).

Once inside Collier and her cohorts quickly and competently begin: “Briskly with Courage we our Work begin; / Heaps of fine Linen we before us view, / Whereon to lay our Strength and Patience too; / Cambricks and Muslins, which our Ladies wear, / Laces and Edgings, costly, fine, and rare, / Which must be wash’d with utmost Skill and Care; / With Holland Shirts, Ruffles and Fringes too, / Fashions which our Fore-fathers never knew.” Collier is critical of the fine clothing that requires so much care to wash, but at the same time, she is proud that with skill (her skill) it can be done well. She ends the stanza on a rushed note: “For several Hours here we work and slave, / Before we can one Glimpse of Day-light have; / We labour hard before the Morning’s past, / Because we fear the Time runs on too fast.” (*Woman’s* 13). Collier repeats “slave” and reminds us that a lot of work is done several hours before the sun rises, as another jibe at Duck, who begins work after sunrise (Duck 21).

Introducing proto-class criticism, Collier next describes the entrance of “our Mistress” *after* sunrise “And in her Hand, *perhaps*, a Mug of Ale / To cheer our Hearts, and also to inform / Herself, what Work is done that very Morn;” (*Woman’s* 13). Goodridge argues that the mug of ale is really an excuse “to spy” (*Rural Life* 50). The mistress “Lays her Commands upon us, that we mind / Her Linen well, nor *leave the Dirt behind*: / Not this alone, but also to take care / We don’t her Cambricks nor her Ruffles tear; / And *these* most strictly does of us require, / To save

her Soap, and sparing be of Fire; / Tells us her Charge is great, nay furthermore, / Her Cloathes are fewer than the Time before.” (*Woman’s* 13-14). Collier uses italicization particularly well in emphasizing not only what the mistress says but also undercutting the words themselves.

Readers imagine a finely dressed (based on the description of the clothes being washed), nagging employer who does little to no work herself. Normally, polite readers would more than likely not feel critical of this unsympathetic employer because the laboring-classes were considered workhorses with no feeling or sentiment, as Sarah Jordan demonstrates (38). In fact, the complaints the employer makes are pretty typical, according to Bridget Hill in *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (138-140). Yet Collier’s juxtaposition of these complaints with descriptions of the amount and type of work she does (along with her cohorts) makes the mistress seem particularly unfeeling. Collier by using the first person plural when describing plebeian woman’s work makes a connection with readers, such that we champion her when her and their work seems slighted. Collier’s purpose with this negative description of her employer becomes evident later in the stanza.

Collier provides a vivid picture of what physically happens to the women as they work: “Now we drive on, resolv’d our Strength to try, / And what we can, we do most willingly; / Until with Heat and Work, ‘tis often known, / Not only Sweat, but Blood runs trickling down / Our Wrists and Fingers; still our Work demands / The constant Action of our lab’ring Hands.” (*Woman’s* 14). In part Collier is replying to Duck’s description of his own sweat as he threshes without breaks: “In briny Streams our Sweat descends apace, / Drops from our Locks, or trickles down our Face. / No intermission in or Works we know; / The noisy Threshall must for ever go” (Duck 16). We should notice that Collier deploys no italics for emphasis in this passage. These vivid images declare to polite readers as well as Duck, how physically demanding the work is, in

fact as demanding as the work Duck describes. Collier is not asking for sympathy however. Rather she asks for recognition by polite readers of the value of her work (indicated by its physical demands and the amount of it that needs to be done).

4.4 Duck as Front-Man

By juxtaposing the image of her idle mistress with her own industriousness, Collier hopes to remind polite readers that if not for her and her cohorts, polite readers (like the idle mistress presumably) would have to do such difficult work themselves. Yet, Collier is careful to direct her comments to Duck, knowing that she cannot indict her employers (and polite readers) directly. Collier may well have borrowed this strategy from Stephen Duck. William Christmas argues “Duck’s criticism of the exploitation of manual laborers was also masked in a similar manner [to Collier’s] in *The Thresher’s Labour*” (*The Lab’ring Muses* 123). In Duck’s case, he concludes his poem by describing the feast after harvesting is done, provided by the Master: “We think no Toils to come, nor mind the past. / But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat, / When the same Toils we must again repeat:” (Duck 25). Christmas indicates that we are meant to believe this was the same master from earlier in the poem who counts the bushels of threshed wheat or corn and figures how many were made that day, and concludes that the rural laborers were not working as productively as their neighbors. The master calls them rogues and Duck declares that the threshers want to start work again to drown out the insult, and compares their reaction to that of schoolboys with faulty penmanship, who out of embarrassment want to fault the ink or the pen or in this case that the corn was too green (Duck 18). Thus for Christmas, Duck deploys a critique seemingly directed at himself and his fellow workers, but which in reality is directed to those who employ him to perform the never ceasing agricultural work. Yet the cyclical nature of the work receives the most blame (*The Lab’ring Muses* 123-125).

In Collier's case, because Duck (and not polite patrons or readers) is the ostensive recipient (or target) of her poem, she can more safely air critiques of those self-same patrons and readers. Collier diverts polite readers and patrons from her proto-class critique by her strategy of one-upmanship with Duck. Duck is the front man. So Collier attacks Duck's misogyny, and then neatly integrates proto-class critique by continuing to speak directly to Duck and by using his wording against him from *The Thresher's Labour*.

We see this strategy in particular where Collier specifies the market value of a day and half's labor as a washerwoman. She reminds Duck that at sundown he can go home, but that washerwomen cannot: "Tho' we all Day with Care our Work attend, / Such is our Fate, we know not when 'twill end :/ ... And after all our Toil and Labour past, / Six-pence or Eight-pence pays us off at last; / For all our Pains, no Prospect can we see / Attend us, but *Old Age* and *Poverty*" (*Woman's* 15). According to Landry the wage is accurate (60). Collier's italicization of "old age" and "poverty" emphasizes the hand to mouth existence these women live with no chance to save a little so that they do not have to work until they literally die of old age. Duck does not deploy this wording in his poem, but he does describe the "prospect" of fields and cottages before the harvest creates "a gloomy waste." (Duck 23). So Collier twists Duck's "prospect" indirectly critiquing the exploitative wages paid by her employers.

The only occasion where Collier more directly addresses her polite readers is in the last stanza of the poem. Beginning weakly with the transition "so," Collier introduces the idea of the beehive: "So the industrious Bees do hourly thrive / To bring their Loads of Honey to the Hive; / Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains, / And poorly recompense their Toil and Pains." (*Woman's* 17). Both Christmas and Goodridge argue that Collier alludes here to the historic tradition wherein laboring-class women in Britain were responsible for raising and maintaining

beehives for honey production, and perhaps to Virgil's didactic use of bees in the fourth *Georgic*, or perhaps even Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* (1714) (*The Lab'ring Muses* 126-128; *Rural Life* 51-52, 193). Christmas indicates that the figure of the bee representing laborers was a popular one, and thus it is not surprising that Collier would deploy it. He concludes that Collier uses this image "for her own ideological purposes," that is a proto-class critique of "the commodification of labor" rendered in a polite poetic discourse (126-127).

E.P. Thompson suggests a similar reading of this stanza in his 1989 introduction to Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* and Collier's *The Woman's Labour*. Thompson posits that Collier may well have been critiquing the effects of Mandeville's theories on laborers (xiii). In *The Fable of the Bees* Mandeville famously defends public vices such as a desire for luxury as necessary for the burgeoning British consumer economy. He also advocates the necessity of much of the population to work to provide services and products to those who could afford them, but at little advantage to themselves. His rationale is that if those who labor are paid well, then they have no incentive to keep working, so it is better for the economy for them to keep working at exploitative wages.

Collier responds as one of those laborers and demonstrates the actual impact such beliefs have on working people (men and women). Yet for polite readers to understand that Collier's critique is directed at them, they must first see themselves as both the unsympathetic mistress with the finery that Collier washes and the sordid owners in the last stanza (as the exploiters), as well as see Collier and her cohorts as the washerwomen of the poem and the bees in the last stanza (as the exploited).

It is not surprising that Collier deploys such an indirect strategy. Considering she wants recognition of the contributions of laboring-class women by polite readers (essentially those who

employ these women), she must not alienate polite readers by attacking them directly as exploitative and uncaring. So Collier cleverly deploys a female critique of actual male assertions combined with a poetic structure that allows such vivid depictions of work.

5. Marriage vs. the Single Life

Not content with bringing attention to the back-breaking and vital work that laboring-class women performed, Collier offers robust critiques of the position of women in marriage. Two poems demonstrate this critique particularly well. These are “The Happy Husband, and the Old Batchelor. A Dialogue” and “A Gentleman's Request to the Author on Reading ‘The Happy Husband and the Old Batchelor.’”¹⁹

Deploying two sociable poetic forms, the dialogue and verse epistle, Collier argues (through the voice of the aforementioned happy husband) that if men want virtuous and non-combative wives, then they must love and respect their wives, as well as be virtuous themselves. The happy husband advises his friend:

I wish that man wou'd know his place,
As Lord of the created race,
Vicegerent of this spacious ball,
A Shining light observ'd by all;
Wise in his conduct he wou'd be,
A Pattern to his Family,
And by his own Example lead
His Spouse the path wherein to tread:
Wou'd he to her himself approve,
And ever bear a constant love,

¹⁹ In *Poems on Several Occasions* (1762)

I am persuaded we shou'd find

Most Women virtuous, just and kind. (*Poems* 38)

The old bachelor replies that he would then have to stop carousing with his friends, in part because a wife as described would not want him to remain in such company. Also he worries that his wife might make him a cuckold with one of his friends. The happy husband concedes that if he is a jealous man then the marriage will be difficult. Yet he says by remaining loving towards his wife, she would not stray. Moreover, he must demonstrate to his friends his new virtuousness, and they would change also or the friendships would end. The old bachelor is convinced and says his pleasures are fleeting and “leave a bitter Sting behind” (*Poems* 41), and though he is older now he would like to marry, treat his wife well and be a happy husband.

Interestingly Collier does not question the patriarchal structure of marriage. Rather she criticizes men for not fulfilling their responsibilities in their roles as husbands. In fact early in the poem, the old bachelor tells his friend he can have as many children as he likes and go with as many women as he wants. His friend replies that is true, but that those children are not considered heirs under the law and thus he would not be able to pass his name and estate on. Yet, while tacitly accepting the existing marriage power structure, Collier openly criticizes those men who complain their wives criticize their behavior and have affairs with other men. Collier asks why these women should be non-combative and virtuous when their husbands are not.

While Collier may not criticize the institution of marriage outright, she certainly recognizes the benefits for women of remaining single. In the verse epistle “A Gentleman’s Request” she is asked to write a poem entitled ‘The Happy Wife and the Discontented Maid,’ in order to encourage “Virgins to fix their love on Virtuous Men.” Collier responds that she cannot write on such a “barren Theme” (*Poems* 41), because “Most Men are now so viciously inclin’d”

that there are few marriages with happy wives. Collier's wordplay indicates that marriages can be barren of happiness as well as children.

Moreover, she knows no "discontented maids" and indicates she is an old maid herself (*Poems* 41). By identifying her aged spinster status, Collier implies that she has observed other women (married and single) over a lifetime so she is in a good position to make this statement, including that she is happily single herself. Collier concludes that virgins have such limited choices for virtuous spouses that they may grow old waiting. So she begs that the gentleman "will excuse / The ignorance, And freedom of the Muse" (*Poems* 41). Collier's playful reply is characteristic of the tone she deploys in large sections of *The Woman's Labour* as well as "The Happy Husband."

If Collier is playful in these two poems, as well as portions of *The Woman's Labour*, the same cannot be said for her most critical poem, which combines a female and laboring-class critique of the education allotted to women of all classes.

6. Collier Calls Out the Exciseman

Decorum only seems an effective strategy up to a point, and once Collier is forced to defend her poetic abilities she openly attacks a critic. Until Ann Yearsley in 1787, we will not see such an attack again.²⁰ Again utilizing the verse epistle Collier addresses an excise man in "An Epistolary Answer to an Exciseman ,Who doubted her being the Author of the Washerwoman's Labour."

Even to this day, no group of persons or institutions are hated as much as tax collectors; this was just as true in the eighteenth century, but excise men were a particularly hated group (O'Brien 26-27). Whether there was in fact an excise man who disbelieved Collier's authorship

²⁰ "Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's Desiring the Author Never to Assume a Knowledge of the Ancients" in *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787), Yearsley's second collection of poetry.

of “The Women’s Labour” (and the fact that Collier has an attestation inscribed by nine important male figures in her community in the third edition of her first collection indicates that enough people thought she did not write the poetry), Collier targets a particularly despised figure (the excise man) to make a proto-feminist and proto-class claim, thus keeping to the ideological principles present in *The Woman’s Labour*. She effectively deploys an ad hominem attack on this excise man, similar to her attack on Stephen Duck, except in this case we have no way of verifying what the excise man actually said.

Keeping to her strategy of social criticism, Collier begins the poem critiquing the excise man’s response by articulating that as an English citizen, she has the right to clear her name of his charge, which he makes without evidence: “you are sure, I hear, / No Woman ever made those lines / That in my Name appear.” Continuing in this vein, she accuses the excise man of thinking he is the Pope and thus “infallible,” but that instead he is not “fit / To fill the Papal Chair.” Deploying her proto-class critique, Collier next argues that no one on earth “Nor yet above the Sky, / Can truly say, they made that Book, / But poor, despised I. /... That Washerwoman made those lines / That now are Sent to you. / Tho’ my extraction was so low, / And I to labour bred; / Yet Stories of the Pagan Gods, / I oft have seen, and read” (*Poems* 30-31). Here Collier describes her background and the fact she can read and moreover has read mythological tales like the Daughters of Danaus and their buckets of water which never fill. Collier deploys this image in *The Woman’s Labour* when trumping Stephen Duck’s comparison of the futility of his work to that of Sisyphus.

In the next two stanzas, Collier utilizes the courtroom language she deploys in her first stanza. She claims that was she in Gloucestershire and he in Petersfield, “What you have Judg’d impossible, / I wou’d plainly make appear.” Critiquing his general condemnation of women,

Collier asks “But why should you our Sex condemn; / And Women all despise / We never with you interfere, / Nor trouble the Excise” (*Poems* 31). Collier is disingenuous here, in that many of the items under excise were purchased by women like candles, soap, and coal (O’Brien 26-27).

Leaving the legal language, Collier proceeds in the next two stanzas to accuse the excise man of fraternizing with the enemy, expressing such claims about women while supposedly “For most of you are wont to be / Admirers of the Fair.” Collier seems to slip from speaking directly to the excise man to excise men (or men) in general with her use of “most of you.” She sarcastically continues “But Since that we such Ideots are, / I hope, you do refrain / Our Company, for fear you Shou’d / Your Reputation Stain.” Linking the excise man’s prejudice to the limited opportunities offered to women, Collier closes the poem by arguing that if women were educated, “Which Justly is our due, / I doubt not, many of our Sex / Might fairly vie with you” (*Poems* 31-32).

Notably Collier is most sarcastic when defending the possibility that a laboring-class woman could write and even more so could write poetry. In this poem and in portions of *The Woman’s Labour*, Collier indeed calls her “Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex.” The portions of *The Woman’s Labour* that seem most critical are those where Collier deploys gender and class critique, for example when she describes her work as a washerwoman. Collier’s directness of approach (at least in describing her physical labor and its value and attacking those who attack her directly) is very much part of her model of authorship.

7. Collier’s Model of Authorship: a Worker Who Writes

Collier’s directness is refreshing, but in addition to the prefaces in which her modesty and humility are emphasized, the rest of her poetry (another six poems) tempers this directness. In her two biblical versifications, and a versification of sentimental story from the *Spectator*,

Collier is supportive of prescriptive gender roles, especially a good woman's positive influence and the resulting respect she derives. The final three poems include two elegies (one to Stephen Duck), and a poem celebrating the marriage of George III. All are supportive of the status quo, and in discussing Duck, Collier seems to argue that elevation led Duck to lose his contentment and peace of mind, states of mind that "Seldom dwell among the Rich, or Great" (*Poems* 51). Collier demonstrates consistently in this poetry that she is not supportive of those seeking elevation, and is supportive of existing gender and class roles. It is worth noting that the more critical poems appear early in the second collection, and that she concludes it with her celebratory poem on George III's marriage.²¹ Collier is clearly attempting to balance her critique with a careful attention to the sensibilities of her audience.

This balance does not include an endorsement of conventional pastoral depictions of laborers. While, there are elements of the pastoral in *The Woman's Labour*,²² they are contrasted with the reality of female laborer's lives. For instance, the only occasion where we see some version of the pastoral is Collier's description of the golden age of gender relations in *The Woman's Labour*. This use seems strategic since it borrows the timeless and idealistic quality of the pastoral form (and its equally idealistic depictions of men and women) in order to contrast present and vivid realities. Collier is no nymph and embraces aesthetics with vivid depictions of work and the valuable contributions of plebeian women and their physical labor. As such Collier follows in Duck's footsteps, including his initial model of authorship, before his social elevation.

Collier's model of authorship combines both an attention to the real as well as circumspection. Her attention to the real motivates her to modify Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* to reflect a female laboring-class perspective, as well as using sociable poetic forms to comment

²¹ *The Woman's Labour* and "The Three Wise Sentences" were the only poems in her first collection (1739), and were reprinted in 1762 as the first two poems in the second collection. "An Epistolary Answer to an Exciseman," "The Happy Husband," and "A Gentleman's Request" appear as the third, fourth, and fifth poems in the second collection.

²² In fact, Goodridge labels *The Woman's Labour* as anti-pastoral (*Rural Life* 6).

on issues important to women (of all classes) such as gender roles and education. Her circumspection comes after her initial publication. Realizing that novelty was not enough, and that any expectation of social elevation was highly improbable, but wanting to write nonetheless, Collier continues to work and to write on the side. Eventually with more savvy, Collier publishes once again (after she can work no longer) and emphasizes her connection to natural genius, able to enjoy briefly the fruits of her mental labor.

Collier's model of authorship and poetry have a proto-feminist component, and before I close I want to address a difficulty with regard to proving that Collier read and was influenced by female authors. Unfortunately I cannot prove such a link. All I can argue is that Collier used themes in her writing that mirror themes present in other writing by women. That Collier was culturally aware is evident, but until a scholar can discover a textual link to specific piece of writing of say Lady Mary Wortley Montagu or Anne Finch to Collier, we can only argue her seeming thematic linkage to the writing of other women.

Yet, this tenuous link has not prevented Collier from gaining semi-canonical status. As I note in my introduction, the fact she has some aesthetic skill and is critical of the treatment of women, particularly laboring-class women, as well as her historical importance as one the first female laboring-class authors, has earned her a place in literary anthologies. At this date, the most recent editions of British literature anthologies, for example Wiley-Blackwell, Norton, Broadview all include Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour*. Longman does not include her work. Her work appears in two other anthologies, David Fairer and Christine Gerrard's *Eighteenth-Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* and *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets* edited by John Goodridge, Tim Burke, William Christmas, and Bridget Keegan. Fairer and Gerrard restrict their inclusion to *The Woman's Labour*, while Burke,

Christmas, and Keegan's anthology includes all her work. It is not surprising that her work appears in the last two anthologies, as they are so specialized.

What is noteworthy is Collier's absence from Gilbert and Gubar's *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*. Gilbert and Gubar include Mary Leapor however, and it is likely that given space constraints and bearing their selection criteria in mind ("works whose historical, intellectual, or aesthetic significance clearly merits their inclusion" (xxiii)), Leapor's superior aesthetic skills including her more complex use of poetic forms trumps Collier's historic status, as we shall see in the next two chapters.

III: Leapor: Authorship and Female Alliance²³

Mary Collier's physical labor defined a large part of her authorial model, whereas Leapor's model of authorship encompasses her laboring-class origins and identity, but one in which her "work" is not physical, but creative: her "labor" is writing.²⁴ In her poetry, people remind Leapor that she is a laboring-class woman and Leapor deploys images of country people working, but they are never of her performing physical labor. When Leapor describes herself in her poetry, she is an observer, a dreamer, a friend, and a writer filled with anxiety about the reception of her poetry. Moreover, Leapor's literary experimentation and deployment of dominant literary forms form the major components of her authorial model, as well as her creative alliance with Bridget Freemantle and Susanna Jennens.

Yet, Leapor does not embrace dominant cultural norms wholeheartedly. She utilizes dominant literary forms (particularly those that are ironic thus allowing complexity of meaning) to comment on the world she sees around her (particularly its inconstancies). Leapor fuses the authoritative and ironic persona of the Scriblerians, Pope's heroic couplets, Swift's comic pace (albeit mostly using pentameter as opposed to tetrameter), as well as Swift and Gay's critique of the pastoral. Leapor also draws from the emerging laboring-class tradition, most often by introducing a laboring-class perspective or subtext, but also by deploying vivid images of physical work. Lastly, while we have no textual evidence to link Leapor to a female writing tradition, the theme of much of her work is proto-feminist in nature.

These complexities define Leapor's model of authorship and work, and are what make her semi-canonical. As I argue in the introduction, while Leapor is not a central figure like Alexander Pope, nonetheless, she is a skilled writer, who synthesized multiple forms, while

²³ All poems, prefatory materials and letters are from Mary Leapor *Poems Upon Several Occasions*. 2 volumes. London: J. Roberts, 1748, 1751.

²⁴ William Christmas argues that Leapor along with other laboring-class writers of the middle of the eighteenth century were attempting to change the definition of work to include writing, arguing that it was not just an idle pastime, and moreover was an acceptable form of work for the laboring-classes to do (*The Lab'ring Muses* 160-161).

integrating laboring-class and female critique. Her relationship with her female patrons also demonstrates an early creative alliance between women, adding to our understanding of the process of female authorship.

In this chapter, I will discuss Leapor's model of authorship in more detail. I will then examine her use of the pastoral and the verse epistle to discuss proto-feminist arguments and arguments focusing on the intersection between gender and class roles. I will examine in particular how Leapor mixes the pastoral with the verse epistle form and Hudibrastics to demonstrate the impact of internal and external class divisions in female alliances.

1. Leapor's Model of Authorship

Mary Leapor's complexity as an author begins with her ironic poetic persona. At the same time Leapor writes she also self-deprecates that activity. We see this particularly well in the "Epistle of Deborah Dough":

But I forgot our Neighbour *Mary*;
Our Neighbour *Mary*,--who, they say,
Sits scribble-scribble all the Day,
And making—what—I can't remember;
But sure 'tis something like *December*;
A frosty Morning—Let me see—
O! now I have it to a T.
She throws away her precious Time
In scrawling nothing else but Rhyme;
Of which, they say, she's mighty proud,
And lifts her Nose above the Croud;

Tho' my young Daughter *Cicely*
Is taller by a Foot than she,
And better learnt (as People say):
Can knit a Stocken in a Day:
Can make a Pudden, plump and rare;
And boil her Bacon, to an Hair:
Will coddle Apples nice and green,
And fry her Pancakes—like a Queen. (II.68-69)

Normally, Leapor refers to herself as Mira in her poetry, but here she uses Mary, so the connection between her persona and herself is more direct. Contrasting the actual usefulness of writing to a young woman with her social background, Leapor indicates her genuine desire to write. Most of Leapor's poetry concerning her writing and publication reflects this anxiety and yet pride in her abilities. Unlike Collier, who could more directly indicate a desire to write as a pastime, in her (few) free moments from work, Leapor could not express without irony the desire to write whenever she wanted to. Leapor must self-deprecate in order for her desire to write to be an acceptable topic.

So she is forced by necessity to utilize ironic forms and techniques to discuss (and disguise) her desire to write, but also to make social commentary, hence, in part, her poetic experimentation with irony. In addition, by modeling her writing after Pope and other such dominant literary figures, Leapor logically utilized ironic poetic forms and techniques, even though by the 1740s poetry had started to shift towards a less satirical mode.²⁵

Yet, Leapor did not restrict herself to ironic poetic forms. She also wrote fables and essays in verse, which are mostly serious in tone. Her pastorals while mostly ironic include many

²⁵ See John Sitter "Political, Satirical, Didactic, and Lyric Poetry (II): After Pope."

that are serious in topic and tone. Leapor also was unafraid to experiment with different genres. She wrote a tragedy in verse and had started to write a second tragedy. These literary experiments indicate that Leapor considered herself a writer, despite the social prohibitions against perceiving herself as such. Unlike Collier, Leapor did not draw her identity from the physical work she did.

The conditions which allowed Leapor to write also differed considerably from Collier's. For instance, at the time she wrote the bulk of her work, she was keeping her father's house and helping him run his plant nursery (he had been a gardener), and so she was dependent without having to worry about providing an income for herself. With that financial necessity, Leapor certainly had more time available to write than she would have as a servant. With more time to study and write, Leapor could experiment with form and technique. In addition, Leapor had access to the libraries of Susanna Jennens, Bridget Freemantle, and her own small library: "sixteen or seventeen single Volumes, among which were Part of Mr. *Pope's Works*, *Dryden's Fables*, some Volumes of Plays, &c" (II.xxxii), and she received literary advice from Jennens and Freemantle. With such time, access to such materials, and critical advice and encouragement, as well as her talent, Leapor could become the writer she aspired to become.

1.1 The Prefatory Material

In the letter to John ***, Esq. at the beginning of the second collection of poetry, Freemantle portrays Leapor as a natural genius whose potential was unfulfilled due to her early death and also as a good person and daughter. Freemantle indicates that on her deathbed Leapor bequeathed her poems to her father, requested that the subscription proceed, and that any profit made from the poems' publication go to her father (xvii). After Leapor's death, this request

seemed to be the primary impetus for the subscription, and the secondary purpose demonstrating Leapor's natural genius.

In the proposal for a subscription itself, the author(s) apologize for the request, while lamenting that such an apology is necessary due to the abuses made of the subscription system by those who are not talented and request financial support. After this lament, the author(s) indicate that in this case readers may put aside such worries, and that the circumstances of this request "bespeak the tenderest Concern of every Reader who has a Heart capable of being either melted with Compassion, or warmed with Admiration."

The authors of the proposal then provide a brief biography of Leapor, indicating "Mrs. Leapor was Daughter to a Gardiner at *Brackley* in *Northamptonshire*; had no other Education than in common with those of her own Station; could borrow no Helps from the Converse of her Country Companions; yet, by the Strength of her own Parts, the Vivacity of her own Genius" combined with diligent self-education she "acquired a Taste for the most exalted and refined Authors in our Language," and "aspired to imitate 'em; and perhaps would have equall'd some of 'em, if the Length of her Life had borne any proportion to the Extent of her Abilities." They also inform potential subscribers that she was twenty-four when she died, and that with this subscription the "First-fruits of her Studies" may be published "in their original Simplicity (that the Force of unassisted Nature may be the better understood)." Further the authors claim that "honest" critics will find these poems "the Traces of a warm and happy Imagination, and see cause to lament that the Shortness of her Life put a stop to that future Progress, which might reasonably have been expected from so early a Genius." The authors conclude the proposal by citing Leapor's piety, and her dying request that her papers be given to her father, in the hope

that any profit made from their publication be put toward providing him a “comfortable Subsistence in his disconsolate Old Age” (np.).

While a good deal of the proposal is spent on Leapor’s talent and further self-education, the authors frame the subscription request in terms of Leapor’s worthiness: she not only died young, but she was pious and a good daughter, in addition to being talented. So the impulse for the subscription is only partly about publishing the work of an “unassisted natural genius” as a way to examine such a phenomenon. In fact the charitable purpose of the venture seems to overshadow the “scientific.” This mixed set of purposes in publication correlates with William Christmas’ arguments about Joseph Spence’s promotion of Stephen Duck. According to Spence, in order for Duck to earn money as a writer, he needed to be “palatable” to polite readers, which necessitated depictions of his humility, honesty and piety (76).

This charitable impulse frames the prefatory material of the first volume of Leapor’s poetry as well. In the first collection a letter entitled “To the Reader” appears before the list of subscriber’s names. Before providing further evidence of Leapor’s natural genius, the authors again note Leapor’s death and her deathbed request regarding her father. In addition the authors convey her father’s “humble Thanks to the Subscribers for the Favor they have been pleased to shew him.” The authors then refer to the proposal hoping its biographical details will account for

the Defects that shall be found in this Collection. Had she lived to correct and finish these first Productions of a young unassisted Genius, certainly they would have been greatly improved, tho’, as they now appear in their native Simplicity, they cannot surely but afford an agreeable Entertainment to the Reader, and serve as a convincing Proof of the common Aphorism, *Poeta nascitur, not fit*. (Inp.)

In the last three paragraphs of the letter, the authors provide further details of Leapor's partiality for poetry, and for Pope in particular. They note that she modeled her writing after his and allowed the reader to make a judgment of how well she did so. The authors then reiterate that Leapor's "Conduct and Behaviour entirely corresponded with those virtuous and pious Sentiments which are conspicuous in her Poems." They add that she was "courteous, obliging to all, chearful, good-natured, and contented in the Station of Life in which Providence had placed her." Moreover, she possessed traits that would have been "ornamental" in someone of higher social station, and "which in all Probability, if it had pleased God to spare her Life, her own Merit would have raised her." Before her death, "several Persons of Rank and of distinguished Taste and Judgment" saw her poems and were eager to promote a subscription to print them thus allowing her to further develop her skills, "but her Friends are now left to lament her Loss, and that so great a Part of a short and valuable Life was spent in Obscurity" (l.n.p.).

In comparison to Mary Collier herself and her promoters, Freemantle and the authors of the proposal and first letter emphasize Leapor's talent considerably more, but Leapor would still have had issue with this portrayal of her talent. While Leapor offered class-based social commentary in her work, she wanted her work to be judged on its aesthetic value and not who wrote it. Leapor writes the following in a letter to Freemantle regarding the publication of her work:

But as to what he observes concerning *Stephen Duck*, I am of Opinion,
that it was not his Situation, but the Royal Favour, which gained the
Country over to his Side; and therefore I think it needless to paint the Life
of a Person, who depends more upon the Curiosity of the World, than its
Good-nature. Besides, the seeing myself described in Print would give me

the same Uneasiness as being stared at. For this Reason, whenever my
Verses shall appear amongst the Public, I hope they will excuse the
Author in this Particular. (II.314)

Beyond the normal insecurities most people have about how they are described, Leapor probably feels that being portrayed as a literary curiosity she would receive an excessive amount of attention, most of it unpleasant and most of due to her social origins. In fact in “Corydon. Phillario. Or, Mira’s Picture. A Pastoral” Leapor pokes fun at how a hypothetical visitor to the country would describe her in contrast to the idealized nymphs of pastoral poetry. Upon being told of the various beautiful nymphs in the area, Phillario spots Mira, asks who she is and then proceeds to critique her appearance. Corydon (his country friend) protests “But she has Teeth----”, and Phillario (the visitor) replies “-----Consid’ring how they grow, / ‘Tis no great matter if she has or no: / They look decay’d with Posset, and with Plumbs, / And seem prepar’d to quit her swelling Gums” (II.298). While a note indicates that this is a caricature, Leapor clearly felt unprepared for the attention she expected to receive, in addition to the attention and criticism she may have already experienced from her neighbors (like Deborah Dough).

Had Leapor lived, her concerns about a biographical notice might well have caused her creative alliance with Freemantle to end. While the authors of the proposal and the first letter (one of whom may have been Freemantle) describe Leapor in glowing terms, Freemantle in the letter to John indicates an imperfect Leapor. For example Freemantle writes “how much she was engaged in her Father’s Affairs [her father owned a nursery], and the Business of his House, in which she had nobody to assist her.” She continues:

This, you may imagine, was some Mortification to a Person of her Turn;
yet she was always cheaful: And as she wanted none of the Necessaries of

Life, expressed herself thankful for that. Her chief Ambition seem'd to be
to have such a Competency as might leave her at Liberty to enjoy the
Company of a Friend, and indulge her scribbling Humour (as she call'd it)
when she had a mind, without Inconvenience or Interruption. (II.xxii-xxiii)

While Leapor may have always seemed “cheerful” in front of Freemantle, clearly from her poetry and comments that Freemantle makes later in the same letter indicate that Leapor had moments of irritability.²⁶ That Freemantle wants to play down these moments is obvious. She indicates right before the above passage that despite her social class Leapor was not “mean” (uncouth) and that she was “honoured to be call'd a friend” by Leapor (II.xxii).

Freemantle's attempts to downplay Leapor's irritability and to emphasize her politeness work against Leapor's desire for her poetry to be read for its aesthetic skill and poetic experimentation. Instead, Freemantle crafts an authorial persona for Leapor who while imperfect, is acceptable or “palatable” to subscribers. This persona displays talent, but is also circumspect about any kind of advancement, dutiful and fun. Leapor is clearly someone that Freemantle likes and respects, and as we see in the letters that Freemantle includes at the end of the second volume, Leapor and Freemantle formed a creative and productive alliance, as well as a friendship.

2. Leapor's Themes and Female Alliance

As I note above, Leapor experiments with several different poetic forms, and she also discusses a variety of topics. In addition to the theme of authorial anxiety, she focuses on issues related to gender in the bulk of her poetry. These include critiques and advice on courtship and

²⁶ See Freemantle's comments a few pages later: “She always call'd it being idle, and indulging her whimsical Humour, when she was employed in writing the humorous Parts of her Poems; and nothing could pique her more than Peoples imagining she took a great deal of Pains, or spent a great deal of Time, in such Compsures; or that she set much Value upon them.

She told me, that most of them were wrote when cross Accidents happen'd to disturb her, purely to divert her Thoughts from dwelling upon what was disagreeable; and that it generally had the intended Effect, by putting her in a good Humour” (II.xxvii).

marriage, the fleeting importance of female appearance, a critique of societal responses to intelligent and witty women, and the theme of female friendship or alliance. These friendship or alliance poems vary on a scale from alliances between women where gender issues are of sole consideration with no mention of class, to those where class makes no difference in the alliance, to where there is an alliance, but a hierarchical one. In part the poems that reflect class and friendship between women reflect the larger difference in status between Leapor and Susanna Jennens (an old employer and member of the local gentry) as opposed to Leapor and Bridget Freemantle (daughter to a late local vicar), but they also comment aesthetically (implicitly) on the difficulty for women from different social classes in the eighteenth-century to form lasting friendships and alliances.

Before going further, I need to explain what I mean by the concept of female alliance. I derive the term from the work of Donna Landry and Susan Staves. Landry articulates what she calls “sapphic textuality” (*The Muses* 81-82) or “sisterly alliances (affective or professional)” (99). Landry argues that in the eighteenth-century “Sappho is synonymous with transgressive female erotic and literary exchange” (82). Landry ties Leapor to Sappho through Leapor’s poem “An Hymn to the Morning,” (in which Leapor finds her own verse lacking in comparison to Sappho’s), and Leapor’s probable exposure to Pope’s “version of Ovid’s *Sappho to Phaon*” (84-85). With these textual linkages Landry then argues that “the oppressiveness of heterosexual institutions in Leapor’s verse necessitates some imaginary alternative or release, generates a powerful investment in “sapphic” relations between women [‘an alternative green world of female affection’]” (82). Thus Leapor creates a textual space in her pastorals where she positively depicts friendship, affection and advice between women. As I will argue below these alliances are severely tested by the relative class and education of the women involved in them.

Susan Staves never uses the term female alliance, but she establishes a practice from 1660 to 1789 whereby women formed alliances via manuscript circulation, by acquaintance through a specific religious society, by patronage, by referring to a woman author in a literary work or letter to another person, by written correspondence between women authors, and by literary critical review of another woman writer's work. Alliance can also mean the theme of friendship between women or a solidarity shared by women (36-43, 99, 108, 127, 132, 167, 175, 200, 436-39). Staves notes in particular that touting a female writer as "a champion of [our] sex" became a common feature of commendatory poems written by women for other woman writers from 1715-1737 (175). Female alliance also includes literary communities.

The most famous alliance or female literary community in this century is the Bluestockings. Not only did members have salons, combining the sexes, but they also encouraged and patronized other women writers, notably Elizabeth Montagu's encouragement and patronage of Elizabeth Carter. Unlike Hannah More's patronage of Ann Yearsley, Montagu and Carter were able to maintain an amicable alliance without the significant intrusion of their differences in social status and wealth (Staves 315-316). Freemantle and Leapor's alliance is comparable to Montagu and Carter's, and demonstrates all of the features of alliance I note above.

In making her proto-feminist arguments and discussing the intersection of gender and class on female alliances, Leapor tends to combine the following poetic forms: the pastoral and the verse epistle. In the introduction, I gave background on the verse epistle and its significance to laboring-class and female authors, and so below I want to provide the same especially as they relate to Mary Leapor.

3. The Pastoral

As Ann Messenger indicates, the pastoral was very popular with female writers and it quickly became linked to them in the first half of the eighteenth-century. Already considered “an apprenticeship genre” according to Celeste Schenck (qtd. in Messenger 8), the pastoral not only becomes “feminine” and but seems to decrease in status as a poetic form matching female status (7-8). Its formal conventions, which were ‘givens,’ both helped and hindered the pastoral’s use by women. The humility and reclusiveness of the speaker offered women trying to publish a safe and modest “stance.” The pastoral’s association with the love theme was so ubiquitous that women could easily use that theme as a cover for their real feelings or message. Messenger cites Katherine Rogers’ argument that courtship and marriage were activities of high importance for women, “yet a woman was not free to express her feelings on these subjects openly. The conventions of literary pastoral let her do so safely” (12-13). Finally, women did not have to read widely to write pastoral poetry. They only had to read it to learn its conventions (13). But these conventions also restricted women’s ability to express a truth using a form that did not have the models or language to express it (12). Yet the pastoral’s innate irony²⁷ or what Messenger describes as its “inherent...self-reflexive[ness]” allow “comedy and satire [to] flourish” in what Messenger terms the “upside-down pastoral” (157). As a result, authors could exploit this quality to reveal the inconsistencies between art (or idealized images) and real-life. Messenger argues that women as a group tended to not write upside-down pastorals and generally avoided the use of satire, particularly the “lewd, the vulgar, the excretory,...the misogynistic..., while men used such weapons frequently to invert the pastoral” (158). As we will see below Leapor indulged the upside-down pastoral and in much satire, though never in a “lewd, vulgar, excretory, or misogynistic” fashion.

²⁷ See David Fairer’s “Persistence, Adaptations and Transformation in Pastoral and Georgic Poetry.”

For Messenger, Leapor capitalizes on the ironic or self-reflexive nature of the pastoral to demonstrate the gap between the idealized images of country laborers, courtship and marriage in the pastoral and the reality she saw around herself: “[in Leapor’s work] I find a mixture of formal exercises in art and expressions of personal truth sometimes separate and sometimes together, and, when united, sometimes awkward but more successfully comic” (Messenger 174-175). While many of Leapor’s pastorals are comic in nature, she also uses elements of the pastoral and verse epistle to discuss more serious topics, often proto-feminist in nature. In addition Leapor spends a great deal of her poetry examining the intersection of gender and class in female alliances. This focus is not surprising as her alliances with Bridget Freemantle and Susanna Jennens played a crucial role in the production of her poetry, as I discuss below.

4. Alliance and Its Role in the Creation of Leapor’s Poetry²⁸

Friendship or alliance represents a major theme of Leapor’s verse epistles and pastorals, in major part due to the intellectual support that Freemantle and Jennens provided Leapor as she was writing her poetry. According to Freemantle, “two to three years before” she met Leapor, she read a “Book the size of a common Copy-Book (but something thicker) fill’d with Poems of her writing” (II.xviii), and when Freemantle asks permission to read a tragedy and any other work Leapor has written, Leapor freely offers her writings for review (II.xvii). Thus Leapor performs one of the first methods of literary alliance, the private circulation of her manuscripts in her community.

Leapor also mentions this circulation in two of her poems, “The Muses Embassy” and “An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame.” Each poem discusses her relationship with those who have

²⁸ For scholarship on Leapor’s poetry in addition to Landry, Christmas, Kord, Prandi, Staves and Messenger see Richard Greene’s *Mary Leapor*, Betty Rizzo’s “Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence,” and “The Patron as Poet-Maker: The Politics of Benefaction,” Caryn Chaden’s “Mentored from the Page: Mary Leapor’s Relationship with Alexander Pope,” Claudia Thomas’ *Alexander Pope and his Eighteenth-Century Women Readers*, Jane Spencer’s “Imagining the Woman Poet: Creative Female Bodies,” Susan Goulding’s “Reading ‘Mira’s Will’: The Death of Mary Leapor and the Life of the Persona,” Laura Mandell’s “Misogyny and Feminism: Mary Leapor,” Kate Lilley’s “Homosocial Women: Martha Sansom, Constantia Grierson, Mary Leapor and Georgic Verse Epistle,” Michael Meyer’s “Mary Leapor: The Female Body and the Body of her Texts,” and Kathryn King’s “Jane Barker, Mary Leapor and a Chain of Very Odd Contingencies.”

read and commented on (or helped revise) her work. The first poem commends Susanna Jennens' literary advice and editing (Greene 14) and in the second Leapor provides a catalogue of local people who have given her advice or sometimes read the work to relieve boredom, in addition to Artemisia who offers refuge and encouragement: "I count the Patrons of my early Song, / And pay the Tribute to their Shares belong: / What Sorrows too oppres'd the Muse's Wing, / Till your Good-nature gave her Strength to sing!" (II.47). Artemisia is Leapor's name for Freemantle (Greene 19). So, we see at least three other forms of alliance, encouragement to women by other women, and an early version of the literary critique women would do for each other's work later in the century, as well as commendatory verse to other women (even if they were not writers as such).

Significantly, these poems (and the prefatory letter to the second collection) also demonstrate another characteristic of alliance: female patronage of women writers. We know that Freemantle and Susanna Jennens become Leapor's patrons (in addition to arranging for her work to be published, both subscribed to both volumes, Freemantle to two copies each). (see Greene 24 and Rizzo "Molly Leapor" 326). Finally, it is clear from the letters in the second collection that while Freemantle may not have offered much in the way of criticism, she and Leapor discussed Leapor's work on a regular basis both in letters and in person (II.308-320). Thus it should not surprise us that so much of Leapor's poetry argues for equal alliances between women (through friendship) and addresses issues that affect all women (thus invoking solidarity), but that in the process they also demonstrate how difficult those alliances were to maintain when class dynamics were introduced, and this complication is reflected in the resultant aesthetics.

5. Leapor's Proto-Feminist Poems and the Themes of Alliance and Friendship

Leapor's most proto-feminist poems "Man the Monarch" and "Essay on Women," both of which seem to fall under the verse epistle genre, indicate her dissatisfaction with the roles offered to women both inside and outside marriage, connecting her to themes characteristic of the female writing tradition (particularly Mary Astell, Elizabeth Thomas, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu)²⁹. In "Man the Monarch" Leapor ascribes the hierarchical relationship between women and men, to male jealousy. She argues that women do not have the ability to counter or contain male domination. Beauty does not last, wit and intelligence are ridiculed and women were not given much physical strength, so they remain dependent, while other living creatures escape human male dominion. In fact, Leapor concludes the poem: "Sires, Brothers, Husbands, and commanding Sons, / The Sceptre claim; and ev'ry Cottage brings / A long Succession of Domestic Kings" (II.10). This poem speaks to the generality of a woman's lack of status in her domestic relationships with men, no matter what her social class (thus to the idea of solidarity between women based on mutual suffering), and in this poem we never see women inflicting suffering on other women, keeping Leapor's argument cohesive and the resultant aesthetics effective.

In "Essay on Woman" in a series of Popean-style vignettes punctuated with antithesis (Chaden 41), Leapor delineates the negative impact of wealth, beauty, and wit on women in their interactions with men and women and makes an argument about alliance and friendship between women. In the first stanza Leapor demonstrates that wealth and beauty have no benefits for women once they marry. These attributes attract positive male attention, with wealth adding lustre to beauty, but with marriage, women become real; they are no longer idealized nymphs. In

²⁹ These philosophical poems do not reach the length of Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* or Pope's *Essay on Man*, but Susan Staves argues that women tended not to write such lengthy poetry (243).

the second stanza which covers the majority of the poem, Leapor repeats the idea of beauty lacking efficacy for women once they marry. Their husbands “tire” of their beauty.

In the same stanza, Leapor addresses the issue of how men and women react to an intelligent woman. Pamphilia, who is “wise” (Freemantle teases Leapor that Pamphilia is remarkably like her, which Leapor playfully denies (II.308)), despairs due to her awareness of the spite that women feel towards her and the dismay men exhibit towards a “Nymph so wise.”

Juxtaposing a significantly opposite vignette in the same stanza, Leapor sets up readers to expect a compromise. This last vignette runs as follows: if a woman possesses no avarice (a lack of desire “Instill’d by Nature, or a careful Sire?” Leapor asks), and seeks a humble companion [Cordia], she will find herself eating foul meals in filthy circumstances with an overly pious woman who dwells on the sin of pride (perhaps a jab at those who have accused Leapor of this sin), and scare beggars with her stare. Hence, companionship with no wealth is just as unappetizing as scorn for an intelligent female or a husband’s lack of interest, and lack of status once a woman marries. In the next stanza Leapor provides an alternative to these extremes. Leapor declares that if these are my options then she wants none of them. Instead she seeks a middle existence: “If this be Wealth, no matter where it falls; / But save, ye Muses, save your *Mira’s* Walls: / Still give me pleasing Indolence, and Ease; / A Fire to warm me, and a Friend to please” (II.67). Combining the comfort and independence that sufficient income provides, as well as chosen company becomes the ideal (a Katherine Philips-like existence). However, we see no mention of beauty, wit, or wealth. Assumedly, with a friend, one does not need beauty or wit, and wealth (or a sufficiency) is implied to provide the “indolence” and “ease.” Leapor confirms this idea about wealth in her letter to Freemantle discussing this poem (II.309).

Leapor concludes the poem with the following stanza, attempting to return to the idea of the universality of female experience present in “Man the Monarch”:

Since, whether sunk in Avarice, or Pride;
A wanton Virgin, or a starving Bride;
Or, wond’ring Crouds attend her charming Tongue;
Or deem’d an Idiot, ever speaks the Wrong:
Tho’ Nature arm’d us for the growing Ill,
With fraudulent Cunning, and a headstrong Will;
Yet, with ten thousand Follies to her Charge,
Unhappy Woman’s but a Slave at large. (II.67)

With this stanza Leapor attempts to indicate that the vignettes in the poem share a common feature – that women no matter what situation are subservient, assumedly to men; but the earlier vignettes themselves do not make such a consistent argument. Certainly we see how marriage erases any status women have from their beauty. Leapor contrasts this vignette nicely with her own ideal living situation, where beauty is not important to a friendship, and the friends meet as equals. But the wit and humble companion vignettes, because they include a woman’s interactions with men and women, and then just a woman, confuse the point that Leapor seems to be making in the poem about male dominance. Those vignettes imply that women are part of the problem, not just men. Leapor may very well be making that argument, but that argument implies that not all women suffer the same under male authority, and that they themselves inflict suffering on other women.

Leapor in her letter to Freemantle admits the poem is unfinished, and that she is not proficient with formal epistles, in response to a comment from Freemantle about her

inconsistency in the poem. Leapor says, “Next, great Letters are my Aversion: I could never write them well; and they always look like a Parcel of misshapen *Dutchmen*...Now to the Feast: You are not to suppose a Woman of *Corelia’s* [Cordia] Character would admit of Two Dishes upon her Table at once: No; they are separate Meals; and the Potatoes are not introduced as Sawce to the Pye.—Now, dear Madam, if you consider this, you will find nothing inconsistent there” (II.308-309). Whether Leapor meant “great Letter” in the sense of a Popean verse epistle as opposed to her handwriting, and deliberately misconstrues Freemantle’s comments about what she was inconsistent about, we will never know, but Leapor’s playful tone indicates this might be the case.

While this “inconsistency” might have been worked out had Leapor lived and continued to revise the poem, it is equally possible that Leapor saw the limits of alliance between women in situations other than the ideal one, and that avarice, jealousy, and dissatisfaction, based (in her mind perhaps) on systems beneficial to men (the seeming common denominator), cause women to suffer in different amounts, and to themselves be the cause of other women’s suffering. If this is Leapor’s argument, then it is a complex one, and we should expect it is a difficult argument to work out on the part of a young writer, even in the verse epistle form which allowed more leeway than other poetic forms. Both of these poems we should note are not written to any person in particular, thus taking away some cohesion that technique might have brought.

In contrast, Leapor’s verse epistles which offer both marriage advice and advice about being an aging beauty, are cohesively constructed³⁰. This is more than likely because while Leapor retains the formal mode of “Essay on Woman” and “Man the Monarch” in her use of Popean-style vignettes, in this case all add to the argument she is making in these poems. Also in

³⁰ “Mira to Octavio” (two versions, one in each collection), “Dorinda at her Glass” (in the first collection) and “Advice to Sophronia” (in the second collection).

these poems she addresses the poem to a person (both “Mira to Octavia’s and “Advice to Sophronia”) or has the person depicted in the poem speak to the reader directly (“Dorinda at her Glass”), which provides an overall structure.

6. Poems which Argue for Alliance Despite Class Differences

In order to argue for a female alliance despite class differences, Leapor must combine two forms in “Minutius. Artemisia. A Dialogue,” the pastoral dialogue and Hudibrastics.³¹ Utilizing tetrameter which allows a quicker pace and undercuts the pomposity (and gender and class prejudice) of the comments being made by the visiting gentleman literary critic, Leapor argues that an equal alliance between two women of different social classes is possible. The literary critic declares that he doesn’t realize how it is possible for a “Gentleman of Taste” to remain in such a place as Brackley “half a Day,” with its foul air and ugly inhabitants (excluding “one or two / Of Ladies, delicate as you,” a concession to Freemantle and Jennens). Before commenting on Leapor’s verse, he insults female writers (“(Ye Muses! fly to distant Climes, / Nor let our Spinsters scribble Rhymes)”) and female Patrons (“For you, dear Madam, I am told, / Have help’d to make the Damsel bold; / Have help’d to stain the sacred Bays, / By smiling on her foolish Lays”), accusing them of spoiling the sacred art of writing.

Mirroring comments that Freemantle makes in her prefatory letter (II.xxi-xxii, xxx-xxxi), Artemisia jumps to Mira’s defense both as a writer and person:

Your Informations are not wrong;
For I’m a Friend to *Mira*’s Song;
And love the Rhymes, altho’ I know
From whence the rude Productions flow:
Nay (what’s a Paradox to you)

³¹ These are “comic tetrameter couplets in the manner of Samuel Butler[’s *Hudibras*] and Swift” (Staves 258-9).

I likewise can the Author view;
Can bear her nigh—yet calmly sit
Without a Qualm, or fainting Fit.
But here—peruse this artless Scribble,
And sift it thro’ a Critic’s Riddle;
Then shall we taste its Beauties more,
When you have purg’d the drossy Ore;
And see the Sense distinct and plain;
The Chaff extracted from the Grain. (II.286-287)

Artemisia indicates her alliance to Mira through the word “Friend” and rebuts the gentleman’s class prejudice indicating that she is able to be in Mira’s presence without any squeamishness. Moreover Artemisia stresses Mira’s artlessness, a strategic reference to women’s traditional linkage to nature rather than art or literariness (which was associated with men), as Messenger argues above. In the process she critiques this art as artificial, obscuring the natural “Beauties” and “Sense” in Mira’s poetry, again appealing to Mira’s linkage to nature as a woman and a laboring-class person.

The critic replies disparaging Mira’s handwriting and faulty punctuation, and argues that the idea of natural genius is erroneous based on Mira’s example: “‘Tis time to lay all Science by, / If such as she must versify.” Artemisia again defends Mira, arguing that the critic is missing the point, that rather than focusing on Mira’s handwriting, the critic should focus on “Her Thought, her Language, and Invention;” and “Point out the Blemishes, and tell / Where the Lines fall, and where excel;” (II.287-288).

The critic (who is aptly named Minutius, Latin for “smallness”), rebuts Artemisia declaring that “It is the Fault of Womankind / To overlook these solid Cares, / For Wit, and Froth, and sprightly Airs.” He continues to point out punctuation problems in the verse, despite Artemisia’s “frown” and asks “Shall Crimes like these go by unheeded?” Minutius advises that Mira should be “bleeded” as she is “beside her Wits, / And scribbles in her frantic Fits.” The critic concludes: “But stay—Your Patience I offend: / I wish your Poetess would mend: / Till then, I solemnly declare, / Her Verses are not worth your Care.” (II.288-289).

Leapor borrows the anti-pastoral dialogue from Swift’s “A Pastoral Dialogue. Dermot, Sheelah,” where a male and a female laborer are weeding the garden declaring their affection for each other in vulgar, un-pastoral terms: “My Love for gentle *Dermot* faster grows / Than yon tall Dock that rises to thy Nose” (533: 13-14). Swift uses pentameter instead of the tetrameter he is known for, but the vulgar language undercuts the allusion of formality created by the structure of the dialogue (beyond the argument stanza, each portion of the dialogue is a four line stanza), and hence the idealization of the pastoral.

Drawing on Swift’s strategy of irony (created through the mixture of a traditional form and informal quick-paced language), she creates a comic villain, whose pomposity makes readers not only laugh at him, but also persuades us that an alliance or friendship between women of different class is not only possible but palatable. While the poem lacks balance, in that the critic speaks longer and more often than Artemisia, yet the length of his speech adds to his pompousness, and reinforces the idea that learned men are long-winded. Thus anything he says is suspect, while Artemisia seems reasonable and logical.

That Artemisia replies to his final speech with only a frown, adds to her genteelness and credibility. In fact, had she replied scathingly, the poem might not have been published. As it is,

it was published in the back of the second collection, buried between Leapor's tragedy and her letters. This poem also draws on the pastoral's focus on the corruption of city life versus the innocence of life in the country, so that the critic's aspersions about the country provide the framework for how readers should evaluate his comments.

One thought to bear in mind with regards to female alliance is that for Freemantle and Leapor to even meet somewhat as equals, Leapor must have enough education to understand social conventions and follow them. It is easy for Artemisia to say that she can sit with Mira in perfect comfort, but that is because Mira understands how to behave in polite company (including bathing enough so she does not smell), and has enough knowledge to hold a conversation.

That idea of leveling by education is implicit in her verse epistle "Essay on Friendship" written to Artemisia where Leapor argues that women can have lasting friendships, despite what wits say about women's variable tempers, but that they can only do so with an effort at balancing the more extreme personality attributes: "A Friend too soft will hardly prove sincere; / The Wit's inconstant, and the Learn'd severe" (l.74-75).

In addition, Leapor seems to argue that this alliance is only possible when both parties are closer in social status than not:

What mighty Pleasure, if we might presume,
To strut with Freedom in *Arvida's* Room,
Or share the Table what supreme Delight?
With some proud Dutchess or a scornful Knight,
To sit with formal and assenting Face?
For who shall dare to contradict her Grace?

Our free-born Nature hates to be confin'd,
Where State and Power check the speaking Mind;
Where heavy Pomp and sullen Form withholds
That chearful Ease and Sympathy of Souls. (I.76-77)

Thus the higher the social status of both friends in addition to any class disparity only takes away the cohesiveness and comfort of the alliance.

In fact in order to have a “Celestial Friendship,” it seems both parties must separate themselves from their social backgrounds (“But yet the Soul whate’er its Partner do, / Must lift its Head above the baser Crew. / Celestial Friendship with its nicer Rules, / Frequents not Dunghills nor the Clubs of Fools.”), and meet in middle ground with their judgment and taste moderated by “Nature” and “Heav’n.” Neither party allows “Sorrow, Sickness, or...Age” to damage the friendship, and both must be without envy or pride, and “Unmov’d can see guilt Chariots whirling by, / Or view the wretched with a melting Eye, / Discern a Failing and forgive it too: / Such, *Artemisia*, we may find in you.” (I.77-78).

In her penultimate stanza Leapor describes the process of sensibility or “social virtue” in which our feelings are shared with others and in this sharing they are eased or heightened and how that connection is worthwhile and found in a good friendship. Leapor concludes the poem indicating that while “Great Authors” and “Men of Sense” dispute much, they all agree that “Life’s great Blessing [is] a well-chosen Friend.” (I.79-80).

As a verse epistle, this is an effective poem. Unlike “Essay on Woman” Leapor ties her examples together and moves smoothly between them, so the cohesiveness of the poem adds to its message. Befitting the seriousness of the topic, Leapor moves slowly through each example, delineating each point. Like Pope, Leapor chooses heroic couplets for this poem as opposed to

octosyllabic couplets, the extra syllables adding to the leisurely pace of the poem. In her second direct address to Artemisia, Leapor deploys anti-thesis and chiasmus multiplying the impact of her point that Artemisia is the ideal friend. Yet as I claim for “Minutius. Artemisia.”, even in this poem a certain level of education and social status seems to be necessary for a celestial friendship to exist and maintain itself, but that point is not made explicit, unlike in an “Essay on Woman.” Leapor does not answer how much companionship is possible if one partner must work to feed herself, and has little free time to read or visit or how much do experiences in common allow sympathy to exist.

7. A Poem Where Female Alliance Is Limited By Education

While Mary Leapor was a gardener’s daughter, with her reading and study, she loses connections with those in her supposed social class, especially other laboring-class women. Leapor was very aware of this gap and the result is her “Epistle of Deborah Dough.” Ostensibly a verse letter written from Deborah Dough to her cousin, it is in fact Mary Leapor satirizing her own literary pretensions, essentially claiming that her poetry is mostly useful for the paper it is printed on that can be used to help corns or to relieve tooth-aches. The persona Deborah Dough stresses early on that “Neighbor *Mary*” “scribble-scribble[s]” all day long, throwing “away her precious Time / In scrawling nothing else but Rhyme; / Of which, they say, she’s might proud, / And lifts her Nose above the Croud;” (II.68-69).

Yet Deborah Dough’s own daughter Cicely “Is taller by a Foot than she, / And better learnt (as People say): / Can knit a Stocken in a Day: / Can make a Pudden, plump and rare; / And boil her Bacon, to an Hair: / Will coddle Apples nice and green, / And fry her Pancakes—like a Queen.” (II.69). These are the skills and attributes that a young woman in Leapor’s position needs (making Cicely “better learnt”).

Leapor clearly felt a distance from other women in her social class, indicated by the satire of Deborah Dough's topics and speech: "Dearly beloved Cousin, These / Are sent to thank you for your Cheese: / The Price of Oats is greatly fell: / I hope your Children all are well / (Likewise the Calf you take Delight in); / As I am at this present writing. / But I've no News to send you now; / Only I've lost my brindled Cow; / And that has greatly sunk my Dairy:" (II.68). This is hardly like the letters Leapor writes to her friend Bridget Freemantle, the daughter of a vicar.

In this poem, Leapor again deploys the tetrameter couplet but this time in combination with the verse letter. Bearing in mind Overton's categories of verse epistle, this poem falls under the verse letter side of the spectrum, by its inclusion of an opening and salutation, and a level of informality heightened by the more "vulgar" speech than found in "Essay on Friendship" for instance. Leapor effectively conveys the real divisions the education and learning of one woman caused between her and other laboring-class women. Leapor could not have achieved this specificity with more pastoral, idealized language, and so astutely she chose the verse letter form with tetrameter couplets.

8. A Poem Where Female Alliance Is Limited by Class Divisions

If Leapor's friendship with Bridget Freemantle seemingly lacked divisions based on their relative class difference, this is not the case with Leapor's friendship with Susanna Jennens. Part of the issue with Jennens is that Leapor at one time worked as a kitchen-maid or house-maid for her, and Jennens came from a landed family, and so the gap in the relative social status was greater than that between Freemantle and Leapor. This disparity is reflected in the poetry that Leapor writes concerning her friendship with Jennens. In particular, the poem "The Muses Embassy" aesthetically demonstrates the gap between them. This poem is written in Hudibrastic

tetrameter, but it is a pastoral as well. It is narrative in nature, and describes how the Muses sent Iris to scour the earth for a poet, and she in turn finds Mira “An humble, but fertile Dame, / Who brought forth Infants, two and two; / But such no Creature ever knew: / With Scars and Botches blemish’d o’er; / Some hump’d behind, and some before; / And Cripples in the last Degree, / Some ne’er a Foot, and some had three.” (II.276-277).

Feeling pity for them, Iris takes them to Parthenissa [Jennens]³² “To form their Bodies, and their Minds, / Till they should flourish into Rhymes;” and reports her find to the Muses. They ask her to whom she sent the rhymes and she declares Parthenissa. At this point the poem turns into a panegyric in which the Muses sing praise to Parthenissa. One muse declares “I’m not a Stranger to her Name: / Nor had I sent, if you must know, / Swift *Iris* to the World below, / The drowsy Nation to explore, / But to enhance her Fame the more” (II.277-278).

At this point in the poem, Leapor seems to indicate that Jennens had a daughter (perhaps the reason for the poem?) and that the Muses declare that Polhymnia is a “Beauteous Darling of the Nine!” (II.279). Panegyrics are cloying to modern tastes, but considering the purpose of the poem (the birth of Jennens’ daughter), praise is expected. Where the poem indicates divisions in the alliance or friendship between Leapor and Jennens is in Leapor’s use of specific satirical language regarding her poetry and the idealized language she uses to describe Jennens. This stark difference highlights the gap between Leapor and Jennens, but also between laboring-class writers and those women who mentored them. The poetry that Ann Yearsley initially wrote to Hannah More is even more cloying. Leapor clearly admired Jennens’ literary knowledge, but there is no sense of equality or ease in this representation of their friendship. While Leapor wrote poetry which incorporated laudatory phrasing to Artemisia (or Freemantle), that phrasing is comfortable and playful, indicating a more equal friendship.

³² See Greene 13-14 and Rizzo “Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence” 322 for the identification of Parthenissa as Susanna Jennens.

This commendatory poem demonstrates the tension that class and education potentially bring into a creative alliance between women, but it also demonstrates Leapor's conflation of her poetry and her social position. Because Leapor feels extreme doubt about her poetic endeavors, due to her social position, she links the fruits of those endeavors to the children she more than likely would have had, if she had lived and married. Conflating the upper class perception that all children of workers are dirty, deformed, and scarred, her poetry (her intellectual children) must therefore be equally dirty, deformed, and scarred. While Leapor attempts to make her poetry as good as her model Alexander Pope's, whose own insecurities she knew of from his poetry and identified with,³³ she ultimately seems to feel she has not achieved this standard, at least rhetorically.

This seeming lack of self-confidence in her work hardly lends itself to an assertive feminist stance on female authorship. Yet, when reading the work where Leapor does not discuss her writing, we see a confident, critical, and assertive writer. While her authorial persona may have been filled with doubt about the social acceptableness of her writing, Leapor was unafraid to write in a diversity of poetic forms, and to exploit the irony available in those forms. She appreciated complexity and that shows in her aesthetic choices. She has come to be a semi-canonical writer because of these risks.

³³ See Chaden 34-35 where she discusses Leapor's "The Libyan Hunter, A Fable: Inscrib'd to the Memory of a Late Admir'd Author" and Pope's *An Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*.

IV. Mary Leapor: A Writer Who Transcends and Maintains Her Origins³⁴

In the previous chapter, I discussed Mary Leapor's model of authorship and her work with pastoral and verse epistle forms. As I argue, one of the key components of Leapor's model is her poetic experimentation, and she did not restrict herself to these forms. She is also known for her revision of the country house poem and her experiment with the mock-epic. In *Crumble Hall* Leapor critiques the idealization of the country house and the relationship between those who reside in it to it and each other, and in *Mopsus, or the Castle Builder* she offers a reading on the complex nature of social advancement (including her anxiety about her own status). Neither of these poems directly criticizes the hierarchical social order, but Leapor's use of ironic characterization and choice of ironic verse form allows readers to glean multiple readings, including critical ones.

Due to the autobiographical subtext of *Mopsus*, Leapor's choice of the mock-epic to depict the theoretical pitfalls of attempts at social elevation by the laboring classes is particularly intriguing. Leapor wrote many poems depicting her anxiety about publication and her potential social mobility, but none of this length. The length and choice of form seem to indicate both the importance of these topics as well the potential for catastrophic failure about which Leapor worries. The hybrid nature of the mock-epic form itself allows both self-expression and self-censure as well as humor, correlating with Leapor's authorial model.

1. *Mopsus* and the Mock-Epic

As a mock-epic, *Mopsus* shares features of the epic including heroic or elevated language, epic set-pieces such as epic battles and an overall epic structure in which the hero experiences "a series of ordeals." As a satirical form it also has a target, in this case Mopsus' pretensions towards social mobility. Mopsus certainly undergoes "a series of ordeals" that

³⁴All poems, prefatory materials and letters are from Mary Leapor *Poems Upon Several Occasions*. 2 volumes. London: J. Roberts, 1748, 1751.

reshape his worldview including a metaphorical visit to the underworld, and a return to the community that remains as he left it (Terry 2-3; Lord 5-6). These ordeals consist of the following circular episodes.

1) Mopsus, bored with his mundane existence, dreams of being a wealthy man, and attempts to woo the local landowner's daughter, who is frightened, screams, and her servants then beat Mopsus. Mopsus returns to his father's cottage humiliated by the landowner, his servants, and the local villagers. Chastised, Mopsus hides safely inside until he starts to dream of wealth again, and departs for London at night (with his father's quarter rent in his pocket—thirty guineas).

2) After an uneventful journey Mopsus arrives, and within minutes—seemingly, a Madam, part of a criminal gang, proceeds to dupe Mopsus, by luring him to a house with promises of a wealthy wife. Once there the gang drugs him, steals his money, and deserts him. He is found alone sleeping in the house by the police, who arrest him and send him to gaol. Mopsus, distraught, writes to his parents, who send him money, enough to bribe the gaoler and then some.

3) Viscount Simper who has heard of Mopsus, and his naivety, lures him to his house, with the services of a seer and his servant, again with promises of a wealthy wife. Simper fobs his pregnant mistress off on Mopsus; he pretends she is his sister. Mopsus marries her, is ridiculed by Simper's servants, his wife gives birth to the Viscount's baby five days later, she soon leaves him for another protector, and the baby dies. Out of money, Mopsus returns to the country, the prodigal son, embraced by his family and the local villagers, and described by Leapor as having "a peaceful Mind.... / Grown grave by Sorrow; by Experience wise" (II.42).

We notice that in each section of the poem, Mopsus abuses but is also saved by his parents' generosity.

Mopsus, similar to the social status of its eponymous hero, has received small critical attention, in comparison to Leapor's ironic pastorals and *Crumble Hall*. Richard Greene argues that this poem is a "satire on her own ambitions" (*Mary Leapor* 145). Specifically, while the country (representing her current life) is safe, it is also moribund, and while the city (representing patronage and/or ambition) has possibilities, it is also exploitative. Greene concludes "*Mopsus* can be seen not only as a pastoral retreat from ambition, but also a firm recognition of the hazards of patronage" (146-148)³⁵. Greene notes in passing that Leapor owes a "debt" to Samuel Butler: "Her poem *Mopsus* depicts a comic knight-errantry which recalls *Hudibras*" (175).

In fact in *Mopsus, or The Castle Builder* Leapor adeptly fuses the dominant cultural aesthetics of the mock-heroic with a laboring class subtext, effectively conveying not only Leapor's anxiety about publication, but also her ambivalence about the social elevation of someone from the laboring-class. While her poem utilizes a dominant aesthetics that supports dominant cultural values and norms, she provides brief glimpses (of a message) that allow readers to appreciate the net value of pursuing unrealistic ambitions (when one is from a marginalized group), that of life learning. She picks a form the mock-heroic that allows such fluidity and incongruity (and thus irony) between subject and aesthetics, so that multiple messages can be read.

³⁵ Both Dustin Griffin (201-203) and Susanne Kord (235-239) make a similar argument, and Christmas links the circumstances of the poem's creation to his argument concerning Leapor's efforts to redefine writing as work. Other than Greene, Griffin's, Kord's and Christmas' individual studies make no mention of the link between the mock-heroic and *Mopsus*. Greene and Kord are the only scholars of the four to discuss *Mopsus*' generic characteristics which they both identify as pastoral. Certainly *Mopsus*, as a mock-epic will contain pastoral elements, just as it will contain elements of other types of poetry. What is intriguing is Leapor's choice of this form to chronicle her anxieties about publication and potential social elevation, as I demonstrate in this chapter.

Leapor's choice of the mock-heroic genre for this poem puts her squarely in the dominant literary tradition of deploying burlesque and satire, in particular for didactic purposes. Various critics have argued that Butler, Dryden, Samuel Garth, and Pope used the mock-heroic to make arguments about not just literary or political issues, but social as well including gender roles and the role of politeness in British society and a very real dispute concerning the establishment of a dispensary for the poor (providing low-cost medications) which was opposed by physicians and apothecaries, *MacFlecknoe*, *The Dispensary*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and *The Dunciad* respectively (Terry "Epic and Mock-Heroic" 366). While Leapor herself is part of the cultural transformations taking place at the time, her reverence for neo-classical authors like Pope and Dryden (and thus their aesthetic models and the values inherent in those) plays a major part in her ambivalence towards social elevation and broader social change. These attitudes are reflected in her work, particularly *Mopsus*. Leapor is particularly indebted to Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, in her characterization of Mopus, as well as her depiction of female characters, and in the "ordeals" that Mopsus experiences, as I will discuss below.

As with any literary phenomenon, scholars disagree about what exactly constitutes a mock-heroic. However most would argue that a mock-heroic (sometimes called a mock-epic) is derived from several types of poetry, including the long narrative poem, the satire, the epic, the allegory, and the fable, to name the most obvious.³⁶ Its technical elements include such characteristics of heroic poetry as its epic and/or fabulistic purpose and structure, heroic set-pieces and settings (i.e. epic battle, hero's descent into the underworld), and heroic language

³⁶ Ulrich Broich indicates at least "five literary forms... comedy, occasional poetry, epic, parody, and satire" (37).

combined with the realism of satire reworked to satirize and comment on a contemporary social phenomenon (a “low” topic).³⁷

While the topic of social elevation may seem significant and not “low” at all to present-day readers, this was not the case at the time (1740s). Social elevation, though it occurred was not recognized by the polite until at least a few to several generations had passed in the elevated family, once those origins were so far in the past, one could forget them. Pope in his *Essay on Man* demonstrates a strong belief in the great chain of being. People who espoused this belief postulated that the existing hierarchy was natural (ordained by God) and beneficial to societies and communities and to the individuals themselves. Leapor was no different. So, Leapor’s utilization of such a “low” character like Mopsus (a respectable tenant farmer’s son who received more education than was good for his place in life) (II.11-12) to demonstrate pitfalls of social elevation automatically lowers the subject matter of the poem. Mopsus’ attempts at social elevation represent the contemporary social phenomenon, and his downfall represents the reassertion of dominant aesthetic and social values.

Yet this self-same dominant aesthetics allows readers to derive multiple and often contradictory arguments about the poem’s message (Broich 45, Colomb 7, and Terry *Mock-Heroic* 2-3). Mixture, incongruity, and contradiction are inherent in the form, hence in its ultimate “truth” or message. In the case of *Mopsus*, the aesthetics of the mock-heroic seem to support the dominant cultural idea of maintaining the social position one is born into, in that Leapor uses heroic language and mirrors epic structure to argue against attempts at social elevation by the laboring classes. Yet the prodigal son fable (one influence on this poem) and at times the epic purpose/structure itself allow readers to give value to his attempts at social

³⁷ See Richard Bond’s *English Burlesque Poetry 1700-1750*, Ian Jack’s “Mock-Heroic: *MacFlecknoe*,” George deForest Lord’s *Trials of the Self: Heroic Ordeals in the Epic Tradition and Classical Presences in Seventeenth-Century English Poetry*, Ulrich Borich’s *The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem*, Gregory Colomb’s *Designs on Truth: The Poetics of the Augustan Mock-Epic*, and Richard Terry’s “Epic and Mock-Heroic” and *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper: An English Genre and Discourse*.

elevation because in the end he becomes “content” and a contributing member of his community. Mopsus would not have learned this valuable lesson had he remained at home discontented.

Richard Terry discusses just this aesthetic dichotomy inherent in the mock-epic form in his study *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*. While contemporary critics felt that elevated or heroic language elevated a poem’s subject matter (the positive correlation between a work’s form and content assumed to be apparent at the time), Terry contends that in mock-heroics (particularly those by Pope and Dryden), authors seemingly elevate the subject (via language, epic structure, and epic set-pieces) in order to actually deflate its importance (2-3).³⁸

That Mopsus finds himself in the epic form, accompanied by the epic’s elevated language and set-pieces, only heightens the ridiculousness of his pretensions, just as Leapor’s expectation that readers’ comparison of Mopsus with epic heroes does. Mopsus, like Sir Hudibras, MacFlecknoe, Shadwell, Theobald, and Cibber are ridiculous figures, especially when compared to Odysseus or Aeneas. In Mopsus’ case, his low social origin only makes him more so. Yet, in this poem, Leapor actually uses the epic structure of “descent and return” as described by Lord (see footnote 5), for *Mopsus*, as opposed to the mock-epic trajectory of “descent.” Her tone is satirical and the scrapes that Mopsus finds himself in are farcical, yet he eventually ends his journey where he started, in the country working for his father (his origin). Thus Leapor’s poem allows multiple mixed “truths” to be read from it.

³⁸ Closely related to Terry’s concept of elevation and deflation, George deForest Lord in *Classical Presences in Seventeenth-Century Poetry* argues that in at least Dryden and Pope’s case (regarding *MacFlecknoe* and the *Dunciad*), the *Aeneid*’s structural “pattern of descent and return” is restructured as the hero descends with no return (185). The “elevation” is superficial, made so by the elevated language and successful completion of heroic tasks by the protagonist of the poem. Yet, Shadwell and Cibber, and Theobald really do not advance at all because their achievements (based on faulty literary and political premises) are empty; thus their elevation is really deflation (or “descent”).

Dryden satirizes the literary taste of Richard Flecknoe and Thomas Shadwell, thus undercutting their real public success (at least Shadwell’s). According to entries in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* for John Dryden and Alexander Pope, Shadwell became poet laureate, partly due to his Whig and Protestant connections, in 1688, subsequent to the dissemination of Dryden’s poem in 1682. Dryden also undercuts the taste of those who admire Shadwell and later elevate him. In Pope’s case, Lewis Theobald the hero of the first and second editions of the *Dunciad* (1728, 1729), became a target of Pope’s due to his editorial decisions in Theobald and Pope’s competing editions of the works of Shakespeare, which differed from Pope’s. Colley Cibber becomes Pope’s second hero in the later version of the *Dunciad* (1743), due to Cibber’s unfavorable contemporary literary reputation, as well as for his political appointment as poet laureate in 1730. In both cases, the literary (and political) society that elevates Theobald and Cibber is ridiculed by its support for these figures.

This mixture begins with the external structure of the poem. *Mopsus* follows a fable format, which is characteristic of both epics and mock-heroics. Colomb calls the external structure or “organizing principle” of a mock-heroic a “literalized metaphor.” Thus the fictional actions, the settings, and the relationships depicted must match in broad outlines the topic and precepts for which the poem is written (7, 21). This outline includes the characterization of the hero. Readers must recognize the hero and his purpose in the poem (his type), which means that while he must display general human characteristics (especially those that help or hinder his social development), the author cannot make him too distinctive. Otherwise his universality (i.e. readers’ ability to see themselves in him) and hence the lesson they are supposed to learn is diminished. Also, according to Broich classical literary tradition demanded that literary examples follow this pattern of generality, but the satirical component of the mock-heroic countered this requirement. Satire requires a level of realism in these depictions, so that the objects or relationships depicted are identifiable to those personally involved. For example, Garth’s *The Dispensary* depicts actual figures involved in the dispute physically fighting each other, and Garth provides clues about the identity of the figures. Yet even this example of what Broich calls “disguise” (or generalizing the actors, settings, and relationships in the poem) is necessary for the purposes of decorum and politeness (see chapter 2 of his book particularly 45). So generality or disguise served two masters: classical tradition and decorum.

That Leapor was clearly aware of the classical traditions regarding disguise and the “literalized metaphor” is apparent by her comments to Bridget Freemantle (her main patron and friend). Discussing *Mopsus*, she says “I am to confess, that I have drawn my own Picture in many Places where I have described this unlucky Hero. But it is a kind of popular Piece, and may serve for many a real *Mopsus*” (II.316). Leapor almost seems apologetic that *Mopsus* the

hero is too much like her, and thus identifiable³⁹. However, in the next sentence she indicates the universality of the poem and its topic, that others will see themselves in her hero and his adventures and relationships. In fact Mopsus is a universal type, and his dreams are not that unusual, bearing in mind the social unacceptability of a laboring-class person expressing these wishes.

Leapor establishes her literalized metaphor in the first two lines of the poem: “In Days of yore, ere *Britons* grew too wise / To court proud Fortune, or believe in Lyes, / A Youth was born, his Father’s only Son / (Well for his Sire he had no more than one).” (II.11). Leapor indicates that the effects of the pursuit of fortune and gullibility are the lessons of this fable. We know from the title (“Mopsus; or, *The Castle-Builder*”), that Mopsus is the unsatisfactory son described and that his journey is the narrative demonstrating the metaphor or the argument. Leapor, following classical tradition unites precept and action. Everything that Mopsus symbolizes and experiences is related to the argument being made, and there are no digressions (Colomb 21). Leapor does this by combining the prodigal son parable from the Old Testament with an epic format and set-pieces.

Eighteenth-century readers would be familiar with both of these. As we know, the prodigal son of the parable, leaves home bored, wealthy and selfish, and returns poor and humble, and contrite. The epic structure and set-pieces that Leapor use consist of the following: a “battle, celestial intervention, lamentation, [and the] ... Opportunity for satirical portrayal of contemporary practices and personalities ” (Bond 13), as well as “a prognosticatory dream,...and a descent into a deathly underworld” (Terry “Epic and Mock-Heroic” 362).

³⁹ Compare one of Mopsus’ day-dreams to a joking comment Leapor makes in a letter to Freemantle when her verses are first sent to London: “By Slaves attended; drawn by shining Wheels; / With flowing Purple at his graceful Heels; / with royal Gold his manly Temples crown’d; / And thus the *Monarch* took his awful Round;” (II.12) and “I presume this will take up as much of my superfluous Wealth as I can spare from the Extravagance of a gay Retinue and splendid Equipage, in which I intend to abound” (II.312).

In addition Leapor seems to follow the overall narrative pattern of the epic in which “the success of the hero in search of himself and his success in restoring or preserving his culture” are paramount (Lord *Trials* 1). In the process the hero undergoes “a series of ordeals” which involve him “leaving home with its protective but unchallenging milieu.” He must enter “another world, usually repellent or monstrous, with incidental encounters with hostile or apotropaic figures that Jung calls threshold guardians. The other world is typically transpersonal and supernatural and often the land of the dead.” Normally the hero “has a guide or some other source of secret knowledge that allows him to travel through an underworld normally forbidden to mortals. On his journey he acquires a mystical understanding of the past and the future that will afterward aid him, as an individualized self, in his efforts to return to his society and reform or establish it or create a new society” (Lord *Trials* 5-6). As I will demonstrate below, while Mopsus’ battles and travels through the underworld are metaphorical, he does enter a hostile world where he cannot survive. In the process he learns to temper his ambition, and to rejoin his community.

As I noted above, Leapor utilizes the basic narrative arc of the parable of the prodigal son for this poem, even though there are three essential differences, the first being Mopsus steals his father’s quarter rent money (30 guineas), as opposed to being given it, he has no jealous sibling, and he is assisted while he is away from home by his parents. However both the prodigal son and Mopsus share distaste for the mundaneness of their lives, and return home penniless and starving. Admittedly, the prodigal son works once he spends his inheritance, and still starves and then goes home very repentant, and Mopsus really only goes home because he has run out of money, and his repentance seems superficial. In fact, Leapor describes Mopsus as repentant, but her language is fairly offhand and thus less convincing than the language used in the parable. Leapor says:

Thus happier *Mopsus* lost the Scourge of Life
 (So Unbelievers often term a Wife):
 The slighted Infant too resign'd its Breath,
 And sought* its Refuge in the Arms of Death.
 Now pressive Want induc'd the longing Swain,
 Once more to seek his late despised Plain:
 According *, ere the regent Prince of Day
 Through the cold *Scorpion* drove his shorten'd Ray
 Repentant *Mopsus* trudg'd before the Wind,
 And left the City and his Woes behind.
 No shining Slaves his weary Steps attend,
 A Scrip his Substance, and a Staff his Friend:
 No more these Visions in his Bosom swell;
 For his sick Heart has bid the Court Farewel. (II.41)⁴⁰

Mopsus seems more repentant about the cold wind he is walking into and that his journey is considerably less grand than an epic hero's, than repentant for stealing his father's rent money or the death of the infant. It is his hurt pride and the fact he ambitions could not be achieved that drive his repentance.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son finishes as follows:

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my
 father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will
 arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned
 against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy

⁴⁰ Freemantle notes that the asterisk indicated words that Leapor meant to revise later (II.17)

son: make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. (*King James Bible Online*, Luke 15.17-24).

As we can see the prodigal son is considerably less selfish than Mopsus, and this is reflected in the language of the passage. The son actually apologizes and supplicates himself to his father. Significantly while the Bible passage does not describe the son's behavior after his return (i.e. does he in fact work diligently?), Leapor implies Mopsus' contribution to the work of the farm:

Here with calm Virtue, and a peaceful Mind,
In rural Plenty, dwells the sober Hind:
His equal Days in one smooth Tenor run;
The same at rising as declining Sun:
No more Delusions in his Fancy rise,
Grown grave by Sorrow; by Experience wise. (II.42)

So Mopsus becomes part of the routine of the community, in a way that he was not at the beginning of the poem, where he day-dreamt much of the time. Like other heroes, he learns from

his “ordeals” and returns to preserve (or become part of) his culture (albeit a culture that does not elevate him).

In addition to external narrative structure of the epic, Leapor adapts the epic set-pieces I noted above. Like her predecessors Butler, Dryden, and Pope, Leapor carefully deflates Mopsus’ pretensions, by significantly reworking the battle, the visit to the underworld, the threshold guardians, the lamentation, celestial intervention and the prognosticatory dream. In addition she cleverly integrates romance/heroic allusions and triplets into her iambic pentameter, further increasing the distance of Mopsus from succeeding at his ambitions.

While Pope in *The Rape* makes a battle scene out of card and tea party, Leapor ironizes the heroic formula in the set-up and aftermath to the actual “battle” as it relates to a country laborer. Her description of Mopsus as he prepares to approach Alethia, the daughter of the local landowner is understated especially compared to Alethia’s reaction on first seeing him:

When daring *Mopsus* left the sleeping Crew.
With Face clean wash’d, and in his best Array,
In quest of Fortune, took his desp’rate Way.
.....
Across that Path the Virgin chanc’d to roam,
Which led our *Mopsus* tow’rd the lofty Dome.
The Youth, whose Features own’d the mute Surprise,
*Stood like a Post**, and fix’d his stupid Eyes:
The conscious Nymph beheld him with a Frown;
And turn’d aside, to shun the gazing Clown: (II.16-17)

Not only does Leapor omit a description of Mopsus' "best Array," but his looks and demeanor fail to draw the damsel's admiration. In fact, she ignores him until he tries to speak to her. With a foolish gesture of romance (because he's too "low" to be a hero of romance),

He first accosts her with a Scrape profound,
And made his Bonnet kiss the humble Ground.
"Madam, I find the Gipsy's Words are true;
And my kind stars have sent me here to You:
It must be You, because you are so fair:
Your Eyes are black, and so's your curling Hair.
I pray forgive me—Though my Birth be low,
'Tis vain to struggle with the Fates, you know." (II.17-18)

Unlike romances, where Alethia would immediately recognize Mopsus as her mate, through his "disguise" as a country laborer, instead she screams for her servants. They come to her assistance and proceed to beat Mopsus in a Butlerian manner:

The soft Valet that scented of Perfume,
The sturdy Keeper, and the dirty Groom,
On wretched *Mopsus* each his Fury throws,
And round his Temples rain'd a Storm of Blows;
Hands, Canes, and Clubs together chiming in,
Till his Bones rattled in his batter'd Skin.
Then sorely bruis'd, they drag the Youth along,
Whose Eyes alone implore the cruel Throng;
For mighty Fear had stopt his feeble Tongue. (II.18-19)

While the passage does not explicitly reference Romance conventions, Leapor knows astute readers would recognize the lack of Romance machinery in the description of Mopsus' one and only battle. Leapor does not provide a description of his weapons, his attire (except a reference earlier to "his best array"), or his preparations for battle. Instead Leapor paints a very brief description of his beating at the hands of a "soft" and "perfumed" valet, a gamekeeper and a groom, who are hardly Romance antagonists, although they are certainly more comparable to Mopsus in terms of rank than knights or titled servants.⁴¹

Leapor completes this stanza with a triplet, which emphasizes Mopsus' helplessness and fear, and undercuts his heroic pretensions (he is no Achilles). More than likely she learned this technique from Dryden. According to Ian Jack, in "Mock-Heroic: *MacFlecknoe*," Dryden used triplets in *MacFlecknoe* to deflate the object of ridicule and his or her pretensions, by elevating the language. Jack argues that the elevation adds "authority to the condemnation" (428, 432). Yet Leapor does not stop the ridicule here. She heightens it further in Mopsus' "confrontation" with Alethia's father:

The Slaves, obedient to their Master's Call,
Conduct their Victim to the spacious Hall:
Coreilus frown'd, and with a haughty Air
First ask'd his Name, and next his Business there.
The Youth, whose Cheeks betray'd his growing Fears,
From his wan Eye-balls pour'd a Flood of Tears,
Confess'd the Project of his teeming Brain,
And told the late Adventure of the Plain.

⁴¹ See Butler's *Hudibras* in particular the section where Sir Hudibras consults the oracle, and visits the widow where he is beaten up and thrown out.

Then smil'd the Baron, and address'd the Swain: (II.19)

Leapor is careful to pick a neo-classical and regal-sounding name for Alethia's father, emblematic of the social distance between them. Like his daughter, Coreilus fails to recognize in Mopsus any gentility much less any heroic characteristics, so much so that Mopsus has to explain his actions. Leapor again deploys a triplet, as well as overstatement with heroic terminology ("Project," "Adventure of the Plain," "Swain"), introducing Mopsus to further shared ridicule (between Leapor and readers). Leapor completes Mopsus' humiliation with Coreilus' catalogue of heroic feats that Mopsus must complete in order to win his daughter, feats it is clear that Mopsus did not have in mind when he began his "Adventure". In fact Mopsus dreamt and daydreamed about the privileges of wealth, not the heroic challenges he would have to undergo to earn them (see II.12-13).

Coreilus concludes by gently chiding that if these tasks are too frightening, then Mopsus needs to return to his origins. Coreilus seems intentionally to provide an idyllic description of Mopsus' life, where Mopsus guards his sheep ("snowy fold") from heat and cold, as well as tends to the pigs like the Prodigal son in Luke and poultry of the farm ("Let thy white Pigs and tender Poultry share / Thy lov'd Assistance, and thy daily Care:"), concluding that Mopsus should "From hungry Vermin guard thy Autumn Store, / And trust those tawny Oracles no more" (II. 20). Coreilus' description compares to any of the pastorals or georgics written at the time (including some of Leapor's), and his euphuistic description of Mopsus' life juxtaposed with the description of the type of battles he would have to fight in order to win Alethia's hand further undercuts Mopus' pretensions. Coreilus (as a representative of dominant culture) seems to be arguing that because Mopsus has little to no courage to fight or fight back when pursuing a lady's

hand, as evidenced by his recent defeat, this reveals that Mopsus is essentially a passive, peaceful shepherd who should not attempt to be something he is not, a nobleman in disguise.

It is significant that Leapor utilizes two triplets within as many pages. This, in combination with her juxtaposition of romance and heroic conventions with Mopsus' social origins, and her deployment of Coreilus as a "threshold guardian," Leapor creates a cumulative effect of authoritative "condemnation." Coreilus clearly bars Mopsus from social elevation by using ridicule, creating a world "usually repellent or monstrous." And at this point, Mopsus has not even left home "with its [up until now] protective but unchallenging milieu" (Lord *Trials* 5). Then Leapor introduces a few more threshold guardians:

Here ceas'd the Baron; but the noisy Train
With loud Huzza's pursue the baffled Swain;
Who sought his Cottage with afflicted Mind,
And left *Alethia* and the Rout behind.

No wretched *Mopsus* through the neighb'ring Towns
The Sport of Milkmaids, and the Jest of Clowns,
Abhors the Beams of all-reviving Light,
And hides in Corners, like the Bird of Night (II.21)

In this case, the locals perform a kind of "rough music" (Thompson 467). While they are not "hostile or apotropaic," (Lord *Trials* 6) they fulfill the basic function of keeping Mopsus in his place, so much so that he hides and ultimately leaves for London.

Not only does Mopsus fail to advance in an entrenched traditional agricultural society, he cannot do so in an urban one either. His naivety, as it does in the country, prevents this, and while he is ingloriously forced into a metaphorical underworld, he fails to learn how to survive,

much less how to elevate himself in this urban milieu. Leapor does not provide a guide to help him navigate this underworld and urban environment. This deliberate absence indicates that, yet again, his social origins seem to prohibit any type of social elevation (rationalized by the philosophy of the great chain of being and the idea that country laborers are simple by nature, so that they should not try to change their social and economic status, and moreover, they do not have the intellect to do so most of the time).⁴²

After an uneventful journey (as Leapor is careful to indicate distinguishing his journey from an epic hero's), Mopsus arrives hungry to London. He has learned (for the moment) to be wary of the people in Mansions, and so is afraid to approach any of them for sustenance.

Leapor describes Mopsus' disorientation as he experiences the noise and bustle of London, indicating his arrival to "another world, usually repellent or monstrous, with incidental encounters with hostile or apotropaic figures that Jung calls threshold guardians...and [is] often the land of the dead" (Lord *Trials* 6):

From Street to Street he wander'd thro' the Croud,
Much wond'ring how they durst to bawl so loud:
He'd often start, expecting ev'ry Scream
Would wake a Countess in her Morning Dream.

Now *Chloe*, who sat up till Four at Play,
Make shift by Twelve to rise, and drink her Tea
The busy Footman with their How-d'ye's run:
The Park grew brilliant, and the rolling Sun
In his meridian Throne began to shine,

⁴² For example, see Bernard Mandeville's "An Essay on Charity, and Charity-schools" in *The Fable of the Bees*: "Ignorance is, to a Proverb, counted to be the Mother of Devotion, and it is certain that we shall find Innocence and Honesty no where more general than among the most illiterate, the poor silly Country People."

And *Mopsus*' Stomach call'd aloud for Chine.

Then by a Stall, where tempting Apples lay,

He took his station, and resolv'd to stay,

Till Fortune, still propitious to the Bold,

Should lead him somewhere, e'er the Meat was cold. (II.25)

His urban adventure and visit to the underworld begins immediately. Within minutes of his arrival in the market, a seasoned Madam (his first urban threshold guardian), who is also part of a thieving gang spots him, sizes him up, and approaches him:

It chanc'd a rev'rend Dame was passing by,

.....

She understood her Business to a Hair;

Knew to a Penny what her Stocks would bear:

When ruin'd Beauty to her Mart came in;

A wise Director in the Bank of Sin.

This Beldam view'd him as an easy Prey,

That little Pains required to betray:

Drew near the Serpent, and her practis'd Guile,

With a low Court'sy, and a fawning Smile.

Hail, Fortune's Fav'rite, whom she courts so young! (II.25-26)

Utilizing an exaggerated rhetoric that only a fool would believe, the Madam successfully woos him, claiming to be the agent of a beautiful rich young heiress who has fallen in love with him:

Fresh as the Fields from whence thy Beauty Sprung

I come, induc'd by charitable Laws,

To plead in Love and Beauty's gentle Cause.
 A Nymph there is, excelling half her Kind,
 In charming Features, and a sprightly Mind.
 Nay, more, attend to what I next unfold;
 Ten thousand Pounds of all-enchanting Gold
 A doating Grandame left her, when she dy'd:
 How blest the Youth that wins the blooming Bride!
 But let me now thy strict Attention hold,
 For Truths like these should be in Whispers told:
 Thy artless Charms have won the smiling Dame,
 Who for thy sake refuses Wealth and Fame.
 Now speak thy Mind, sweet Youth, and let me bear
 A gentle Sentence to the doubting Fair. (II.26-27)

Believing the Madam completely, Mopsus follows her to a mansion where Celia (a whore) waits and cajoles Mopsus, and over the course of the evening, Mopsus drinks to excess (or is drugged?): "While our brisk Youth, unread in future Harms, / In the gay Bumpers toasted *Celia's* Charms." Alluding to Mopsus' lack of prophetic guidance, he becomes drunk and passes out: "His careless Head against the Table fell, / And his dim Eye-balls bid the World farewell: / With Joy the Damsel heard her Victim snore, / And from his Purse extracts the shining Ore" (II.28-29).

Mopsus wakes the next day, abandoned in the house, as he is arrested by the authorities who were searching for an escaped thief. Despite his pleas of innocence he is thrown in gaol because "For tho' no Witness of his Guilt appear, / 'Twas thought sufficient that they found him

there.” With his metaphorical death, Mopsus becomes homesick and “Exclaims at Fate, and blames the cruel Pow’rs;” eventually imagining his “injur’d Father” and his “Mother’s Tears” (II.29-30). Leapor’s tone undercuts his actual suffering (and “lament”). Having eaten the previous night, he is starving in the morning, and fears he will continue to starve, which prompts him to write to his parents to inform them of his misfortune, and to beg for “Mercy” or else he will “die” in prison. Deploying a practical intervention as opposed to celestial, Leapor’s description of his letter and his parents’ response drips with irony for his selfishness and for his parents’ generosity, especially after he stole their rent money for his journey to London:

He wrote a Letter with his trembling Hand,
Whose homely Phrase in little, writ, could show
A Son’s Misfortunes, and a Father’s Woe;
*Exploring** how he must in Prison die
Without their Mercy, and a small Supply.
These Lines arriv’d, to wound a Father’s Eyes:
And his sad Mother fills the Air with Cries:
Her stately Cheeses in a trice were sold:
Her Husband turn’d his Oxen into Gold:
Then, with a Caution to be wild no more,
They to their Darling send the welcome Ore. (II.30-31)

Leapor’s scathing description of Mopsus when he receives the money and the fact he has not learned humility or caution guides the reader to share in a desire for Mopsus’ comeuppance, which quickly follows:

Now struts the Youth—His Suff’rings at an End;

The Prince of *Bridewel*, and the Ruler's Friend.

A pow'rful Guinea brib'd the Keeper's Will:

He gain'd his Freedom; and the Law was still.

A Peer there was within the Skirts of Fame,

A Viscount; *Simper* was the Hero's Name;

A gentle Lord, much honour'd by the Fair

For his rich Sword-knot, and his curling Hair.

This Chief, while luckless *Mopsus* was confin'd,

Had learn'd the Story of our wand'ring Hind:

A Fool he wanted long; but never yet

Judg'd one so aptly for his Purpose fit.

Whether by Chance, or by the Fates Decree,

Uncertain, *Mopsus*—but he fix'd on thee. (II.31)

Leapor's tone in the last few lines in particular indicate an authorial glee (and which readers share) for the richly deserved lesson which follows in the last section of the poem. As part of the setup for this section, Leapor borrows a character from Butler's *Hudibras*. Viscount Simper pays Sir Sidrophel to prepare Mopsus for his con (persuading Mopsus to marry his pregnant mistress). Mopsus, clearly not remembering the consequences of his last encounter with a seer, is easy prey:

This Greeting past—Sir *Sidrophel* began.

O happy Youth! Couldst thou behold, like me,

What the kind Stars have now in Store for thee!

What Time fair *Venus* triumph'd o'er thy *Form*,*

In the same House a noble Lord was born.
 Nay, hold—cries *Mopsus*—by my Father's Sins,
 I think you're wrong—my Mother ne'er had Twins:
 I came that Year my Father built his Barns;
 Old *Winfred* bore me squalling in her Arms.
 'Twas *Valentine*, of all the Days i'th' Year,
 As I remember; sure on Lord was there.

 Here smil'd the Sage—and thus pursu'd his Tale:
 Nay, pr'ythee mind me; for I seldom fail.
 This noble Lord, the Axle of your Fate,
 'Tis he must raise you from your humble State.
 But stay—methinks I see a double Cause:
 O, now I find; there's Marriage in the Clause:
 His Lordship's Sister—Yes, it must be She.
 When this shall come to pass—remember me.

 Here ceas'd the Oracle—The ravish'd Boy,
 Whose sparkling Eyes confess'd the welcome Joy,
 Two Guineas gave—and whisper'd in his Ear,
 On Marriage-Day Two hundred Pounds a Year. (II.32-33)

Before discussing the implications of Leapor's Madam and Viscount Simper, a few words about Leapor's debt to Butler are necessary. As Richard Greene in his biography of Leapor indicates, she borrows the character Sir Sidrophel from Butler, a seer who also prophesizes a wealthy marriage to Sir Hudibras (174-175) which seems unlikely to happen by the end of the poem.

Leapor not only borrows a character, she also borrows Butler's ironic tone and ability to poke fun at unrealistic ideals as displayed in heroic and romance texts (Terry *Mock-Heroic* 38-40), but in Leapor's case as she deliberately contrasts them with aspirations of laboring class people to comment on social elevation, as I have demonstrated throughout this chapter.⁴³

2. The Implications for Leapor's Aesthetic Choices in *Mopsus*

Leapor deploys threshold guardians particularly well in this regard. Her country and city threshold guardians demonstrate the futility of Mopsus' efforts at social elevation. Thus, Mopsus is prevented from social elevation in the country by established social and economic systems (represented by Coreilus and the villagers). In the city, where social mobility seems possible as illustrated in other literary models (for example *Moll Flanders* and Macheath from *Beggar's Opera*) and the historic rise of a merchant class, the Madam and Viscount Simper prevent Mopsus' social elevation, in the criminal class (low) and in gentility (high), respectively. Readers learn from the Madam and Viscount Simper incidents that unless one is savvy enough to follow the existing "rules" and manipulate them to one's advantage, success is unlikely. So while Mopsus' London experience is even more unpleasant and humiliating than his adventures in the country (fulfilling the country/city safe/dangerous dichotomy implicit in eighteenth century works), the fact of his continued naivety (inability to learn) will prevent him from any social elevation in either venue.

If it seems to readers that Mopsus could not be so naïve, we need to remember that Leapor needs to stay within the confines of the forms (mock-heroic and epic) and types (Mopsus is the country simpleton for instance) to make her argument. Mopsus cannot learn for most of the poem, until he has experienced disappointment to such an extent (via his adventures) that he does

⁴³ David Mazella argues that Leapor's use of Sir Sidrophel provides more textual evidence that Leapor modeled the attacks and tricks on Mopsus on those of Sir Hudibras. He cites in particular how each and every time Sir Hudibras attempts to "lord it over the rabble" or to convince the widow more vigorously to marry him, he gets attacked and subdued.

not dream anymore. If we think of an Odysseus, he does not rest or recoup the benefits of his experiences until he learns enough to allow the Gods to let him return home and resume his place in his society (and allow Homer to end the story). Also while Mopsus' learning curve and return are abrupt, compared to Odysseus', we need to remember that Mopsus is a type, and so any gradual shift in his thinking, any complexity would be questioned based on his characterization as a country bumpkin. Further he must be a general enough character, so that other Mopsuses can see themselves in him, so Leapor keeps to the generality expected in the Fable form (a component of the epic form as discussed above).

While modern readers might find these aesthetic limitations frustrating and disheartening, Leapor (utilizing the cumulative effect of dominant cultural aesthetics) demonstrates that the hierarchical society that Mopsus inhabits is also hers. For Mopsus and Leapor there are no real mechanisms in place for them to climb the social ladder from their low social positions. Even with her location in the city (a location offering comparatively greater social mobility) and her shrewdness, life experience and powers of observation, the Madam, for instance, can only advance in a parallel strata outside of dominant culture. While she may be a female Macheath, she is not the social equal of Viscount Simper or the Baron. Like the seers (who also manipulate seemingly any system), she is always outside. Similarly, unless Mopsus found a patron, who would educate him and find him social and wealth connections through marriage or government office, Mopsus is essentially static. More savvy or street smarts will not make a difference. Mopsus must fail; he must go home, chastened, so that he does not attempt to alter the status quo, and Leapor's use of the threshold guardians and the fable/mock-heroic/epic structure emphasizes this. This structure ends with the hero safely home, wiser, and at the minimum reaffirming the society he lives in, no longer punished because he doesn't try to step away from

existing social expectations for laboring-class folk. For Mopsus, that means going back to work and ending his day-dreaming, which he does, albeit reluctantly as discussed above as part of the comparison to the parable of the prodigal son.

3. Another Interpretation of *Mopsus*

While it is easy to interpret this poem solely as Leapor's obligatory defense of the hierarchy as she attempts to climb the social ladder via publication, the poem's very epic-ness, that is its essential recognition of the value of experience as a teacher (Lord *Trials* 5-6), makes other readings possible. The mock-epic after all derives its existence from the epic, so that it cannot completely discard epic aesthetics or messages. These aesthetics allow readers to respect Mopsus' learning process, while they laugh at his attempts to climb. They recognize that one adventure was not enough, that he needed to have others to learn to accept his social position. In that recognition lies the tension inherent in the mock-heroic genre. At the same time that readers laugh at his attempts, they also accord a certain importance to the subject matter, due to how it is aesthetically represented (in a dominant cultural form with set-pieces and language to match). Just as those elements make Mopsus look foolish, they also elevate or transform his quest, as Broich (5-6) and Michael Edwards articulate (ctd. in Terry *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper* 2).

Both Broich and Michael Edwards discuss what they call "transformation" and "transfiguration of the ordinary" (respectively), where the topic, plot and the characterization of the figures in a poem become elevated by the poem's formal/heroic language and heroic premise. Three characteristics in particular encourage this alternate reading of the poem: the length of the poem, its epic descent and return structure, and the shift in tone in the last two stanzas of the poem. The first is the length of the poem. First we need to remember the form requires this type

of length. A mock-heroic must have a series of adventures, with sufficient room to describe each one and its consequences. Bearing that generic requirement in mind, we could easily say that the length actually supports a critique of Mopsus' continued fruitless and selfish attempts to advance, as each adventure and its outcome becomes even more humiliating, creating a cumulative effect of humiliation and warning to any potential Mopsus or a message to a reader worried about the pretensions of laboring-class folks. Alternately we could argue that by spending so much time on his quest (the poem runs approximately thirty pages in the second collection), Leapor asks readers to give recognition to it, and implicitly to her quest for publication and recognition as a writer. For this second recognition (of Leapor as Mopsus) to happen, readers of this poem would need to consult the prefatory letter written by Freemantle at the beginning of the volume and the selection of letters from Leapor at the back of the volume, as a "key" to the poem.

The structure of the poem, which follows the epic format, also lends credence to this positive reading. In each adventure, Mopsus is saved by his family. In the first instance he returns safely to his father's house to hide. In the second adventure, after his "death" (incarceration), his father and mother aid his release/rebirth, and at the end of his third adventure he physically returns home, not sure of his welcome, but welcomed nonetheless like the prodigal son. In essence, Mopsus returns to his origins, safe and under his father's financial protection.

The negative interpretation possible of this structure is that Mopsus knew his family would help him, no matter what the consequences. So as he pursues his adventures he takes no real risk, proving the argument. Contemporary stereotypes about the laziness of the laboring poor would reinforce this interpretation.⁴⁴ In fact, dominant cultural attitudes would suggest that

⁴⁴ For instance see Daniel Defoe's "Letter IV" in *The Great Law of Subordination Consider'd* (1724): "when they [the labouring Poor] may have Work, and may get Money enough to live well, and lay up for a Time of less Business: then instead of Diligence and Good-Husbandry which

Mopsus needed more correction of this tendency than other laboring-class people, and thus the epic structure demonstrates this more effectively. Moreover whatever redeeming qualities Mopsus has, Leapor is careful to demonstrate that Mopsus is reluctant to go home because of the humiliation, and not because he missed his family.

Another positive interpretation to take from this structure is that it mirrors that of the parable of the prodigal son; just like Mopsus when the prodigal son returned, he was welcomed warmly by his family (in fact like he had come back from the dead—an epic characteristic). As I discussed above, Leapor implicitly alludes to this parable, but makes Mopsus less repentant than the prodigal son, even if we later see Mopsus resigned to work and “content.” Thus even with this interpretation, Mopsus is still perceived negatively by readers.

But these are both negative interpretations and we still need to account for the relatively happy ending to this poem. First, as savvy readers would know, Mopsus is a type of alter-ego of Leapor’s (II.xx, and 316). Because she has her own ambitions towards intellectual labor—as the subscription plan would have allowed her to do (see II.xxii-xxiii, 66-67, 309, 312, and 316)—she cannot completely condemn his ambitions. Also assuming she had lived, and the subscription plan had not been successful, she would have ended like Mopsus, where she began, dependent on her father (II.313), and disillusioned with publishing. We know this from her letters and poems where she expresses real concern for her future if he died before her, and her ability to handle the notoriety and discomfort of publishing and putting herself in the public eye as a writer (see II.xx, xvi-xvii, 43-54, 314-315, 317-318, and 323).

Moreover, the poem’s aesthetic mixture reflects her own ambivalence towards publication and its social significance. Leapor feels her own ambitions are unrealistic but she

might be expected from honest Men, on the contrary they will Work but two or three Days in the Week, or till they get Money enough to keep them the rest of the Week, and all the other part of their Time they lie in the Alehouse to spend it.”

cannot help feeling them (see “To Lucinda” especially page 59 in the second collection). Mopsus represents those ambitions which seem selfish to her, perhaps symbolized by his theft of the rent money, and his begging letter from gaol. Yet when he was in the country, he could not stop dreaming of wealth. Leapor cannot stop writing, which is unprofitable but an idle pursuit (see “Epistle of Deborah Dough” 68-69 and “Epistle to *Artemisia*: On Fame” page 52 in particular in the second collection). The implication of the happy ending indicates that whatever happens, Leapor wants to be protected, as her health and temperament do not lend themselves to her taking care of herself.

If the structure and length of the poem do not offer readers an alternative message, then the shift in tone in the last two stanzas do so. In the second to last stanza, Leapor alternates between the ironic tone she has used throughout the poem and a somber one:

Thus happier *Mopsus* lost the Scourge of Life
(So Unbelievers often term a Wife):
The slighted Infant too resign'd its Breath,
And *sought** its Refuge in the Arms of Death.
Now pressive Want induc'd the longing Swain,
Once more to seek his late despised Plain:
According*, ere the regent Prince of Day
Through the cold *Scorpion* drove his short'ned Ray,
Repentant *Mopsus* trudg'd before the Wind,
And left the City and his Woes behind.
No shining Slaves his weary Steps attend,
A Scrip his Substance, and a Staff his Friend:

No more these Visions in his Bosom swell;

For his sick Heart has bid the Court Farewel. (II.41)

The actual tragedy, the death of the infant, Leapor paints in a sad tone, while she treats the desertion of his wife as the relief it really is (she will drain his purse no longer). We notice that Mopsus does not abandon the child, thus showing a redeemable quality in contrast to his wife or the father of the child. Mopsus then seeks “refuge” in the country. Leapor portrays his journey with irony, alternating between romance conventions (“No shining Slaves his weary Steps attend,”) and the actual conditions of the journey (the weather paralleling the loss of his illusions):

At length, with Visage pale, and Garments poor,

The Youth appear’d before his Father’s Door:

Their Neighbors hail the late-returning Boy:

His Father clasp’d him with a Parent’s Joy:

His Mother’s Eyes with Tears of Pleasure run:

She drops her Knitting, to embrace her Son. (II.41-42)

It is difficult to discern Leapor’s tone in this section of the stanza, but she seems to allude to the parable of the prodigal son, so perhaps she is asking us to forgive Mopsus for his selfishness. To his parents he is always their son, however selfish he has been.

Here with calm Virtue, and a peaceful Mind,

In rural Plenty, dwells the sober Hind.

His equal Days in one smooth Tenor run;

The same at rising as declining Sun:

No more Delusions in his Fancy rise,

Grown grave by Sorrow; by Experience wise. (II.42)

With the last stanza, Leapor's tone seems straightforward, as befits the lessons he has learned, first that in the country while life is not exciting, it is even, it is calm, it is safe, and one's basic needs are taken care of, and second that one must be realistic about what one can achieve. The tone of this concluding stanza also reflects the type of hero Mopsus is. He is a young country laborer with foolish illusions; he is not a larger than life figure like Aeneas whose very heroism demands great adventures with dire consequences and great lessons. Thus his adventures and the lessons he learned are not "heroic" in nature, so his fall and redemption are not as drastic as an epic hero's.

But for all that Mopsus' experiences pale in comparison to an Aeneas or Odysseus, his very ordinariness is what makes him such a convincing example of the danger of ambition. As Leapor says in her letter to Freemantle, while Mopsus shares some of her own characteristics, others also behave and think as Mopsus does, so his lessons have more resonance, and thus are more "epic" or universal. His universality has the potential to scare and to reassure polite readers, thus allowing the poem to safely be published.

Leapor's complex characterization, careful use of heroic and mock-heroic elements, generous borrowing from Butler's *Hudibras*, and allusions to the parable of the prodigal son in her poem *Mopsus* allow readers to derive multiple messages about social elevation, and allows Leapor to express her uncertainty, her ambition, her learning, her values, and her hope. This poem is a testament to Leapor's skill and aesthetic training.

Crumble Hall is another poem that testifies to Leapor's skill and training. In this poem, Leapor demonstrates her ability to experiment with dominant literary forms and techniques (particularly contrast and incongruity to create irony) to find those that allow her to make

complex cultural critiques from a safe distance. By utilizing comic pastoral characters from Swift and Gay, Leapor both placates polite readers with safe stereotypes and forces them to recognize the value contribution of these self-same figures in a country house.

4. *Crumble Hall*

With *Crumble Hall*, Leapor further adapts the country house poem from the modifications that Pope made to the form in “An Epistle to Burlington,” where he satirizes the taste and morals of Whig politicians like Walpole, in order to ultimately contrast Burlington’s estates (and hence his morals) favorably to theirs. Leapor latches onto Pope’s satirical but stylized model in which he focuses on the architecture and design of the house and gardens and their misuse. She further alters his model with a laboring-class subtext and as well as vivid imagery in order to reveal the valuable contributions of the laboring-classes to landed estates (albeit in an ironic way).⁴⁵

In the poem, Leapor briefly covers the history of the mansion, its public rooms (in less than ideal terms), then takes the reader to the kitchens (where she spends a good third of the poem), and concludes in the gardens. In her description of the kitchens and the staff therein, her poetic style is vivid and sensual. The fact that she provides descriptions of the kitchens (let alone of its inhabitants) indicates the extent of Leapor’s innovations. Certainly in the country house poem tradition, the food provided by a host is described to indicate the bounty, generosity, and taste of the patron, but not the staff who prepare or serve it, or who work and eat in the kitchen (and the staff is not described in such detail as in her poem).⁴⁶ Essentially, Leapor uses the

⁴⁵ Critics are divided in their interpretations of this poem. While Donna Landry and Moyra Haslet argue that Leapor is making a gender and class-based critique of the country-house poem, William Christmas and Valerie Rumbold argue solely in terms of a class-based critique. Richard Greene argues that Leapor uses the form to critique how landowners were reneging on their pastoral or paternal duties, and Dustin Griffin argues that the poem is an “ironic observation of country-house poem conventions,” in fact “mock-heroic” rather than a class-based critique (195). David Fairer argues instead that the poem’s compendious structure does not indicate a class-based critique, but rather “a palpable continuity between past and present” (“Mary Leapor” 235). There are also studies which focus on Leapor’s critique of land improvement; see Jeannie Dalporto, and Peter Denney. This diversity of critical opinion alone indicates the richness and complexity the poem offers.

⁴⁶ See Aemilia Layner’s “Description of Cooke-ham” (1611) and Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst” (1616).

kitchen as a focal point for the poem, wherein we see many of the laborers responsible for the work and productivity of the estate.

In order to demystify the country house, its habitants, and their relationship to each other, Leapor deploys the techniques of contrast and incongruity, creating irony. Her ability to contrast the real and the ideal is derived significantly from John Gay and Jonathan Swift; one need only think of Gay's *Shepherd's Week* and Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room" and "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed." The ideal façade and pathos in Gay's pastorals is often undermined by the actual work that needs to be done or the actual behavior of laborers. In Swift's case the parts that make up the "Beautiful Nymph" are dismantled one by one, until she is no longer a nymph but an imperfect body, and in "The Lady" we see the artificiality with which her charms are created, and the bodily fluids and smells which she leaves behind but which make her real.

While Leapor's contrasts are not as unpalatable as Swift's, her characterizations of the staff of the house model Gay's depictions of country laborers fairly closely, in particular those in "Tuesday or The Ditty" as both Richard Greene (115) and Moyra Haslet (192-193) note. In this poem Gay recounts the meeting, courtship of Marian and Colin, and his desertion of her for Cic'ly, from Marian's point of view. Interspersed with her pathos, Gay provides vivid images:

Where-e'er I gad I cannot hide my Care,

My new Disasters in my Look appear.

White as the Curd my ruddy Cheek is grown,

So thin my Features that I'm hardly known; (15.39-42)

In a passage from which Leapor seems to draw Urs'la's the cook's lament (see below), Gay describes the specific work of both Marian and Colin:

Whilom with thee 'twas *Marian*'s dear Delight
To moil all Day, and merry make at Night.
If in the Soil you guide the crooked Share,
Your early Breakfast is my constant Care.
And when with even Hand you strow the Grain,
I fright the thievish Rookes from off the Plain.
In misling Days when I my Thresher heard,
With nappy Beer I to the Barn repair'd;
Lost in the Musick of the whirling Flail,
To gaze on thee I left the smoking Pail;
In Harvest when the Sun was mounted high,
My Leathern Bottle did thy Drought Supply;
When-e'er you mow'd I follow'd with the Rake,
And have full oft been Sun-burnt for thy Sake;
When in the Welkin gath'ring Show'ers were seen,
I lagg'd the last with *Colin* on the Green;
And when at Eve returning with Carr,
Awaiting heard the gingling Bells from far;
Strait on the Fire the sooty Pot I plac't,
To warm thy Broth I burnt my Hands for Haste.
When hungry thou stood'st *staring, like an Oaf*,
I slic'd the Luncheon from the Barly Loaf,
With crumbled Bread I thicken'd well thy Mess.

Ah, love me more, or love thy Pottage less! (15-16.49-72)

We notice that for each task that Colin performs that Marian is nearby, in large part because she fancies him, but the level of specificity is uncharacteristic for pastorals of the time—in pastorals as Gay notes, laborers are not supposed to work (see the third page of “The Proeme to the Courteous Reader” in *The Shepherd’s Week*). Gay’s specificity satirizes Ambrose Phillips’ argument that “modern” or English pastoral poetry should allow realism such that the countryside described and the people who inhabit it are English. Gay deploys specificity to argue the ridiculousness of expecting any realism in the pastoral genre. In this effort however, he seems to unintentionally question the idealism of the genre, no matter what countryside or people are described⁴⁷. Poets like Duck and Leapor were quick to notice the efficacy of this strategy to critique the idealistic depictions of country laborers in poetry.

We should note how the last two lines of the stanza undercut the pathos of Colin, and thus reinforces eighteenth-century stereotypes about country laborers, i.e. that they did not have the sensibility of those from further up the social ladder, and thus were more suitable for labor. This technique is especially evident at the conclusion of the poem where Gay contrasts Marian’s lovesickness for Colin with her skills as a cowwoman, undercutting her pathos as a pastoral object of love. After describing Colin’s attributes, Marian’s skills, his desertion of her for Cic’ly, the effect of that on her appearance and thoughts, a catalogue of the various services Marian performed for him, the prophesy of three gypsies, and a knife she bought for him, Gay concludes the poem: “Thus *Marian* wail’d, her Eye with Tears brimful, / When Goody *Dobbins* brought her Cow to Bull. / With Apron blue to dry her Tears she sought, / Then saw the Cow well serv’d, and took a Groat” (18: 103-106). Again sentiments are secondary to livelihood and day-to-day

⁴⁷ Over the course of 1713, *The Guardian* published six essays written by various authors debating the appropriate characteristics of the pastoral as a genre, reflecting a larger poetic/aesthetic/political debate between the “moderns” (Whigs), and the “Ancients” (Tories). Ambrose Phillips and Alexander Pope represented the two sides respectively. John Gay wrote *The Shepherd’s Week*, with the encouragement of Pope (Greene 106).

concerns; that Leapor and other laboring-class writers picked up on this critique is not surprising. Whatever intention Gay had, Leapor utilized this technique of the pairing of sentiment and reality to create irony in a poem about contrasts, to critique the poetic ideal of the country house.

Leapor's extensive description of the kitchen and its inhabitants provides an example of this method. As I note above, typically in a country house poem and certainly the case in Pope's "Epistle to Burlington," neither kitchen nor workers are described. Leapor indicates her knowledge of her departure from this pattern in the following passage:

Thus far the Palace—Yet there still remain
Unsung the Gardens, and the menial Train.
Its Groves anon—its People first we sing;
Hear, *Artemisia*, hear the Song we bring.
Sophronia first in Verse shall learn to chime,
And keep her Station, tho' in *Mira's* Rhyme; (II.117-118)

Here, Leapor provides a contrast to (that country house ideal image) beginning with her description of Sophronia's place or "Station," which will remain the same despite her inclusion in the poem. Moreover, we see Sophronia's real value in the next lines of the poem:

Sophronia sage! whose learned Knuckles know
To form round Cheese-cakes of the pliant Dough;
To bruise the Curd, and thro' her Fingers squeeze
Ambrosial Butter with the temper'd Cheese:
Sweet Tarts and Pudden, too, her Skill declare;
And the soft Jellies, hid from baneful Air. (II.118)

Leapor's vivid description and use of several literary techniques in this passage highlights the social or cultural prestige of the Hall, reflected in Sophronia's skills as a pastry chef⁴⁸. In addition to the vivid sensory detail Leapor provides the pastry-chef with a neo-classical name which means "wise," of which Leapor was clearly aware, as she uses the word "sage" next to it, creating emphasis through alliteration. Leapor then juxtaposes "learned" and "knuckles" creating irony based on a reader's association of "learned" with book learning and higher status, and of "knuckles" with physical labor. Leapor further complicates this juxtaposition with "know" again playing with the idea of knowledge (mental or physical)⁴⁹. Leapor's use of alliteration and vivid description emphasize Sophronia's contribution to the prestige of the Hall. Implicitly Leapor makes an argument for Sophronia's real value, not as an ideal pastoral type, but through her work and work-related training and skill. Her work and skill is the real value of the Hall, not its underused library for instance: "Here *Biron* sleeps, with Books encircled round; / And him you'd guess a Student most profound. / No so—in Form the dusty Volumes stand: / There's few that wear the Mark of *Biron's* Hand" (II.116)⁵⁰.

Not only Sophronia, but Urs'la adds value to the household, creating less prestigious food but food associated with "old English" hospitality, such as roasted meat like mutton and pork, as well as the beef, cabbage, and dumplings served to the workers of the household. Urs'la feeds plenteous and nourishing food to the people who make the running of the estate and household possible: Colinettus, a farm laborer concerned with the newly gathered hay and the oxen for which he is responsible, Gruffo, whose position is unidentified, but who jealously guards the ale for the servants' supper, Roger, her swain and another servant whose position is unidentified, but

⁴⁸ Ivan Day, a noted food historian, in a lecture concerning Mrs. Elizabeth Raffald, author of *The Experienced English Housekeeper* (published in 1769) and "the Martha Stewart of her day," indicated the prestige accorded to households with pastry chefs.

⁴⁹ For a similar interpretation for the significance of the kitchen sequence, see Valerie Rumbold in "Alienated Insider" page 72. Rumbold argues that Leapor's depiction individualizes the servants in the household, but it does not idealize the work, and is rather satirical, indicating her own unique position as a servant and observer/writer (72-73). See also Greene 15-17, 115-116.

⁵⁰ See Rumbold 70 and Greene 117-118.

who is crass enough to have fallen asleep at table after stuffing himself, herself (cook and scullery maid in one), and Sophronia, the pastry-chef (II.118-120). Leapor is careful to point out Urs'la's real value, allocating Urs'la over a page of the poem in order to describe just what work she does.

Stylistically, in contrast to her treatment of Sophronia, Leapor shortens Urs'la's name in part to make the meter fit, but also to indicate aesthetically Urs'la's status in the servant hierarchy. Ursula comes from "bear," seemingly not a compliment. Yet, with Leapor's emphasis on Urs'la's contributions, the root "bear" might also imply the physical strength required to prepare and cook the meat, as well as to clean the dishes, pots, and pewter, and perhaps the work that Urs'la "bears" (carries) for the household.

In this passage Leapor also describes a warm and inviting setting as David Fairer argues ("Mary Leapor" 233). This is in contrast to the descriptions of the rest of the house, for instance the little used and dusty library, the only room described in the rest of the house with any life in it (compare to Biron above):

O'er-stuff'd with Beef; with Cabbage much too full,
And Dumpling too (fit Emblem of his Skull!)
With Mouth wide open, but with closing Eyes
Unwieldy *Roger* on the Table lies.
His able Lungs discharge a rattling Sound;
Prince barks, *Spot* howls, and the tall Roofs rebound.
Him *Urs'la* views; and, with dejected Eyes,
'Ah! *Roger*, Ah!' the mournful Maiden cries:
Is wretched *Urs'la* then your Care no more,

That while I sigh, thus you can sleep and snore?
Ingrateful *Roger*! wilt thou leave me now?
For you these Furrows mark my fading Brow:
For you my Pigs resign their Morning Due:
My hungry Chickens lose their Meat for you:
And was it not, Ah! was it not for thee,
No goodly Pottage would be dress'd by me.
For thee these Hands wind up the whirling Jack,
Or place the Spit across the sloping Rack.
I baste the Mutton with a chearful Heart,
Because I know my *Roger* will have Part.'(II.119-120)

Certainly, Leapor seems to ridicule Urs'la's sentiments in a passage mirroring Marian's lament in "The Ditty" (see above and note the reference to pottage and the overall structure of the passage). Her pathos is undercut by the cumulative effect of the specific cataloguing of her efforts with Roger in mind, but their very vividness indict the pastoral romance ideal. Yes, Leapor utilizes Gay's strategy even to providing a stanza detailing Urs'la's scullery duties after the lament:

Thus she – But now her Dish-kettle began
To boil and blubber with the foaming Bran.
The greasy Apron round her Hips she ties,
And to each Plate the scalding Clout applies:
The purging Bath each glowing Dish refines,
And once again the polish'd Pewter shines." (II.120).

Yet this stanza gives voice to Urs'la's real contribution to the household and the estate, and readers will not forget such vivid images couched in a country house poem.

Deploying more irony in an already ironic form derived from Pope, Leapor cleverly critiques what Fairer calls the laudatory "politics" of the country house poem (even if she had no knowledge of any beyond Pope's) ("Mary Leapor" 231). Her ironic yet specific depictions of the servants of *Crumble Hall* serve at least two purposes. First their specificity gives value to the work and people described, part of Leapor's ethos. Second because Leapor deploys a familiar model (particularly Urs'la and Roger), her poem can also be read as a reinforcement of stereotypes of country laborers by those inclined to do so, making it possible for the poem to be published.

Despite Leapor's desire to be a writer, and to risk breaking ties to her laboring-class origins, Leapor's vivid images of laborers (men and women) and the relative dignity she gives to Mopsus at the conclusion of her poem indicate her respect for her origins. In other poems, several of the pastorals and essays for instance, Leapor shows her ties to her community (see for example "A Hymn to the Morning," "Colinetta," and "An Essay on Happiness" in the first collection). She values the connections between women. While Leapor may not have wanted to emulate Deborah Dough's daughter Cicely, she also did not want to be separate from that community. Moreover, she is not a natural genius in isolation; she is aware of and speaks about her community. Leapor's extensive use of dialogue and verse epistle speaks to her sociability. At the same time, Leapor is not afraid to use various poetic forms and techniques in an effort to become a writer.

Unfortunately Leapor did not live, and while her poetry was published multiple times in the eighteenth century, she was only rediscovered by Roger Lonsdale in the 1980s. Even though

she cultivates the mock-epic, the (anti) country-house poem, the verse epistle, the pastoral, the essay, and various religious poems and prayers, we have not been able to determine if Leapor had a specific influence on other authors (marginalized or not) thus far. Right now her semi-canonical status remains intact due to her skill, her historical importance, and her ability to synthesize and adapt the aesthetics and ideas of those before her. The next duty literary scholars have with regards to Mary Leapor and Mary Collier is to see if we can find textual evidence that they influenced other authors. That is the least we can do.

V. Conclusion

Mary Collier and Mary Leapor (two of the first British laboring-class female authors) share many characteristics, not the least of which is their desire to be writers and to depict and comment on gender and class dynamics more accurately than had been done before. This artistic focus on “the gap between the ideal and the real” (Messenger 172-174) is rooted in part in the mode of satire where writers create irony by contrasting more realistic images or situations with idealized ones (often implicitly). Part of the point of satire is amusement and entertainment, but an equally important part is to critique practices and concepts that the writer finds problematic, a didactic purpose. Collier and Leapor are very much writers of their age, and yet while they both reflect the writing impulses of the eighteenth-century, they draw from a mixture of different writing traditions to achieve this goal. Moreover, their differing economic, creative, and educational circumstances made for significant differences between their writing, despite their common laboring-class backgrounds. As a result, the differences between their work are considerably more pronounced than most discussions of their work lead us to believe, as I have demonstrated in this study.

These differences include Collier’s use of the georgic, in contrast with Leapor’s extensive deployment of the pastoral; Collier’s limited experimentation with forms versus Leapor’s experimentation with mixing forms and techniques; and Leapor’s revision of the country-house poem and the mock-epic. These textual and aesthetic differences correlate with two different models of the laboring-class female writer, established by authors writing around the same time.

Comparing the work of these two authors, who were writing within approximately ten years of each other (Collier’s first collection was published in 1739, Leapor died in November 1746 (and the bulk of her work was written from 1745 to November 1746), and Collier’s second

collection was published in 1762, so seven years separate their initial composition periods, and sixteen years their second), has allowed us to examine two different models of laboring-class female writing: the worker who writes, and the writer who worked briefly, long enough to establish her laboring-class credentials, but who wanted to work no longer and to study and write at her leisure. These different models have implications for how we study and evaluate the work of these authors.

1. Different Creative Conditions

Before discussing the implications to literary history for these different models of writing, we need to also consider the different conditions of creation experienced by Collier and Leapor. While it is easy to say the Mary Leapor is the more talented of the two writers, based on dominant writing tradition aesthetics, this assertion ignores the advantages that Leapor had over Collier. First, Leapor worked as a kitchen maid, it is true, but for a period of maybe nine years altogether. Greene estimates she may have started working in 1735 at age 13 (Leapor lived from 1722-1746), and that she left Edgecote Hall (probably her second place) in fall of 1744 or early in 1745. Returning to her father's house in order to run it and assist him in managing his nursery (her mother having died in late 1741) ("Introduction" to the *Works*, xix, xxiii), with no assistance, certainly Leapor may have been as busy as when she worked as a kitchen maid, but the fact she wrote the bulk of her work in the year and a half between her return and death (as Freemantle suggests in her prefatory letter to the second collection) indicates that she had more time to study, write, and revise her writing. Even though she assisted her father in his plant nursery business, and she was expected to stay busy at household chores, a small household of two requires less work to take care of than a many-roomed house (even with a more proscribed set of duties she had as a kitchen maid). Thus while her time was not entirely her own, she could

spend more of it on writing than previously. In addition, she did not have to financially support herself or her father. The absence of that concern alone allowed her to reserve her mental energy, a significant component in writing and creativity.

Collier was not so fortunate. Collier worked as a laundress, brewer, sick nurse, char-woman, and harvester for forty-three years, assuming she died in 1762 and was born in 1688 or so, and started to work to support herself at approximately age 20. She could have conceivably started working as a child (or a young teen) to add to the family income, and in her “Remarks” states as much (“As I grew up, I was set to such labour as the Country afforded”). She “t[ook] care of a Farm House” from age 63 to 70, so she worked an additional seven years, making her adult working life at least fifty years. Thus until she retired Collier’s time was not her own, and when she had time, she would have been exhausted from the arduous work she did. Also she had to continually think of ways to make income. These would all sap her mental energy. To help conserve that energy, she learned to write (“to aid her memory”) (*Poems* iii-v), but even that act requires mental energy as well as money for paper, ink and a writing utensil.

Second, both authors learned to read before the age of ten, but their access to reading materials could be described as unequal at best. Collier provides little information in this respect: “My recreation was reading, I bought and borrow’d many Books, any foolish History highly delighted me; but as I grew older I read Speed and Bakers Chronicles, Fox’s Acts and Monuments of the Church, Josephus, and others” (*Poems* iii). She clearly read Duck’s work, as well as the bible in addition to the religious and historical works she mentions. It is difficult to determine from her poetry what other works she may have read, but Leapor clearly had the advantage in this respect.

Leapor, who not only had some works by Pope and Dryden's fables, as well as some plays in her small library (Freemantle does not identify what else Leapor owned), had access to the Weston Hall library (the house owned by Susanna Jennens), as well as Bridget Freemantle's collection of books. Richard Greene, in his biography of Leapor, has provided a list of books that are part of the current collection at the Weston Hall library. Unfortunately no list exists of the books that Jennens owned and after her death "some of her books were removed from the house." Greene's list includes books published before Leapor's death which were part of the collection during the time Leapor worked there and during her friendship with Susanna Jennens. Greene excluded those books fitting these specifications that were clearly added to the collection "by subsequent owners of the house." Greene cautions that "Not all of the books in this inventory were certainly in the library during Leapor's employment in the house or during her subsequent friendship with Jennens....there is no reason to doubt, however, that most of these books did belong to Jennens, and that Leapor had access to them" (210). In addition to Pope and Dryden (some of whose work Leapor owned), the collection includes Butler's *Hudibras*, plays by Colley Cibber, work by William Congreve, work by George Farquhar, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, work by Thomas Otway, plays by Nicholas Rowe, a collection of Shakespeare's work edited by Pope, a translation by Dryden of the satires of Juvenal, a couple of novels by Mary de la Riviere Manley, and works by Richard Steele and Joseph Addison (but not *The Spectator*).

Greene provides evidence to support that she also read the following: *Cato*, *The Spectator*, *The Tatler*, Homer's *Odyssey* and *Iliad*, Sappho, Theocritus, Virgil, Ovid, Horace, Cicero, Seneca (all of these in translation by Pope, Dryden or Ambrose Philips), Matthew Prior, John Gay, Thomas D'Urfey, Edward Ward, William King, Jonathan Swift, Ambrose Philips, *The Guardian*, some of John Locke's writings, Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Jeremy

Taylor's *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Dying* (166-185, 188, 203). In addition, Greene indicates that a "folder of manuscript poems at Weston Hall contains transcripts of poems by Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Astell on the death of Mrs. Bowles." As Greene argues, because the current collection does not include any work by either of these authors, "this is interesting, since it indicates that both authors were known to Susanna Jennens and probably to Mary Leapor... Since Leapor does not name any female writers in her own works, it is valuable to know where she might have derived her views on issues of gender" (178).

Not only did Leapor have access to such authors, she received literary advice and encouragement from both Susanna Jennens and Bridget Freemantle. As I discussed in chapter three, while Freemantle claims to not have offered much assistance regarding technique, she offered valuable encouragement and carried on a lively discussion of ideas with Leapor, as the preface to the second collection and letters between the two indicate. Jennens, as Greene argues, aided Leapor with technical advice, editing, and encouragement as we see from "Parthenissa's Reply to a Pocket Book's Soliloquy" and "The Muses Embassy". In addition, Leapor had been circulating her work for some years before its publication, as Freemantle records that she had read some of her work two or so years before she met Leapor (II. xviii-xviii).

Collier did not have such technical advice (that we know of), but she did have encouragement as she indicates in her second preface where she writes that she was asked to versify "The Three Wise Sentences" by a lady who she was sick nursing, and to write "The Happy Husband" by a gentleman (*Poems* iv). Obviously these people and others felt she was talented enough to publish her work, and defended her reputation as a writer when it was questioned if she was indeed the writer of *The Woman's Labour* and *The Three Wise Sentences*. Thirteen local men of importance signed an attestation that she composed the work herself,

which was printed with the third edition of the first collection. Yet, despite evidence of this encouragement, Leapor retained the most advantageous conditions of creation of the two authors, and these conditions are reflected in the quality of their work.

A case in point is Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour*, which she composed first after reading and memorizing Duck's *The Thresher's Labour*. At the time she composed *The Woman's Labour*, she did not know how to write,⁵¹ so she composed it in her head. The time of her initial reading of *The Thresher's Labour* (around 1730 or so) to her composition and later recording of *The Woman's Labour*, to its publication (1739) is almost ten years. It is no wonder that this poem is Collier's most accomplished and polished. Most authors would envy such a long gestation and revision period. In addition, its vivid imagery, particularly of Collier's bleeding hands after many hours of washing clothes, and her ripostes to Duck's actual lines in *The Thresher's Labour*, testify to the amount of time she spent studying, thinking, and crafting her response to Duck. Had she the time to have done so with all her poems, they would equal this one in technique and message. Also she would have written more of them. It is possible that she did write more, but burned or lost those works, but considering her straitened finances and lack of free time, it is not improbable that these were the bulk of the work she actually wrote if not composed.

From reading Mary Leapor's work, we know that not all of it is as accomplished as "The Month of August" or *Crumble Hall* but these poems and the bulk of the other poems in the two volumes attest to not just Leapor's talent, but also to the time she dedicated to reading the work

⁵¹ See Collier's "Remarks" in the second collection. Collier says in full: "still devoting what leisure time I had to Books. [iii] After several Years thus Spent, Duck's Poems came abroad, which I soon got by heart, [sic] fancying he had been too severe on the Female Sex in his Thresher's Labour brought me to a Strong propensity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex: Therefore I answer'd him to please my own humour, little thinking to make it Public it lay by me several Years and by now and then repeating a few lines to amuse myself and entertain my Company, it got Air.

I happen'd to attend a Gentlewoman in a fit of Illness, and she and her Friends persuaded me to make Verses on the Wise Sentences, which I did on such Nights as I waited on her. I had learn'd to write to assist my memory, and her Spouse transcrib'd it with a promise to keep it private..." (iv). While there might have been less of a time lag between when Collier first read the poem and composed her reply to when she learned to write and transcribed it, it still seems that initially Collier did not know how to write when she composed *The Women's Labour*. Even if the time lag was only a year or two, Collier displays an impressive memory.

of other authors, thinking, crafting and re-crafting her work, along with the literary advice and encouragement she received. These are necessary components for any author to create good work, and as literary historians we especially need to keep these conditions in mind when we study the work of marginalized authors, who characteristically have more constraints on their time, and more obstacles to writing and publishing.

2. The Implications of Different Models of Laboring-Class Female Authorship

Collier and Leapor are considerably different writers with seemingly different purposes, but these differences only add to their value in literary history. Instead of conceiving of them as two female-laboring class writers, writing at about the same time, and addressing issues of class and gender in similar ways, we can see them as individual writers who had different life experiences, reading experiences, and creative conditions, used different literary modes and techniques and traditions, and hence responded differently to class and gender issues.

Comparing them we see laboring-class female authors not as a homogenous group seeking the same goals, but instead as a group of writers aligned at moments together by a common cause, but at others divided by philosophical, cultural, or practical differences. For instance, a conclusion we may draw from Collier's work is that she rejected the pastoral form not because she could not write in that style effectively, but that she felt it demeaned the real and strenuous work she and other laboring-class women did. She perhaps wanted recognition for the work that these women did for their families and their employers and thus embraced the georgic form as a more accurate for representing her views and philosophy.

In contrast, Leapor's point in using Pope and other dominant literary aesthetics was perhaps to demonstrate that a laboring-class female could be an author too, that her gender and class did not limit her authorial capacities, that a laboring-class female author could be learned

and inventive at the same time. For example, in her use of the pastoral, she mixes Hudibrastics undermining the idealization of the pastoral form, thus rejecting the idealization (and the limiting nature of that idealization) of rural men and women using the very aesthetics which creates that idealization in the first place. Thus, while both authors are critiquing class and gender representations, they do so using different but equally effective approaches.

Donna Landry and other scholars would agree, but their purpose in examining these two authors has been to discuss how these authors fit into a writing tradition, often downplaying their differences in the process. While this is a necessary rhetorical strategy in teleological studies, we run the risk of pigeon-holing authors to the extent that we forget to examine the nuances and complexities of their writings. While minor writers are considered “minor” for a reason, i.e. that their work is less complex and/or has had less influence, if the purpose of literary studies is to not just study patterns, but to explain aberrations, then we must examine the differences between authors just as closely, major and minor. Failing to do so, we lose not just the nuances of individual authors but also how the nuances affect our overall picture of patterns and conclusions about literature of any time period, culture, or society and its creation.

As I discussed in my introduction, these variables include generic differences, as well as different approaches to authorship. While we now think of writers working in isolation, that was a foreign concept in the eighteenth century. Even with such a concept as natural genius in which a writer might have visible talent in accessing and deploying aesthetic forms, early in the century, further study was encouraged so that authors crafted their work within existing conventions and techniques. This kind of study necessitated access to reading material and to other people. These connections were important for literary reasons and cultural reasons. Connectivity and politeness were deemed important especially as diverse groups of people

meshed together increasingly in urban and regional centers. We see this connectivity through alliances, patronage, and subscription in the work of Mary Leapor, and to some extent, in the work of Mary Collier.

Another important result of studying these two authors and their approaches to authorship has been how their differences force us to examine how we evaluate the work of female authors. As I discuss in my introduction, Collier and Leapor's differences reflect the difficulties inherent in evaluation. As I demonstrated above, we need to balance as much as possible the creative conditions an author has as much as her aesthetic talent. We also need to consider her values and the values of the time period that she lives in.

The approach I have used in this project is only the beginning. I have attempted to balance context, content and form, to examine the aesthetic choices these authors make in their poetry based on their generic choices, while at the same time considering the impact their social origins and other circumstances have had on their aesthetic choices. I wanted to provide a model of analysis that combines the historical context so necessary for understanding earlier writing with a return to the examination of these earlier writers' aesthetics. But I too have neglected an important group of women writers, those women who were supportive of the status quo, and existing gender relations, and who were as equally talented as their sister authors who critiqued existing gender relations and the status quo. If we want a fuller understanding of the diversity of women's writing, then we need to accept the challenge that Susan Staves and Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have made, that we continue to value aesthetics, but that we also value diversity of thought and form.

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