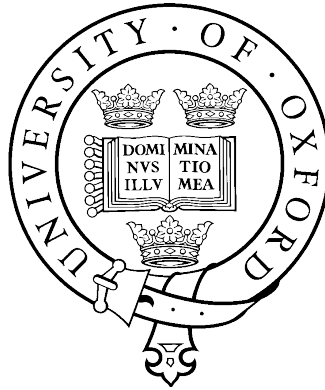


Eighteenth Century Women and the Domestic Mock Heroic



Kathleen Lawton-Trask
Lincoln College
University of Oxford

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Illustrations

Fig. 1: One of the medals honouring the Duke of Marlborough.

Fig. 2: A medal depicting Marlborough accepting keys from a kneeling female figure.

Figs. 3 – 5: Letter from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Charlotte [Dyves] Clayton,
c1720.

Abstract

This thesis examines women's mock-heroic verse on domesticity, focusing on four female poets of the eighteenth century. Despite critical work on women's poetry, on the mock-heroic, and on the rise of a cult of domesticity during the period, there has been little sustained criticism of women's verse about domesticity, and even less about women's use of mock-heroics. This thesis closes a gap in the work of the past few decades by adding the work of women poets to the discussion of domesticity and mock-heroic verse. The mock-heroic has been identified as '*the* exemplary mode of the eighteenth century' and 'the dominant idiom of the age': a form which late seventeenth and early eighteenth century poets developed to criticise the status quo.¹ The fact that female poets wrote mock-heroic poems and sections of poems in the mock-heroic mode, as well as the range of poems by women which may be considered mock-heroic, demonstrates that women's use of what might be called the domestic mock-heroic merits more and different critical attention than it has received until now. This dissertation traces the use of mock-heroic poetry by four different female poets of the eighteenth century: Mary Leapor, Mary Jones, Elizabeth Moody, and Anna Letitia Barbauld. It demonstrates that the mock-heroic poems written by women differed significantly from those written by Scriblerians such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and John Gay – both in form and in tone. Further, it argues that mock-heroics by women contributed significantly to the form's development throughout the century and to the intellectual shifts that occurred throughout the century.

¹ Richard Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper: An English Genre and Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 3; Claude Rawson, 'Mock-Heroic and English Poetry,' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 167-192.

Introduction

Mock-heroic poetry has been established as a significant form and mode of the eighteenth century, arising out of the period's intense interest in classical forms and its irreverent wit, both especially evident in the first half of the century. Early practitioners such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Gay, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu used mock-heroic to satirise urban life while demonstrating their knowledge of classical antecedents to establish their poetic authority. Richard Terry asserts that 'Mock-heroic is perhaps *the* exemplary genre of the English Augustan era: it is one of the few genres that the Augustans could be said to have invented themselves, and it could be seen as a paradigmatic literary form for a culture still reverential of the grandeurs of the classical past but increasingly vexed about their continuing relevance to a shabby modern reality.'² The fact that this form encapsulates several aspects of the early eighteenth century – classicism, ambivalence towards modernity, wit, formalism – makes it unsurprising that women writers also wrote mock-heroics – and therefore surprising that few full-length studies of mock-heroics by women exist. While mock-heroic itself has been theorised and debated by critics since its inception, little attention has been paid to women's mock-heroics. Perhaps because women's access to education was variable and the idea of wit in women still associated with female sexuality, women's mock-heroics seem at times to have hidden in plain sight, taken for sincere when they were really deeply ironic. As this thesis will show, depending on their audience, poems about women's work or social roles might appear to be simply conservative celebrations of the domestic, or satire on that which they purported to elevate. Women's mock-heroics about domestic matters are particularly worthy of study: they reveal that women were

² Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 3.

participating in a tradition of questioning the *status quo*, even as the cult of domesticity was on the rise at the end of the century. This dissertation examines the poetry of four women from different classes and with different educational backgrounds, who had different kinds of poetic careers, to demonstrate not only that women wrote mock-heroic poetry, but that they used it in a different way than their male counterparts, and that their work may have been instrumental in the form's persistence over the course of the century.

Although most studies of mock-heroic poetry see the form coming to an end in the middle of the eighteenth century, recent scholarship has suggested that mock-heroic as a mode persists into the end of the century through mock-heroic passages in long poems and what Terry calls 'mock-heroic discourse' in a variety of poetry and prose. Terry explains that 'mock-heroic, rather than being narrowly a literary form, confined to a relatively small number of seventeenth and eighteenth century works, provides a way of thinking which diffuses outwards so as to inhabit and structure a range of eighteenth century social discourses,' among them a growing consumer culture, advances in science, and religious devotion.³ When considered in this light, mock-heroic does not die out in the middle of the eighteenth century, but rather changes and persists, contributing to intellectual developments through the end of the century.

This study focuses on the way that women used mock forms to complicate the poetic discourse about gender, poetry, and domesticity. In a literary context, laughter and specifically mockery establish both comfort with a subject and an emotional separation from it; specifically, the ability to ironise it. The ability to laugh at a topic like domesticity, to 'mock' it in the way that we mean when we talk about mock forms, also implies mastery of that form, in the sense of understanding how the form works and what

³ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 6.

it represents to use that form. The use of the mock form, too, is important – in the sense that mockery is a speech-act, a way to express if not disdain for, at least a separation from that which is mocked.⁴ For the women in this dissertation, who wrote mock-heroic poems about domestic labour and domestic concerns, the use of laughter was much more than enjoyment: it was at the same time a way to distinguish their literary identities from their domestic lives and a way to claim for themselves their right to poetic recognition. The two-fold act they perform through these poems – first, the distance established between them and the domestic; second, the alliance formed with the poetic tradition of, first, Homer, Virgil, and John Milton and, second, Pope, Swift, Gay, and others – is formed through the evocation of laughter in the reader: laughter that indicates a recognition of allusion and formal innovation. Yet this act of distancing from the domestic and allying themselves with the canon may also be masked by the laughter these poets evoke (and in which they participate). It is this complicated use of laughter that makes these poems worthy of study.

Seen from this standpoint, examining women's mock-heroic poetry about domestic labour and domesticity in the eighteenth century offers an interesting and important facet of our understanding of women's lives during a time when the domestic, and woman's place as domestic labourer, were part of public discourse as well as private lives. While there has been some critical discussion of women's poetry at the time; women's changing social role through the century; and women's responses to the cult of domesticity, less has been written about the way women poets used humour as a response to the often constricting domestic role in which they found themselves.

⁴ For more on speech acts, see Austin, J.L., *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955 2nd edition*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

In this introduction, I will discuss first the opportunity which mock-heroics offered women to establish their educational and critical qualifications; next, the way that the domestic and domestic labour are defined for the purpose of this study and the status of domestic labour, particularly cooking, in the literary landscape of the eighteenth century; and finally how female poets participated in the changes in mock-heroic poetry over the course of the century.

Classical Allusion as Credential

In *The Theatre of Wit; or, A Banquet of the Muses*, a miscellany from 1746 whose contents are ‘Embellish’d with one Hundred Copperplate Cuts, Applicable to their Respective Subjects,’ Jonathan Swift’s poem ‘The Furniture of a Woman’s Mind’ is illustrated with the image of a nearly empty room.⁵ A central fireplace is flanked by two chairs and three paintings hang on the wall, but the room contains neither tables nor bookcases. On the extreme left of the copperplate etching, a woman stares at the viewer, a startled expression on her face and her hand on her chest. The drawing gives the impression of intruding upon a scene, but a scene that is almost empty. This image might be considered as typifying what was expected of a woman’s mind at mid-century: decorative vacuity. Something similar might be said of women’s poetry: that the topics of poems by women were expected to be (as critic Jan Wellington notes Elizabeth Moody’s reviewers read her) ‘children, flowers, fashion, and friends.’⁶ A woman’s right to attention was still based more on her appearance, manners, and breeding than on her intellect, her education, or her opinions.

⁵ *The theatre of wit, or a banquet of the Muses. A collection of choice & entertaining pieces in verse and prose. Selected from the most eminent authors. Embellish'd with one hundred copper-plate cuts, Applicable to their respective subjects* (London: 1746). Accessed via *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Oxford.

⁶ Jan Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1997), p. 32.

The use of mock-heroic, then, was an opportunity for women to establish a right to attention for their poems. That they were educated enough to write the kind of poetry that responds to Pope, not to mention Milton and Homer, was not an immediate assumption at the time. Indeed, the women in this dissertation were all self-educated, in different senses of the word. The least privileged of the poets in this thesis, Mary Leapor, depended upon others for her access to books. Most of the books she read likely belonged to other people: she benefitted from the libraries of her employer, Susannah Jennens, and probably of her friend Bridget Freemantle. Although Jennifer Batt has identified a handful of periodicals as new and interesting sources of Leapor's education and inspiration, Batt also emphasizes that Leapor's finances were extremely limited and therefore her access to such periodicals must have been, as well.⁷ Mary Jones and Elizabeth Moody likely had more access to books than Leapor, but still were not formally educated, and on some subjects were likely self-taught. Higher on the social scale but still not formally educated, Anna Laetitia Barbauld likely had as close to a formal education as any poet in this thesis, or indeed any female poet of the time. She grew up in the Warrington Academy, the daughter of John Aikin, tutor in first classics and then divinity; although she was not allowed to learn with the male pupils of the academy, she was educated at home and eventually convinced her father to teach her to read Latin.⁸ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose mock-eclogues will be discussed briefly at the end of Chapter One, was an aristocrat who grew up surrounded by books, but she told different stories about how she learned Latin: first, that she was self-taught at 13; then that her future husband taught her around age 20. In any event, the classics were not part of her formal education, which (according to Isobel Grundy) included

⁷ Jennifer Batt, 'A Muse / To Grace the Page of Evening News: Mary Leapor and the Periodical Press,' *Review of English Studies*, 68, 283 (February 2017), pp. 79-98.

⁸ William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 32.

instruction ‘in drawing ... in the Italian language, and in carving joints of meat,’ the latter ‘an essential skill for a political hostess,’ who would eat by herself ‘in order to devote herself at dinner to the ceremonious serving of guests.’⁹ If even a daughter of privilege such as Wortley Montagu was forced to teach herself Latin (or to learn it from a man, or to flatter a man by pretending that he taught it to her), then any allusions to classical literature in women’s poetry represent a positive claim to education and the power that comes with it.

The overall form of a mock-heroic poem is an allusion to the original epic poems it imitates; many of the poems discussed in this dissertation are also highly allusive, line by line. The women who wrote these poems used them to demonstrate their knowledge and their right to participate in the literary world. Writing about Margaret Cavendish (1623-1673), Harold Weber emphasises the importance of allusion in her work:

For Cavendish, fame depends on the relationship between a collective memory that shapes the dreams individuals share, and the power of poetry to transform the merely mortal into the stuff of dreams. In such a world creation depends on ‘the god-head Wit,’ for poets preside over the memorial processes that represent the second life we might live.¹⁰

Allusion to that ‘collective memory’ is Cavendish’s route into the literary landscape of the seventeenth century, and, even in the eighteenth century, allusions may have represented the best way to establish a right to attention. Similarly, male poets such as Alexander Pope (a Catholic) and Stephen Duck (a thrasher) used classical allusion to place their work into an educational tradition that their backgrounds had denied them.

At times, the use of allusion might be mistaken for plagiarism or imitation, and this difficulty seems to have had a greater impact on female poets than male. Although

⁹ Isobel Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: Comet of the Enlightenment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 15.

¹⁰ Harold Weber, *Memory, Print, and Gender in England, 1653-1759* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 53.

Richard Terry says that plagiarism accusations against Pope for his use of classical sources ‘cast a pall over his poetry, both in his own lifetime and afterwards,’ these seem not to have hindered his career.¹¹ All too often, female poets whose work was highly allusive were accused of imitation rather than recognised as demonstrations of learned wit. Terry notes the unreasonable plagiarism charge levelled against Charlotte Smith over a translation she had written, and the great lengths to which she later went to avoid further charges in later editions of her *Elegiac Sonnets* (3rd edition 1786), ‘supply[ing] numerous notes identifying sources for her poetic allusions.’¹² As Terry says, ‘literary association with powerful male figures has a tendency to end up being incriminating for women, who get accused of leeching off the superior intellectual attributes of their patrons.’ Thus Mary Leapor is at times treated as an acolyte of Pope, rather than a poet in her own right responding to him; thus Mary Barber is assumed to have depended upon Swift for her talent. In Joseph Warton’s edition of Pope’s poetry, two of Wortley Montagu’s ‘Town Eclogues’ are said to have been written by Pope, and a footnote added that demonstrates not only the editor’s awareness of the bind in which female writers found themselves when faced with help from male authors, but also that Wortley Montagu herself was keenly aware of it:

When Lady M. W. Montague [sic] would sometimes shew
[sic] a copy of her verses to Pope, and he would make
some little alterations, ‘No,’ said she, ‘Pope, no touching!
for then, whatever is good for any thing will pass for
yours, and the rest for mine.’¹³

Despite such awareness, even at the time she was writing, and even by an editor of Pope, the authorship of Wortley Montagu’s work was debated during her lifetime and

¹¹ Richard Terry, *The Plagiarism Allegation in English Literature from Butler to Sterne* (Houndmills, UK, and New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 85-86.

¹² Terry, *The Plagiarism Allegation*, p. 128.

¹³ Alexander Pope and Joseph Warton (ed.), *The Works of Alexander Pope, Esq.* (London: Printed for B. Law, J. Johnson, C. Dilly, et. al.: 1797), p. 332n.

continues to be discussed today, another instance of female poets' relationship to male poets being fraught -- whether 'relationship' in the sense of a literary friendship or in the sense of allusion and response on the page. A section at the end of Chapter One discusses Wortley Montagu's work, its reception, and her complicated relationship with print as a demonstration of the difficulties faced by female poets who wrote mock-heroics, despite the opportunity that mock-heroic offered. I have not included a full chapter on Wortley Montagu in this dissertation because her work does not discuss domestic labour, and because the Town Eclogues, though extremely influential, represent her primary contribution to mock-heroic's development.

Routes to Classical Literacy

Terry points out a passage in Henry Fielding's Preface to *Joseph Andrews* in which Fielding emphasizes that his novel is not a burlesque, though its descriptions may sometimes include 'burlesque':

In the Diction I think, Burlesque itself may be sometimes admitted; of which many Instances will occur in this Work, as in the Descriptions of the Battles, and some other Places, not necessary to be pointed out to the Classical Reader; for whose Entertainment those Parodies or Burlesque Imitations are chiefly calculated.¹⁴

The exclusionary language here is notable: the burlesque humour in Fielding's novel, which Terry classes as 'local burlesque effects' in 'mock battles' as well as mock-epic similes, are (according to Fielding) 'chiefly calculated' for 'the Classical Reader.'¹⁵ Such a classification excludes those readers who had not been classically educated (such as most women) from a full appreciation of *Joseph Andrews*. Indeed, the passage suggests that such readers cannot fully understand Fielding's 'burlesque,' which appears to

¹⁴ Henry Fielding and Thomas Keymer (ed.), *Joseph Andrews and Shamela* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008), p. 4.

¹⁵ Terry, *Mock Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 30; Fielding, p. 4.

involve an understanding of heroic precedents and epic similes, and which Terry classifies as ‘mock-epic set-pieces.’¹⁶ The complicated nature of classical allusion in the eighteenth century, especially questions about its detections by female readers and its use by female writers, is one that requires careful consideration.

As was mentioned in the previous section, women in the eighteenth century were denied the classical education of their male counterparts; therefore, their relationship with imitations of the classics or with any classical allusion is necessarily fraught. As Isobel Grundy explains with regard to female poets’ education in general,

...their making as poets remains a mystery. On the one hand, excellence in poetry presupposes a long apprenticeship. On the other hand, information about women’s education and development is particularly scanty. Every part of this period presents the scholar with traces of women whose scattered manuscripts or single published volumes offer no clue to how they developed their art, yet whose poetry is excellent by any standard.¹⁷

The classical education of the poets in this thesis is not always clear—yet their use of classical allusion goes beyond a simple echo to a complex deployment of references and ideas, and may itself be seen as establishing their classical knowledge.

Of course, there is much evidence for the role verse played in ordinary people’s lives: through reading out loud, miscellanies, commonplace books, and other propagations of some or all of a poem that at times might present a poem without all of its original context. Penelope Wilson describes the circuitous route by which one young woman came to copy out lines from Pope’s imitation of Horace’s first *Epistle*: the young reader says that she found them in ‘a borrowed volume of the *Spectator*,’ but Wilson notes that the poem ‘from which the lines are taken ... post-dates the *Spectator* itself by some twenty-six years,’ and surmises that the lines found their way into a copy of the

¹⁶ Terry, *Mock Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 31.

¹⁷ Isobel Grundy, ‘The Poet as Poetess’ in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 247-265, p. 253.

Spectator via the title-page of *Letter to a Young Lady Concerning the Principles and Conduct of the Christian* (1756), which used them as an epigraph, and which was ‘bound as an advertisement leaf into an index to the *Tatler*, *Spectators*, and *Guardians* printed in London in 1757.’¹⁸ Wilson continues, ‘The happenstance itself – a passage about intellectual frustration originating in Horace’s Latin and transformed by Pope, affixed out of context to the kind of work to be found in an un-bookish household – emblematises the unstructured and dispossessed nature of female access to learning in this period.’¹⁹ Of course, what Wilson is describing here is the result of the popular practice of commonplacing: as Abigail Williams describes it,

the copying out and indexing of short sections of text in manuscript books. The practice had its roots in classical education and rhetoric...over time, commonplacing came to be interpreted more loosely as the copying out of pieces of favourite reading, and a commonplace book evolved into an eclectic and inventive hotchpotch of materials.²⁰

Certainly, one cannot assume that a classical allusion made in a mock-heroic work implies that the author of the poem has read the work to which she alludes in its original form. The translations by John Dryden and Pope, among others, were likely many readers’ first and only experience of Ovid or Homer. Even these translations, or imitations such as Pope’s of Horace above, may have been detached from their original context or read only in part. Yet other routes to learning offered more information: as I argue in Chapter Two, Mary Leapor likely understood the pastoral wars between Pope and Philips because of reprints in Dryden’s first miscellany, which she had access to through the library of her employer. Her poems also reference translations of Virgil that

¹⁸ Penelope Wilson, ‘Women Writers and the Classics,’ in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume III 1660-1790*, ed. by David Hopkins and Charles Martindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 495-518, p. 495.

¹⁹ Wilson, pp. 495-6

²⁰ Abigail Williams, *The Social Life of Books: Reading Together in the Eighteenth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2017), p. 129.

appeared in the first part of *Miscellany Poems*, and engage with them on a higher level than simple imitation. Louise Curran has observed the deep engagement with Milton's *Paradise Lost* of miscellanies over the course of the century, perhaps beginning with Joseph Addison's essays about Milton's epic in *The Spectator* in 1712.²¹ She describes the recommendation of Milton's verse in educational miscellanies as appropriate for memorization and recitation by both children and adults:

Milton's poetry is prized by [Samuel] Whyte, as for other proponents of elocution, because he represents the pinnacle of oratorical talent. Reading his poetry requires 'knowledge capacity, and talents, rarely to be met with.'²²

This popularisation of Milton, then, presents his work in better context, with both a sense of the meaning of the poem and the importance of Milton's style. Ideally one might envision women making allusions to epics they learned through having them read out loud in the home, a particularly appealing image of the domestic contributing to the public – but even this scenario does not necessarily imply the deep understanding of *Paradise Lost* (or any other work) that real engagement with poetic allusion requires.

Wilson notes the 'inventiveness of women writers' with the exposure they did have to classical antecedents:

What they did have at their command ranges from classical reading and linguistic competence to match that of many well-educated men...to a vaguely defined echo chamber or generalised locus for cultural or literary polemic.²³

As we have seen, women writers received classical learning from a variety of different sources, most through reading at home or instruction from a male relative or friend.

Some allusions in women's poetry may be nuanced responses to the work of their

²¹ Louise Curran, 'Reading Milton in Eighteenth-Century Poetic Miscellanies,' *Eighteenth-Century Life* 41(1), (2017), 32-55. See also *The Spectator*, issues no. 267, 273, etc.: Joseph Addison, *Notes upon the Twelve Books of Paradise Lost: Collected from the Spectator* (London: printed for Jacob Tonson, 1719).

²² Curran, 'Reading Milton,' p. 33. The passage quoted is from Samuel Whyte and E.A. White (ed.), *Miscellanea Nova* (Dublin, Printed by R. Marchbank, for the editor: 1801), p. 60.

²³ Wilson, 'Women Writers and the Classics,' p. 496.

predecessors; some may amount to little more than Wilson's 'echo chamber.' Yet it is worthwhile to pay attention: an individual poet's real engagement with the source to which their work alludes may give some sense of her level of education or intelligence; indeed, since (as Grundy notes) the only thing left of some female writers is their writing, careful engagement with it may be the only way to know about a particular author's education.

At the same time, Wilson points out that some female writers are at pains to demonstrate their 'independence of Greek and Latin, and freedom from the literary abuses into which too much regard for learning can lead.' In 1662, Margaret Cavendish disclaims classical learning in order to demonstrate her modesty, in both senses of the word. As Weber points out (see above), her work is highly allusive – yet she emphasises her allegiance to Britain and to the home. She says, in the notably domestic metaphor of cooking, 'I am neither a Greek nor a Latin cook ... I never was bound apprentice to learning. I am as ignorant of their arts and meats, as of their persons and nations; I am like a plain, cleanly English cook-main, that dresses meat rather wholesomely than luxuriously.'²⁴ Cavendish declares her fidelity to Britain and to the domestic in one tidy metaphor, circumventing the possibility of being accused of overeducation or of lack of loyalty while emphasizing the 'wholesome[ness]' of her own verse: not only its worth, but its value. This is an early example of the domestic offering female poets protection from attacks on their work; ultimately, the domestic mock-heroic becomes a fruitful way for women to engage with the public nature of classicism and allusion while retaining a sense of propriety.

²⁴Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *Playes* (London: Printed by A. Warren, for John Martyn, James Allestry, and Tho. Dicus, at the Bell in Saint Pauls Church Yard, 1662), p. 682. Quoted in Wilson, 'Women Writers and the Classics,' p. 498.

The Domestic and Domestic Labour

This study's focus on women's poems about domesticity offers the opportunity to read women's writing about the lives they were expected to lead, and to engage with their opinions about those lives. The English word 'domestic' comes from the Latin *domus*, the home; the term 'domesticity' refers to activities that are performed in the home, such as sewing, cooking, and other aspects of domestic economy. In their mock-heroics on domesticity, these women demonstrate not just the power of allusion, but the ability to ironise their daily lives – and therefore their own claims to intelligence, originality, and genius.

Adeline Johns-Putra explains the long-standing understanding of the 'cult of domesticity' that emerged over the course of the eighteenth century:

It is a critical commonplace that the end of the eighteenth century saw the cultivation of a set of ideals promoting domesticity for women. Even given recent debate about how far these ideals can be said to have exercised an ideological or hegemonic function, it is at least widely acknowledged that an alignment of femininity and domesticity occurred in an imagined 'private sphere' of the home.²⁵

Michael McKeon's thorough and nuanced study of public, private, and the domestic emphasizes that modern ideas about 'public' and 'private' emerged slowly over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as part of a transition in thinking from monarchical absolutism, the 'divine right of kings,' to the idea that rights are rooted in the individual and an increasing sense of the private. He is not arguing that 'public' and 'private' were new ideas, necessarily, but that they became 'explicit' as part of an increase in subjectivity:

... 'traditional' knowledge is *tacit* in the sense of being deeply embedded in a political, social, and cultural matrix of practice whose guidance suffuses daily experience and

²⁵ Johns-Putra, 'Minding the Gap,' p. 67.

discourages the separation out of knowledge for self-conscious examination. 'Modern' knowledge is, on the contrary, an *explicit* and self-conscious awareness...²⁶

McKeon emphasizes that it is consciousness of such differences that increases; as Johns-Putra puts it, such discussion 'articulat[ed] as separate what had always been distinct.'²⁷ At the same time, discussions of domesticity as the proper concern of women and the home as the site of feminine authority certainly rose over the course of the eighteenth century. Yet these were not necessarily simply oppressive, as some critics have assumed. Johns-Putra continues, 'It is a commonplace too that such [ideas about domesticity were], in the hands of women, a means towards authority and responsibility, and not a simple blunt instrument of male oppression.'²⁸

The poems in this dissertation demonstrate not only women's attitudes towards the domestic but also the very self-consciousness that McKeon notes as the ultimate result of the changes in social history he traces. The irony with which these poets approach domestic labour – labour in which some of them engaged as maids or housewives – would not be possible without a sense of subjectivity which McKeon posits begins in the second half of the seventeenth century and continues to develop throughout the eighteenth century. One difference between Pope's satirical mock-heroics and those written by the women in this dissertation is that sense of interiority which McKeon rightly points out is crucial to the development of the novel and of modern thought in general. Although individual poems cannot be seen as explicitly 'feminist,' nevertheless the tradition of mock-heroic poems by women about the domestic may be seen as one phase of the development of (at least) proto-feminist thought, combining as

²⁶ Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. xix.

²⁷ Johns-Putra, 'Minding the Gap,' p. 67.

²⁸ Ibid.

they do women's senses of their own subjectivity and their attitudes towards the labour that was coming to be defined as feminine.

What kinds of domestic labour, then, feature as domestic in the women's poetry of the period? The poems in this dissertation describe purely physical labour such as cooking, baking, churning butter, and washing clothes, but also labour that was both physical and intellectual, such as entertaining, letter-writing, instructing servants, and visiting, as well as longer-term endeavours such as courtship and marriage. While this may appear to be a very broad definition, for the purpose of this study it encompasses what might be seen as within a woman's proper scope by the end of the eighteenth century – and therefore captures the writers' attitudes towards those different kinds of labour, all of which contributed in one way or another to the establishment of a household and a family. It is notable that McKeon sees domesticity as often associated with privacy, but not exclusively so:

...the advantages of attending closely to the category of domesticity would be negated if either domesticity were collapsed into privacy or privacy into domesticity. Indeed, in lived experience the norms and values of domesticity were found to be capable of obstructing one another.²⁹

Here, McKeon emphasises not only that the domestic and the private are not the same, but also that 'lived experience' defines the spheres – experience which was different for women of different social classes and at different points in the century. Isobel Grundy notes the way that the domestic specifically affects women's conceptions of public and private in 'poems of retirement,' popular early in the century:

Expectations of domesticity ensure that the ideal of retirement looks different to a woman and to a man, who has an alternative in public life ... Comparison of public and private produced from women a perceptibly female version of the 'choice' genre initiated by John Pomfret, in

²⁹ McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity*, p. xxi.

which women's choices lean toward singleness as well as self-sufficiency, liberty, and solitude.³⁰

It is this definition of the domestic which seems most useful to this study, which is concerned in an overall way with the way that women used mock-heroic to react to and to complicate the discussion of domesticity and femininity that emerged over the course of this study, as well as with the way that women's mock-heroics contributed to the development of and the persistence of the form itself. Although domestic labour is the focus of this thesis, other, related interpretations of and poems on the domestic will also be discussed, where appropriate.

Creative Tension: Cooking, Entertaining, and Writing

Although poems about domestic matters offered female poets a useful 'screen' against accusations of immodest or unfeminine subject matter, writing about housekeeping and particularly about cooking had its complications. As Henry Power points out, there was a discomfort in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the attention paid to cooking and food. He explains:

English authors ... recoiled at innovations in diet—and these culinary innovations were often associated with the excessive eating habits of the ancients. England, it seemed, was in the grip of a moral and cultural decline which echoed Rome's fall from frugal piety to wanton excess. The Roman satirists had drawn a clear connection between [Roman] shift in diet and the apparent decline in literary and aesthetic standards – and the connection was pursued with equal vigour by their Georgian successors.³¹

If an increased focus on food presaged the decline of Rome, this argument went, then England must be on the brink of decline itself – and an interest in culinary pleasure or innovation must contribute to its fall. Another source of anxiety regarding innovations in

³⁰ Isobel Grundy, 'The Poet as Poetess' p. 257.

³¹ Henry Power, *Epic into Novel: Henry Fielding, Scriblerian Satire, and the Consumption of Classical Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 4.

cooking may well have stemmed from the fact that the kitchen, as McKeon notes, was beginning to be separated out from the rest of the household, and figured as a seat of female power.³² Mary Leapor's cook character 'Sophronia' is very much in charge in 'Crumble-Hall'; Anna Letitia Barbauld emphasises the lack of male power over domestic affairs in 'Washing-Day'.³³

This aspect of the domestic, then, was fraught with political implications as well as gender dynamics. Pope mentions with embarrassment the scenes of food and feasting from *The Iliad* in the notes to his translation of the epic. In her translation of *The Iliad* (itself then translated into English by John Ozell), Anne Le Fèvre Dacier feels obliged to excuse Homer's description of his heroes preparing meat for sacrificial feasts:

Homer often talks of Pots and Cauldrons, of Blood, Fat, Entrails, &c. We meet with Princes themselves [flaying] Beasts, and roasting them. Men of Mode think this very disagreeable; but we make it appear, that it is entirely consonant to what we find in Holy Writ ... in Homer, Agamemnon and the other Princes, kill the Sacrifice themselves, because that is the most August and solemn act of Religion ... Nothing, then, can be objected against Homer on that Account. But, say some, who can endure to see Princes dressing their own Meat? the Sons of the greatest Kings keeping Sheep, working with their own Hands? And, Achilles doing the most servile Domesick [sic] Offices? Such was the Custom of those Heroick [sic], those Happy Times, when Luxury and Effeminacy were not known, and when Glory consisted only in Virtue and Labour; and nothing but Sloth and Vice were dishonourable.³⁴

That Dacier felt these passages required such a lengthy explication demonstrates the discomfort felt by both readers and writers at the beginning of the eighteenth century

³² For a description of changes in architecture that separated the kitchen and prioritised privacy, see McKeon, *Secret History*, p. 242.

³³ For 'Crumble-Hall,' see Fairer and Gerrard, pp. 386-390; for 'Washing-Day,' pp. 600-602. Both poems are discussed in detail later in this thesis.

³⁴ Homer, Anne Le Fèvre Dacier (ed. and trans.), and John Ozell (trans.), *The Iliad of Homer, with Notes. To Which Are Prefix'd, a Large Preface, and The Life of Homer, by Madam Dacier. Done from the French by Mr. Ozell*, Vol. I (London: printed by G. James, for Bernard Lintott, 1712), pp. xx-xxi.

with the idea of epic colliding with domesticity. At the same time, her conclusion drawing attention to the lack of ‘luxury and effeminacy’ in the classical era might be seen as a critique of eighteenth-century values and a call to a return to the classical, when what Dacier calls ‘virtue and labour’ (which were in the process of becoming associated with femininity and domesticity) served as the basis for heroism. Ultimately, Dacier is calling attention to the increase in trade and materialism that was another part of the culture of domesticity and the separation between public and private. In ‘Heroick [sic]...Happy times,’ she reminds her reader, ‘the most servile Domestick [sic] Offices’ were not domestic at all, because the concept was (as McKeon would put it) embedded or unconscious, rather than explicit. It is as if Dacier is attempting to bring the public and the private back together by normalising the hero Agamemnon cooking, but they will not re-merge seamlessly. What Johns-Putra would call ‘the gap’ between public and private when Dacier tries to align cooking and heroism is the site of the mock-heroic: a mixed form, as McKeon puts it, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.³⁵

Such tension regarding food, cooking, and eating comes up not only in criticism and poetry, but also in novels. Regarding Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones*, Power says,

There is a deliberate paradox [in Fielding’s work]...which would have struck many eighteenth-century readers forcibly: eating and epic were not supposed to mix.³⁶

Although Power begins his examination of Fielding’s novels by referencing a scene of feasting in Byron’s *Don Juan* (1819) which comically begins ‘Great things were now to be achieved at table’ (Canto XV, Stanza 62, line 489), he could have reached further back to mock-heroics of domesticity from the previous century, including some written

³⁵ For ‘the gap,’ see Johns-Putra, ‘Minding the Gap’; for McKeon’s mixed forms, see McKeon, *Secret History*, chapter 8.

³⁶ Power, *Epic into Novel*, p. 2.

by the women in this dissertation.³⁷ Mary Leapor ('The Sacrifice'), Elizabeth Moody ('To Economy'), and Anna Letitia Barbauld ('Washing-Day') wrote comically about the conflicting demands of hosting meals long before Byron described his heroes' triumphant feast. Like Pope in his 'Receipt,' they depicted not only the feast, but the preparation of the feast – an act of creation not unlike writing itself.

For women writers, there was often a tension between the requirement that they be skilled in domestic 'creations' such as cooking and the copying out of recipes and the desire to write poetry: the former often served as a method of suppressing the latter. Even the highly accomplished Elizabeth Carter, translator of Epictetus, was praised by her friend Samuel Johnson in both literary and domestic terms. According to John Hawkins:

Upon hearing a lady of his acquaintance commended for her learning, he said:--'A man is in general better pleased, when he has a good dinner upon his table, than when his wife talks Greek. My old friend, Mrs. Carter' said he, 'could make a pudding, as well as translate Epictetus from the Greek, and work a handkerchief as well as compose a poem.'³⁸

The implication here is that a woman may be educated, but will always also be judged according to her domestic abilities. In an article about Carter and Johnson, Claudia Wakefield reminds us that

similar formulations of women's priorities had appeared, and would continue appearing, for many years. Addison, for example, recorded a visit with some learned ladies in *The Guardian*, where 'It was very entertaining ... to see them dividing their speculations between jellies and stars.' When in 1774 Henry Laurens mailed 'a pair of the best eighteen inch [globes], with caps and a book of directions' to his daughter Martha, he reminded her, 'When you are measuring the surface of this world, remember you are to

³⁷ George Gordon Lord Byron and Jerome J. McGann (ed.), *The Major Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 834.

³⁸ Quoted in George Birkbeck Hill (ed.), *Johnsonian Miscellanies*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1897), v2, p. 11.

act a part on it, and think of a plumb pudding and other domestic duties.’³⁹

Domestic economy was at times set up as a substitute for literary creativity. Sarah Fyge

Egerton complains in ‘The Liberty’ of the limits placed on her writing:

My Pen if ever us’d must be imploy’d
In lofty Themes of useful Housewifery
Transcribing old Receipts of Cookery
And what is necessary ‘mongst the rest:
Good Cures for Agues, and a cancer’d Breast
But I can’t here write my *Probatum Est* (lines 37-42).⁴⁰

Egerton uses the elevated phrase ‘lofty Themes’ but then punctuates it with the practical ‘useful Housewifery,’ and transcription of ‘what is necessary’ from old recipe books (which typically included home remedies for common medical ailments). Not only is Egerton asked to write only about domestic matters, but her pen is employed only to copy others’ words, not to create her own work. She has not even engaged in creation by testing the recipes, she emphasizes: she cannot write ‘*Probatum est*’ (Latin, it is proved / it has been tested) on her work. As we will see in this thesis, the frustration of Egerton’s speaker is echoed in women’s descriptions of cookery and entertaining throughout the century.

As I have established, the eighteenth-century relationship between the domestic and the heroic is more complicated than twenty-first century readers may realise. How was a woman, who was expected to prepare and provide (or at least to oversee the preparation and serving of) food, to respond to the possibility that excellence in cooking was (as Power notes) believed to be associated with a decline in literary standards? Responding with humour to such ideas was the strategy of many female poets – from Leapor, who as a kitchen-maid was literally involved in cooking and other housework, to

³⁹ Claudia Thomas, ‘Samuel Johnson and Elizabeth Carter: Pudding, Epictetus, and the Accomplished Woman’ in *South Central Review* 9:4 (Winter 1992), 18-30, p. 20.

⁴⁰ David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, *Eighteenth Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology*, 3rd edition (England: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), p. 12.

Barbauld, who likely directed the work of a kitchen rather than cooking herself. It is important to note that the work of the kitchen involved all women, regardless of social class – but involved them in different ways. Although Leapor was a kitchen-maid (notoriously allowing meat to burn while composing poems in her head) and Barbauld the head of a school, they and many other female poets used scenes of cooking and meals to defend women's intelligence and their own right to the act of creation – whether culinary or poetic – and also to transcend the act of creation with which women will always be associated.

The Female Writer

It is difficult to justify a study that isolates female writers from their male contemporaries, and this thesis does not purport to do so, although the poets discussed in this study are all women, and I am making a specific claim about the effects of women's poetry on the development of the mock-heroic. In an article on Barbauld, genre, and domesticity, Haley Bordo recalls Barbauld's reason for declining Maria Edgeworth's 1804 invitation to help establish a periodical paper consisting entirely of women's writing: 'Perhaps her most interesting reason for not entirely supporting the paper is that she did not feel that women should or could, productively at least, be united on the basis of their sex alone.'⁴¹ Bordo quotes from a letter Barbauld wrote to Edgeworth: 'There is no bond of union among literary women, any more than among literary men; different sentiments and different connections separate them much more than the joint interest of their sex would unite them.'⁴² Bordo, through Barbauld, identifies the difficulty with a study which focuses on female writers: no one woman (or, in this case, four women)

⁴¹ Haley Bordo, 'Reinvoking the 'Domestic Muse': Anna Laetitia Barbauld and the Performance of Genre,' *European Romantic Review* 11:2 (2000), 186-196, p. 186.

⁴² Anna Letitia Le Breton, *Memoir of Mrs. Barbauld, Including Letters and Notices of Her Family and Friends* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1874), pp. 86-87.

may be representative of her gender as a whole, yet any attempt to restore women's writing and women's experience to literary history runs the risk of appearing to draw broad conclusions about 'women's writing' as a whole. As David Fairer observes regarding Leapor and Ann Yearsley's status as labouring-class poets,

It is easy to limit them by validating them chiefly as representative figures who speak for their class or gender, as case studies of writers who successfully found a voice within a canon dominated by the major male writers—as if we always feel the need to empower them critically as laboring-class women rather than simply as poets ... The critic's investment in what is potentially a project of mutual empowerment is considerable, but what is in danger of getting lost is the individual poet's voice.⁴³

In this thesis, I attempt to retain a focus on the individual poet's voice and her approach to mock-heroic, without allowing my work to devolve into mere biography.

The poets in this dissertation also represent the wide variation in how women's poetry was shared with others over the course of the century. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's poems were circulated in manuscript form; famously, her first entry into the print world was when the first three of her Town Eclogues were pirated by Edmund Curll. Mary Leapor shared her poems among friends for years before her work was finally published posthumously. On the other hand, Mary Jones published her poems by subscription; Elizabeth Moody had a career as a professional reviewer before publishing her collection of poems in 1798; and Anna Letitia Barbauld published numerous books of poems and prose as well as working as a reviewer and editor. Only part of the decision to print or not was within the control of the individual author; Montagu's class made publication risky to her reputation, while Moody worked as a reviewer likely to supplement her income, and Leapor's publication was the result of years of efforts by her

⁴³ David Fairer, 'Flying atoms in the sightless air': Issues of Coherence and Scale in Leapor and Yearsley,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 34:1 (2015), 141–162 (pp. 141-142).

patrons. Nevertheless, the changes in mode of publication – from Montagu’s pirated verses in 1716 to Barbauld’s publication of her controversial Juvenalian satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* (1812) – are notable in their transition from private to public.

Also interesting, in regard to the development of women’s writing and mock-heroic over the course of the century, is the transition McKeon posits from absolutism to interiority and individual subjectivity. He points out that debates about satire and libel led to a greater awareness of – or more overt literary discussion about – the distinction between author and character, a distinction which ultimately was not binary but much more complex.⁴⁴ This distinction, so important for the kind of satire written by Dryden, Pope, and Swift, was not assumed regarding women’s poetry: perhaps because it was often occasional, there was a tendency on the part of reviewers to treat women’s poetry as sincere and autobiographical. Nevertheless, there is a great deal of evidence that women were aware of their authorial personae and played with the idea of the authorial mask. Grundy points out Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s awareness of the possibility for play with author, character, and innermost self even as an adolescent:

she neatly transcribed her poems in an album whose title page addressed them ‘to the fair hands of the most beauteous Hermensilda by her most obedient Strephon.’ This literary cross-dressing reflects consciousness of distinction between her poetic persona and her quotidian self ... Even writing as Strephon, however, Lady Mary did not conceal her actual sex. The album’s preface, a brisk, conventional expression of modesty, begins: ‘I am a Woman.’⁴⁵

Montagu does not hide her gender, and yet she is aware that she is taking on another role when she is writing. Almost eighty years later, Elizabeth Moody uses the assumption that a literary critic must be male as an incitement to similar literary cross-dressing,

⁴⁴ McKeon, *Secret History*, ‘Chapter 2: Publishing the Private,’ esp. p. 102.

⁴⁵ Isobel Grundy, ‘The Poet as Poetess’ in *The Oxford Handbook of British Poetry, 1660-1800*, ed. by Jack Lynch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 247-265, p. 255.

referring to herself as a male critic smoking a pipe and drinking to drive away fears after reviewing a particularly frightening Gothic tale. Women, who were so accustomed to being told who and what they could or could not be, must have been aware of a separation between their quotidian selves and the *personae* they presented in their writing, similar to the separation between their interior subjectivity and the faces they presented to the world. This separation was in some ways constricting – yet it could be exploited for ironic ends. At the same time as poets such as Pope and Swift were arguing the distinction between their satirical personae and their private, inner selves as protection from accusations of libel, female poets might be said to be engaging in a similar separation from their *personae* to avoid either accusations of immodesty or the degradation of their work through an association with the domestic. This study aims to highlight what happened when women turned the double bind of domesticity to their own ends – not just what happened to their work and the trajectory of women's writing, but how this strategy affected the development of mock-heroic and British writing as a whole.

Chapter One

Mock-Heroic and Its Forms

This study aims to demonstrate not simply that mock-heroic continued through the end of the eighteenth century, but also that the women who participated in its continuation changed the form materially and contributed to its development. At the outset, then, an understanding of the effect women poets may have had on mock-heroic requires an understanding of the history of the form as well as its literary associations and critical treatment. In this chapter, I will discuss different critical approaches to the mock-heroic as a whole and then briefly describe background particular to its various constituent forms (mock-epic, mock-georgic, mock-pastoral, and other mock-forms). The chapter concludes with a study of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Town Eclogues*, one of the earliest examples of women's mock-heroic verse.

Foundations of Mock-Heroic

Mock-heroic produces a comic effect by contrasting high language such as that used in epic poetry with a low subject matter. As Fred Parker observes, 'Taken in its widest sense, referring to a mode of sensibility, [the term] could be connected with a great deal of the literature produced [in the eighteenth century], when many writers combined the rhetorical performance of grandeur or importance with a conscious scepticism about the grounds or limits of such grandeur.'⁴⁶ Parker emphasises that such a wide definition does not fully describe the ironic tone of mock-heroic, nor the weight which mock-heroic allusions carry – not only in references to other mock-heroics but also in their responses to the classical tradition. Terry's sense of the mock-heroic mode or discourse, which is

⁴⁶ Fred Parker, 'Travesty and Mock-Heroic' in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, Volume III 1660-1790*, ed. by David Hopkins and Charles Martindale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 323-359, p. 323.

broad but retains an understanding of the full sense of the form, is that which I have used in developing this thesis. Terry's sense of the mock-heroic discourse as including, not simply the juxtaposition of high form and low content, but also the use of irony and allusion is crucial to prevent critical explorations of mock-heroic from becoming too diffuse, too inclusive.

Terry posits that the tradition of mock-heroic changes over the course of the century, becoming what he calls a 'discourse' as well as a form and a mode:

Most previous criticism has tended to see mock-heroic as a genre, a distinct category of work, not as a fugitive 'effect' flickering to life in a variety of contexts. Yet this is one of the directions in which mock-heroic evolves in the eighteenth century: indeed, it is a mark of its full absorption in the literary culture of its day.⁴⁷

Instead of seeing the 'flickering' effect of mock-heroic in different contexts as a sign of its diffusion and eminent demise, Terry rightly notes that this represents a new phase of mock-heroic development, and that this development included both a mode that appears in some longer poems and a discourse about relative value during a period (as McKeon and others have noted) subject to significant social shifts. Using as examples mock-heroic passages in James Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) and William Cowper's *The Task* (1785), Terry suggests that 'poems above a certain length necessarily become exercises in contexture, and one of their more common ingredients is mock-heroic.'⁴⁸ In other words, as it became acceptable for longer poems to include passages in markedly different styles, mock-heroic emerged as one of those used. Terry also points out the mock-heroic discourse that emerges as part of the philosophical landscape of the century: that ideas about high and low, and about opposing attributes in general, were called into question at mid-century, as were assumptions about class and gender.

⁴⁷ Richard Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper: An English Genre and Discourse* (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 26.

⁴⁸ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 26.

These mock-heroic discourses were not confined to poetry: Terry offers examples of different works in which the question of high and low is debated, including Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*. Henry Power's *Epic into Novel* (which traces the responses to classical literature in Henry Fielding's novels and the way that the epic affected the novel's development) begins with a discussion of Fielding's *Tom Jones* as a mock-epic. Terry identifies this shift as an indication of the importance of mock-heroic in a larger change in discourse over the course of the century.

From its beginnings, however, mock-heroic combined the incompatible. As Terry explains, mock-heroic's 'essential technique' is 'a contravention of the canon of fit style, the principle, that is, that the content and style of a work should be in sympathy with each other,' a common consideration in literary criticism in the late seventeenth century.⁴⁹ Mock-heroic's humour is achieved by an incongruity of form and subject; the author uses the 'high' form, tone, and language of epic to describe matters considered to be 'low.' According to Claude Rawson, the first mock-heroic poem was the French *Le Lutrin* (1674-83), by Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, which chronicles a battle over where a lectern should be placed in a chapel.⁵⁰ *Le Lutrin* was translated into English by John Ozell in 1708, and Ozell's dedication in his translation describes the new form as it was beginning to be understood:

Monsieur *Boileau* calls this poem of his, *Heroi-Comique*, Mock-Heroic; that is, a Ridiculous Action made considerable in Heroic Verse. If I distinguish right, there are two sorts of *Burlesque*; the first where things of mean Figure and Slight Concern appear in all the Pomp and Bustle of an *Epic Poem*; such is this of the *Lutrin*.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Terry, *Mock Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Claude Rawson, 'War and the Epic Mania in England and France: Milton, Boileau, Prior and English Mock-Heroic,' *Review of English Studies* 64, no. 265 (June 2013), 433-453, p. 433.

⁵¹ Nicolas Boileau-Despréaux, *Boileau's Lutrin: A Mock-Heroick Poem. In Six Cantos*, trans. by John Ozell (London: Printed for E. Sanger and E. Curll, at the Post-House at the Middle Temple-Gate, and at the Peacock without Temple-Bar, 1708), p. sig *3.

Notably, Ozell's dedication hints at the way that the content of a mock-heroic poem is raised by its treatment: ridiculous actions are 'made considerable' and 'things of mean Figure ... appear in ... Pomp and Bustle.'⁵² At the very beginning of its treatment in English, then, mock-heroic has included the potential for its low subject matter to be not simply mocked but also elevated. Mock-heroics range in form from mock-epic and mock-georgic to mock-pastoral, but share the quality of heroic language combined with a subject matter traditionally viewed as trivial or unworthy of poetic attention.

Claude Rawson sees mock-heroic as, at bottom, protective, calling the early eighteenth century

the first mock-heroic moment, when, perhaps for the only time in history, some of the best poets devoted some of their strongest energies to a hybrid genre that parodied the epic but did not satirize it. Their style, though seemingly designed to deflate, was protective of the older epics, and, by retaining and even absorbing some of the primary majesties it was travestying, actually aspired in its way to emulating them, achieving through parody the status of what Dryden called 'Heroique Poetry it self.'⁵³

For Rawson, mock-heroic begins with epic, and specifically with Boileau's attempts to retain epic language through mock-epic. Of course, the definition of mock-epic itself may be argued; Gregory Colomb, for example, sees only three mock-epics in the century: Samuel Garth's *The Dispensary* (1699) and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (1712) and *The Dunciad* (1728).⁵⁴ Although this seems an extremely limited list, Rawson is referring only to mock-epic. It is important to note the distinctions among the various kinds of mock-heroic. In this thesis, I use the term 'mock-heroic' to refer to the general

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Claude Rawson, 'Mock-Heroic and English Poetry,' in *The Cambridge Companion to the Epic*, ed. Catherine Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 167-192, p. 167.

⁵⁴ Gregory C. Colomb, *Designs on Truth: The Poetics of the Augustan Mock-Epic* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) p. xiii.

mode of discourse and as a term encompassing specific forms such as mock-epic, mock-georgic, and mock-pastoral/mock-eclogue.

The English tradition of mock-heroic begins with John Dryden's *Mac Flecknoe* (1682) and Samuel Butler's *Hudibras* (1684), but Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*; John Gay's *Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*; and Jonathan Swift's 'Description of a City Shower' are the best examples of mock-heroic from this early period. They range in form from mock-epic to mock-georgic and mock-pastoral, and share the quality of heroic language combined with subject matter traditionally viewed as trivial or unworthy of poetic attention. To the very broad sense of the form already discussed, most scholars add qualities such as irony, classical references, and allusions to other mock-heroic works, especially those by Pope, Swift, and Gay. Most importantly, critical scholarship recognizes the way that mock-epic and mock-heroic give rise to other mock-forms.

The georgic and mock-georgic poems popular in the eighteenth century began with Virgil's original, *The Georgics*, a four-part instructional poem written to teach Roman soldiers farming for the good of a post-war state. Similarly, georgic poems of the eighteenth century held up labour and the labouring class as morally superior and the key to Britain's greatness.⁵⁵ As Anthony Low argues, the mode stresses 'the value of intensive and persistent labour against hardships and difficulties,' and 'differs from epic because it emphasizes planting and building instead of killing and destruction ... it is preeminently the mode suited to the establishment of civilization and the founding of nations.'⁵⁶ Stephen Duck, one of the first labouring-class poets to write eighteenth-century georgic, changed the form by writing from his own experience as a thresher in

⁵⁵ Rachel Crawford, 'English Georgic and British Nationhood,' *ELH*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Spring 1998), 123-158, p. 129.

⁵⁶ Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 12.

The Thresher's Labour (1730); in a response to his depiction of women, Mary Collier wrote, *The Woman's Labour* (1739), a response which – if not exactly mock-georgic – is different in tone and intent from a georgic. As David Fairer and Christine Gerrard observe:

work for [Collier] is never transformed or justified by a wider context as it is for Duck. It remains hard labour in which the material qualities of things demand attention. Set against the social realities of the daily struggles, her brief references to the timeless world of Greek myth make a telling ironic point.⁵⁷

As opposed to Duck's sincere poem, which elevates his labour while also depicting its hardships, Collier's response introduces irony and criticism into the conversation. Her complaint that Duck dismisses women's labour turns into a broader social critique of women's place in eighteenth-century society.

Swift's 'Description of a City Shower' and Gay's *Trivia; or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* and *The Shepherd's Week* are the most notable examples of English mock-pastoral at the beginning of the eighteenth century. *The Shepherd's Week* arose from a debate about the nature of pastoral poetry and how it should sound. The sixth part of Tonson's *Poetical Miscellanies* had included pastoral poems by Pope and Ambrose Philips, but only those by Philips were praised by Thomas Tickell in five separate numbers of *The Guardian* (Nos. 22, 23, 28, 30, and 32).⁵⁸ Jealous, Pope lashed out with a satirical piece on pastoral which he tricked Richard Steele into printing as a serious work. At stake was the question of how pastoral should sound and what events it should describe. Pope had crafted his poems as 'Golden Age' pastorals, in simple yet elegant language which avoided all vulgarity. Philips, on the other hand, followed Spenser's model from *The Shepherdes Calendar*, endowing his shepherds with more

⁵⁷ Fairer and Gerrard, p. 312.

⁵⁸ Edward Heuston, 'Windsor Forest and Guardian 40,' *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. 29, No. 114 (May, 1978), 160-168, p. 160.

rustic concerns and a plainer vocabulary. To mock Philips, Pope encouraged Gay to write *The Shepherd's Week*, which extended Philips' coarse shepherds and his verse's simpler voice to a comic degree. Yet ultimately what Gay created, in conversation with Pope, Swift, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, has had a greater effect on English poetry than any of the pastorals debated in the pages of *The Guardian*.

As David Fairer explains, the strict boundaries of pastoral that Pope and the Addisonians debated almost naturally led to a mock-form that deliberately flouted the rules:

What we tend to think of as 'mock'- or 'anti-pastoral' is often more truly the opening out for display of its ironic potential as a mode that is defined by what it excludes. All the things pastoral holds at bay – heroism, politics, money, war, time, and death – are there to haunt it from an echo's distance.⁵⁹

What Fairer says about pastoral – that it invites mock forms based on the subjects it excludes – may be applied to mock-heroic forms in general, and certainly the poems in this dissertation might be seen as a backlash against the exclusion of the domestic and feminine from the epic, such as Dacier and Pope's notes on *The Iliad*.

Intertextuality and Classical Allusion

Mock-heroic poets' work with allusion, especially to the classical, is crucial to the form's depth. Terry posits that the two 'best' routes to 'conspicuous elevation of style' needed for mock-heroics were 'mimicking the conventions of epic, or by adopting what, within the confines of vernacular literary culture, passed for an "heroic style," this being equated alternatively with the closed decasyllabic couplet practised by Pope in his translation of Homer's *Iliad* or with the sprawling grandiloquence of *Paradise Lost*.'⁶⁰

⁵⁹ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003), p. 84.

⁶⁰ Terry, *Mock Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 12.

Thus mock-heroic poetry of the eighteenth century references Pope's *Iliad* (and, at times, classical literature not mediated through Pope's translation) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* as signals of their form as well as allusions. Pope's own *The Rape of the Lock* is an example of the former; John Philips' 'The Splendid Shilling,' written in mock-Miltonic blank verse, of the latter.

Similarly, Fairer points out two distinct types of mock-heroic: the strictly satirical, whose primary focus is an attack on a subject who represents a particular vice; and what might be called the sympathetic, which leaves openings for the reader to relate to its subject. Comparing passages from Swift's 'Description of a City Shower' (1710) and Philips' 'The Splendid Shilling' (1701), he writes:

Where Swift's frightened beau, anxious for his powdered wig, is mocked and judged from a distance in regular heroic couplets, we enter the imaginative world of Philips' frightened man, a victim of sublime terror, and the blank verse draws us into his vision so that the final word delivers an amusing jolt to us as well. Both passages are mock-heroic, but in different ways, and the contrast marks out two traditions in the mode – and two modes of poetry that co-existed throughout the century.⁶¹

Fairer is making a distinction between the satire of 'Description of a City Shower,' in which the beau is 'mocked and judged...in regular heroic couplets' that reference Pope's translation of the *Iliad*, and Philips' use of Miltonic blank verse to '[draw] us into his vision' and create a stronger connection between the character and the reader. Heroic couplets appear to create a more satirical relationship between reader and character, while blank verse creates a more sympathetic mock-heroic stance. It will be important to trace the different formal choices made by poets in this dissertation and what these

⁶¹ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century: 1700-1789* (London and New York: Longman, 2003), p. 49.

signify for the poems – and for the development of the mock-heroic in the eighteenth century.

The use of mock-Miltonics allows female poets to ally themselves with John Milton and with his great English epic, *Paradise Lost*. As many critics have pointed out, *Paradise Lost* centers around a domestic drama: the disagreement between Adam and Eve over whether they should divide their labour leads to them working separately, and to the serpent's temptation of Eve. The temptation, too, is carried out through the offering of food – first by the serpent to Eve, and then by Eve to Adam. If *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem about man's fall from grace, it is also a poem about the relatively low subjects of marriage, labour, and food. In this, it demonstrates the duality that later poets would use to call into question the relative values of low and high, female and male, epic and mock-epic.

There was real tension during the eighteenth century between admiration of classical literature and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century discomfort with classical values – particularly epic descriptions of warfare and sexuality. In the story of Adam, Eve, and the serpent, Milton writes an English epic that espouses the moral ideals of its time. As Terry explains,

Though *Paradise Lost* conforms to the generic template of epic, the moral values it expresses are at an extreme from, and deliberately designed to rebuff, the martial bluster of traditional epic. Milton's values are not merely more pious but also more undemonstrative than heroic ones...At the end of the poem, Adam comes to accept a personal placidity wholly at odds with the self-vaunting energy of the traditional epic poem, realizing that 'to obey is best, / and love with fear the only God.'⁶²

If *Paradise Lost* is at direct odds with martial epic, as Terry points out, it is aligned with actions often associated with married women: domestic concerns and obedience. The

⁶² Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 22.

Milonic mock-epics that this dissertation will consider thus align themselves with the work widely considered as the greatest English epic – calling attention to the fact that the values elevated in that work were associated with the domestic and the feminine. While the contemporary view of Milton’s epic was not as a domestic work – Joseph Addison wrote a series in *The Spectator* in which he raised the question of whether *Paradise Lost* was a heroic poem, but not on the grounds of its domestic content⁶³ – there is no question that the women in this dissertation who write mock-Milronics are playing with the very domestic content of Milton’s work, and aligning themselves with the author of the great English epic.

Contexts and Approaches

Ulrich Brioch points out that the mock-heroic mode expresses the ‘fundamental split between the heroic ideal and an unheroic reality’ starting in the early eighteenth century. When considered in such terms, women seem the natural candidates to write mock-heroic, pulled as they were between idealised archetypes and the reality of their actual experience in such areas as marriage, domestic labour, beauty, and luxury.⁶⁴ Claude Rawson says that mock-heroic was ‘the dominant idiom of the eighteenth century,’ and it seems important to reintroduce women’s mock-heroic domestic poetry into the critical conversation about the form. These poems demonstrate that female writers in the eighteenth century engaged in complex and nuanced criticism of their daily lives and their place in society through poetry.

Grundy points out the current critical understanding of ‘the “double voice” of women’s poetry, which aims on the one hand to ‘emulate the male poetic models’ (in the

⁶³ In *The Spectator* 267, Addison examines *Paradise Lost* according to ‘the Rules of Epic Poetry.’ Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 2, p. 538.

⁶⁴ Ulrich Brioch and David Henry Wilson (trans.), *The Eighteenth-Century Mock-Heroic Poem* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

largest sense of relating to a whole canon of poetry both English and classical), and on the other hand to create ‘feminine difference.’⁶⁵ This ‘double voice’ has a neat parallel in the doubleness of mock-heroic, which both mocks and elevates its subject.

The rise of sentiment in the second half of the eighteenth century seems to parallel what Terry calls a ‘general elevation of comedy above ridicule,’ a preference for the gentle mockery of comedy rather than the biting tone of satire.⁶⁶ The public stance of satire and its ‘biting tone’ may have led to the satires that women wrote not being published or not being critically accepted. Indeed, the only woman who has been recognised as writing mock-heroic poetry in the first half of the century is Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, whose work will be discussed in the next section. Montagu’s *Town Eclogues* have a more traditionally satirical tone than those of the other women in this thesis, despite the moments of real sympathy with which she imbues them – and their reception at Court demonstrates the barriers which women who wrote mock-heroic encountered.

Terry points out that studies of mock-heroic have therefore focused on the first half of the century, making it appear that the form largely disappears after 1750. ‘What gets lost when this is done is the process through which the late eighteenth century redefines mock-heroic not as a satiric form but as a comic one.’⁶⁷ In the second half of the century, as a move toward sentiment in poetry became more prominent, ideas about domesticity and praise for the domestic woman were also increasing; women could credibly write gently comic poems that mocked ideas rather than satirising people. This is not to say that their mock-heroics do not at times include satire, but rather to say that the women of this thesis place more emphasis on sentiment and humour than did either

⁶⁵ Grundy, ‘The Poet as Poetess,’ p. 256; Grundy is quoting Paula Backscheider, *Eighteenth Century Women Poets and Their Poetry* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), p. 332.

⁶⁶ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 5

⁶⁷ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 4.

Montagu or the Scriblerians who wrote mock-heroics in the first half of the eighteenth century. The writers in this dissertation, in different ways, offer mock-heroic poems as comedy rather than satire, therefore participating in the development of the form.

Indeed, two of the poets in this thesis are connected with Joseph Priestley, whose essay on laughter sets up mock-heroic as ‘not just a paragon of civilized laughter, but as a key to understanding the very concept of humour.’⁶⁸ Seen in this light, Moody and Barbauld were at the heart of the retention of mock-heroic in Britain. Barbauld, one of the best-known female poets of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, was a close friend of Priestley, and wrote several poems to him and to his wife. Scholars have traditionally seen English mock-heroic as a phenomenon of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century: beginning with *Hudibras* and Ben Jonson’s *The Famous Voyage*, refined by Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and falling out of fashion around mid-century. Yet critics like Priestley discussed the form, and poets such as Moody and Barbauld used it to articulate a particular set of domestic and social concerns, through to the end of the century.

This sense of change in women’s mock-heroic verse may be seen as supporting Michael Edwards’ sense of the form as transformational. Edwards claims mock-heroic as a driver of progress:

By its very nature, [mock-heroic] indicates a discrepancy between reality on the one hand and, on the other, poetry, language, art; or rather, it announces that reality is being changed by art.⁶⁹

The topic of domesticity, then, is being changed through its poeticization. Edwards specifies that the mechanism of this change is artistry rather than mockery:

By emphasizing its means, by calling attention, that is, to its choice of event, of verse level, of vocabulary, to each of

⁶⁸ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ Michael Edwards, *Poetry and Possibility* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1988), p. 32.

the moves by which it mimes the epic, it declares itself to be art and revels in the fact. True: since its aim is partly satiric, it will show, in one perspective, that the reality selected for the poem is unworthy of the artistry bestowed on it; yet, from another perspective, the positive transformation of that unworthy real is the process by which poetry redeems as well as judges – the process, one might say, in which the poetry functions most inwardly as poetry.⁷⁰

It is in this sense that mock-heroic may have been most appealing to the women of this dissertation. If their domestic bind left them with the choices of eliding their gender role, attempting to transcend it, or embracing it, Edwards argues that those who embraced domesticity through mock-heroic – those who both mocked and elevated their domestic role and its attendant labour – were participating in changing attitudes towards the domestic, if not in their reader then in their own experience.

In a related vein, Margaret Koehler uses cognitive models of attention in the brain to trace the effect of mock-heroic on the reader; she emphasises that ‘because mock-heroic focuses on such unlikely material, readers confront new demands on their own attention. They must attend to the mighty and the trivial in turn and then to the combination, noting satirical incongruities as well as mock-heroic’s more imaginative possibilities, its “capacity to enjoy a life unaccompanied by satire.”’⁷¹ Certainly, women’s poetry about domestic labour fits neatly into the basic definition of mock-heroic: the work of a housewife is not usually considered to be worthy of poetry, or of any other kind of literary attention. Yet the domestic mock-heroics of the period transcend the very framework of mock-heroic, claiming the reader’s notice by deploying not just mockery and not just high language but also domestic detail, allusion, and wry

⁷⁰ Michael Edwards, ‘A Meaning for Mock-Heroic,’ *The Yearbook of English Studies* v15 (Special Number on Anglo-French Literary Relations) (1985), 48-63, p. 48.

⁷¹ Margaret Koehler, *Poetry of Attention in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 62; the quotation at the end is from Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 6.

sympathy to deliver a new sort of mock-heroic, one that passes smoothly between satire and sentiment.

The Case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu⁷²

As I have mentioned above, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's *Town Eclogues* are the clearest and best-known example of mock-heroics by a woman in the eighteenth century. As an aristocrat, and one who faced scandal early in her, Montagu was all too aware of the difference between her own desires and what was expected of her. In 'Written extempore in Company in a Glass Window the first year I was marry'd,' Montagu reflects more upon the fragile nature of reputation than on her personal experience of marriage. This may be due in part to the fact that the pressure of gossip in London had pushed her to elope with Edward Wortley Montagu. She chose to elope in order to avoid marriage to a man her father wished her to marry, and was in love with a third, to date unidentified, man.⁷³ Montagu is not only adjusting to Edward's expectations for her as his wife, but also to the necessity of remaining within the bounds of propriety after the serious breach of her elopement.⁷⁴ She issues a warning to herself as well as to her reader in the final lines of the poem: 'In part to blame she is, who has been try'd; / Too near he has approach'd, who is deny'd.'⁷⁵ Marriage comes up only in the title, yet the poem is suffused with a sense of oppression that the reader assumes is due to her marriage. The glass window of the title brings to mind imprisonment, with Montagu writing although she has company, ducking into a windowed alcove to avoid the pressure of the

⁷² Some of the research in this section was carried out as part of the Digital Miscellanies Index Project (see <http://digitalmiscellaniesindex.org/>) and is published, in a different form, as Kathleen Lawton-Trask, 'Lady Mary Wortley Montagu: New Insights from the Digital Miscellanies Index,' *Eighteenth-Century Life* (2017) 41(1), 76-95; doi:10.1215/00982601-3695945.

⁷³ Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁴ Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, p. 46.

⁷⁵ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, A Comedy*, ed. by Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p. 179. All subsequent references to Wortley Montagu's verse are to this edition.

‘Company’ and to dash off the reminder, ‘ex tempore.’ Eloping with Edward may have been Wortley Montagu’s choice, but their marriage did not offer freedom: the poem is another suggestion of the struggle between social expectations and Wortley Montagu’s wishes, with a sense of the danger of forgetting the former in favour of the latter.

Certainly, the dual nature of Wortley Montagu’s writerly aspirations – her need to write, combined with her fear of appearing in print – and the different ways her writing was used in her lifetime make her a fascinating subject of study. It seems both necessary and incongruous to include Wortley Montagu in this dissertation: the former because the *Town Eclogues* are to date the best-known examples of women’s mock-heroic verse to have been published in the eighteenth century, and the latter because she is exceptional in several ways. Unlike the other writers discussed, she was an aristocrat: not only did she not need to earn money by her writing, but the social risks of publication – which existed for all women at the time – were intensified in her case. Moreover, the misunderstanding of her mock-eclogues at court, and Edmund Curll’s use of them and of further misattribution to sully her reputation as part of his pamphlet war with Pope, reveal the particular risk that satire of any kind represented for women poets: misunderstanding was not simply a nuisance, but a real blow to reputation and standing. The risk of misunderstanding and backlash against satirical verse was not only a crucial part of Wortley Montagu’s story; it is a common theme for each poet in this dissertation, most notably Anna Letitia Barbauld, who at the end of the century faced startlingly negative reactions to her Juvenalian satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. The case of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu demonstrates one possible reason that women’s mock-heroic verse developed with a sympathetic, comic tone rather than one that was strictly satirical. Not only did women face criticism for sharp satire throughout the century, but

as the frequent targets of social commentary women may have been naturally more sympathetic to the subjects of any mockery, including their own.

By the time of her death, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was recognized as the writer of important letters about the Ottoman Empire; as Pope's friend and then his foe; as an activist for the use of a vaccine for smallpox; and as the likely writer of *Court Poems*, a series of mock-pastoral poems pirated by Edmund Curll in 1716. Curll's pamphlet, which claimed that he found the poems in a pocket-book at court (the pocket-book itself a suggestion of the feminine), named three possible authors for the work: 'a Lady of Quality;' 'Mr. Gay;' or 'the Judicious Translator of Homer,' Alexander Pope.⁷⁶ Today, we also know that she wrote anonymously for *The Spectator* (No. 573, 28 July 1714) and that she wrote all nine of the essays that appeared in her own periodical, the short-lived *The Nonsense of Common-Sense* (1737-8).⁷⁷ Yet she steadily resisted publication, likely due in part to the damage incurred to her reputation by Curll's initial pirating and his ongoing use of pseudonyms that pointed to her in his print war with Pope.

It is not exactly that Wortley Montagu was ashamed of the poems she wrote; indeed, she proudly notes her authorship of the eclogues both in her copy of Dodsley's *Collection* (1748) and in a manuscript edition of which she says 'all the verses and Prose in this Book were wrote by me, without the assistance of one line from any other. Mary Wortley Montagu.'⁷⁸ Unfortunately, the heavy irony of her poems caused a misunderstanding with Princess Caroline, which led to at least some level of disgrace at court, and – if it did not lead to her departure from London – at least made it more attractive for her to leave.

⁷⁶ *Court Poems* (London: Printed for J. Roberts, near the Oxford-Arms, in Warwick-Lane, 1716), pp. i-ii.

⁷⁷ Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity*, 69-74 (*Spectator*) and 3 (*Nonsense of Common-Sense*).

⁷⁸ Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, p. 107.

When Curll pirated three of her eclogues, Wortley Montagu's reputation became one of the casualties of his print war with Alexander Pope. Curll and Pope traded insults and insinuations in the press over the course of years; after Pope took exception to Curll's publication of the three poems (and suggestion that the author was Pope, Gay, or Montagu), he sought to punish Curll with, first, an emetic and, then, a poem about Curll's reaction to the emetic. Curll responded by printing the eclogues again and again, under different covers, keeping them in print for years and printing other, bawdier poems under similar names (such as *Court Poems Part II*). The loss of control of those three of her poems led to Wortley Montagu's name being attached to other, more scandalous, poems that she had not written – and contributed to her determination to tightly control the publication of any of her writing.

Wortley Montagu was an aristocrat; the printing of her poems would have been a scandal for her no matter what the subject matter. This is not the case for the poets in this dissertation, each of whom courted publication to one degree or another. But Wortley Montagu also enjoyed a level of privilege the other women did not, and was associated with two unquestioned writers of mock-heroic: Pope and Gay. Despite the fact that her audience understood the world she described and despite the fact that the form of her poem makes its mock-pastoral intentions reasonably clear, she was suspected of being sincere in what she wrote, and of attacking one it was her duty to flatter. That Wortley Montagu had difficulty despite her status navigating the gap between audience expectation and literary intention demonstrates that the other women in this dissertation were doing something somewhat bold in writing mock-heroics about domesticity, even when they were misunderstood.

Lady Mary Wortley was not always opposed to imagining her work in print. She began her poetic career as a young girl circulating poetry in manuscript, but (like most

writers) publication was clearly in her mind from the first: one of her early manuscripts imitates a printed book. As biographer Isobel Grundy notes, the ‘title-page—“The Entire Works of Clarinda. London”—firmly asserts both gender and aspiration to print.’⁷⁹ The tension between privacy and publicity would come to typify Wortley Montagu’s relationship to publication: her rank and gender required that she resist publication, while her authorial pride urged her to own her work. When one of her poems was misattributed in Dodsley’s *Collection* (1748), while a response to that poem was erroneously attributed to her, she chafed: ‘By what accident they [her poem, and the response] have fallen into the hands of that thing Dodsley I know not, but he has printed them as address’d by me to a very contemptible Puppy, and my own words as his Answer.’⁸⁰ Clearly, she wished for recognition, but not notoriety – a vain desire for one in her social position and historical moment. Later, she complains to her daughter:

Sure no body ever had such various provocation to print as my selfe. I have seen things I have wrote so mangle’d and falsify’d I have scarce known them. I have seen Poems I never read publish’d with my Name at length, and others that were truly and singly wrote by me, printed under the names of others. I have made my selfe easy under all these mortifications by the reflection I did not deserve them, having never aim’d at the Vanity of Popular Applause.⁸¹

Her injured pride at having to disclaim poems of which she is proud, and at not being believed that other poems are not hers, emphasizes the frustrating lack of control Wortley Montagu faced when it came to publication. Prevented by social convention from actively pursuing publication, Wortley Montagu is instead forced into an attempt at control of her print record through denial – a poor substitute indeed. Her fraught

⁷⁹ Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, p. 20

⁸⁰ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu*, Vol. 3, ed. by Robert Halsband (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 187.

⁸¹ Montagu, *Letters*, Vol. 3, p. 95.

relationship with printing and poetic reputation began with her mock-eclogues, but continued throughout her lifetime.

It is Montagu's effect on the mock-heroic that is most important for this study: the six mock-eclogues, which she sometimes called 'Eclogs,' and which were later printed as *Town Eclogues*, satirise life at court. They use the language and conventions of the pastoral to describe courtly concerns such as love affairs and patronage; their tone is highly ironic. To a modern reader, the intention is clear: the tension between the innocence of the pastoral poem and the world-weariness of Wortley Montagu's experience of the court casts aspersions on the latter, while Wortley Montagu's skill leaves open the possibility of a sympathetic connection to her characters. Nevertheless, it was a scandal when Curll published the first three of these poems. As Lady Loudoun wrote to her husband, 'I'm told it is very pritty [sic] and not a little wicked ... the Princess has seen it, poor Lady Mary will not know how to come to Court again.'⁸² The princess in question is Princess Caroline, later Queen Caroline, and the poem is 'Roxana; or The Drawing Room,' later known as 'Monday: Roxana.' The poem was apparently misunderstood by some (including Lady Loudoun) as satirising her majesty, rather than the easily-identified Mary Ker, Duchess of Roxburghe. 'Roxana,' a courtier and self-professed 'prude' (line 10), complains of having changed her behaviour and compromised her morals in her bid for favour at court:

For Thee, Ah! what for Thee did I resign;
My Passions, Pleasures, all that e'er was mine?
I've sacrific'd both Modesty, and Ease;
Left Opera's, and went to filthy Plays.
Double Entendres shock'd my Tender Ear;
Yet even this for Thee, I chuse to bear. (lines 13-18)

⁸² Huntington mssLO 7417 (Lady Loudoun to the Earl of Loudoun, 3 January 1716).

Here, Wortley Montagu upends the expectations of the pastoral love complaint and, indeed, of Restoration bawdy verse: the prude's 'pleasures are 'modesty and ease,' and she endures 'filthy plays' and 'double entendres' while courting Caroline's approval. The mention of the double entendre is particularly interesting in this context, for the poem itself is a double entendre, capable of being understood in two different ways. The true object of Wortley Montagu's satire is the hypocrisy of the courtier; yet to one who shared Roxana's strict morals the poem appeared to be a complaint about Caroline. The fact that the poem was written while Montagu herself was trying to gain favour at court lends just enough credibility (and more than a touch of irony) to the reading of the poem as sincere complaint. There is still another level to this poem, however; despite Wortley Montagu's clear dismissal of Roxana's complaints as frivolous, a sense of real sorrow makes its way into some lines: the couplet 'Yet Coquettilla's Artifice prevails / When all my Merit and my Duty fails' (lines 39-40) rings with real regret, recalling the sincere eclogue's declaration of love and loyalty.

Some part of Wortley Montagu's sympathy for courtiers arose from personal experience; she and Edward appear to have had a distant if cordial marriage, and Wortley Montagu spent much of the latter part of her life abroad. Wortley Montagu's poems demonstrate a deep cynicism about most relationships. Some of her mock-eclogues move the Amebean eclogue, the singing-contest, from the countryside of Virgil to the urban center of London, using courtly tropes to reintroduce a level of political commentary to the eclogue. Yet her technical skill, and her ability to see her subjects clearly, enable her to elicit an unexpected level of sympathy from her reader even in characters she is clearly mocking.

Both 'Tuesday' and 'Thursday' are dialogues, and offer dark and comic views of love in Montagu's world. 'Tuesday' shows two rakes competing, not in their praise for

their loves (as is traditional for a singing-contest), but in their descriptions of their conquests. Rather than shepherds on a hillside resting from their work, these are urbane gentleman in a coffee house that is empty because everyone else has gone to the opera. Siliander begins by asking Patch why he is sighing and whether he is in the grip of a 'helpless Passion' (line 22), but the two are soon trading boasts about the women they have seduced, the gifts they have received from those women, and what they have seen of their bodies. Patch describes winning a snuff box from his Countess:

She laughed, and fled, and as I sought to seize
 With Affectation cramm'd it down her Stays:
 Yet hoped she did not place it there unseen;
 I press'd her Breasts, and pull'd it from between. (lines 56-59)

Instead of winning a prize for a song of his love's beauty, as in a traditional Anebean eclogue, Patch has already won the prize, by groping the Countess when she flirtatiously hides the snuff box in her stays. Siliander, too, displays the prizes he has won: shoe-buckles from another countess, who 'fondly made the gift' (line 51). In this world, men are not rewarded for composing romantic songs about the women they admire, but rather for flirting with women who admire them. What seem to be even more prized than the material items that they receive from their innamoratas are the glimpses Patch and Siliander catch of the women's bodies. The dialogue's climax, before it is interrupted by events outside the coffee house, is first Siliander's and then Patch's description of the objects of their desire offering their bodies to them. Siliander's countess spends the evening ignoring him, but 'with sudden art' she crosses the room to speak to a friend, angling herself so that 'the stiff whalebone with the motion rose / And thousand Beauties to my sight expose' (lines 66-67). His descriptions remain comically exaggerated, emphasizing that the world of the court is entirely focused on what one may gain from a

lover, and what one may see of her – not on her charms or what one would do to win her love.

Yet when Patch's lady invites him to drink tea alone with her in the morning, while she is still in her nightclothes, Montagu's verse slows and draws the reader in:

Warm from her bed, to me alone within,
Her Nightgown fasten'd with a single Pin,
Her Nightcloaths tumbled with resistless Grace
And her bright Hair play'd careless round her Face.
Reaching for the Kettle, made her Gown unpin,
She wore no Wastcoat, and her Shift was thin.
(lines 70-75)

This passage may be read as yet another conquest, but the soft beauty of the hair playing 'careless' around Celia's face and the domestic intimacy of her gown slipping as she reaches for a kettle, creates a moment of real emotion in the midst of masculine competition. It is this private, domestic moment that makes 'Tuesday' notable; the brittle frivolity of the court falls away when Patch and Celia are alone. This moment seems to prefigure Wortley Montagu's oft-praised 'The Lover: A Ballad,' in which she describes her ideal partner.

But when the long hours of public are past,
And we meet with champagne and a chicken at last,
May ev'ry fond pleasure that moment endear;
Be banish'd afar both discretion and fear!
Forgetting or scorning the airs of the crowd,
He may cease to be formal, and I to be proud. (lines 25-30)

Again, it is when the lovers she envisions are alone and away from the public that they are able to forget 'the airs of the crowd' and 'cease to be formal' and proud. The specificity of the domestic detail 'champagne and a chicken' evokes an image of a late-night feast when the couple become themselves again after a long day of pretending. For Wortley Montagu, it is sincerity that is most valuable – a notable aspect of her verse, given her reputation for satire and wit.

The second singing-contest of the eclogues, 'Thursday' takes place between two women, Smilinda and Cardelia, who have been disappointed in love and gambling (respectively). Smilinda has been jilted by Sharper, while Cardelia has lost three 'sept-et-le-va' plays in one hand of cards.⁸³ As is traditional in the Amebean eclogue, the contestants appoint a judge – Betty Loveit, whose name may be a reference to Mistress Loveit, the scorned woman of George Etheridge's Restoration comedy *The Man of Mode*. Each woman puts up a prize as her stake in the contest: Cardelia offers a decorated case, and Smilinda a snuff-box from her lover. As Smilinda and Cardelia make their cases to Betty, each claiming her tragedy is greater, their troubles are described in the terms of the other's distress. Cardelia explains that 'her Lord' who drew the card undid her, while Smilinda's lover's very name (Sharper) means 'gambler' or 'cheat.' The women's verses begin to merge – by lines 86-87 and 98-99, they are sharing the rhyme 'boast/lost.' Ultimately, Betty Loveit awards each woman's stake to the other woman – emphasizing that their grievances are the same. Again, Wortley Montagu strips idealized love from the Amebean eclogue by setting it in town. At court, any sort of love represents a risk (and the love of gambling may be as ardent as desire for a lover). By adhering more closely to the eclogue form with a judge and stakes, Wortley Montagu is able to make a complicated point about any romance at court.

It is the final eclogue, 'Saturday: The Smallpox,' that seems to reveal the most about Wortley Montagu's capacity for both sympathy and self-reflection, as well as the way that these can play out in mock-heroic couplets. The final poem of a cycle of pastorals was traditionally about death, and it is appropriate that Wortley Montagu's *Town Eclogues* end with a poem about what might be called social death: Flavia's loss of

⁸³ Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity*, p. 194n.

her beauty. Like Wortley Montagu, Flavia survives the smallpox, but is left with scars that make her unrecognisable to herself:

How am I chang'd! Alas, how am I grown
A frightfull Spectre to my selfe unknown!
Where's my Complexion, where the radiant bloom
That promis'd Happyness for Years to come? (lines 4-8)

Instead of an actual ghost, Flavia faces the 'spectre' of her changed face, and the loss of her promise. She describes her past conquests and the gifts with which suitors showered her, and Wortley Montagu alternates between pitiful comedy and true pathos, building to a climax in which Flavia insists that all pictures of herself be destroyed:

As round the Room I turn my weeping Eyes,
New unaffected Scenes of Sorrow rise;
Far from my Sight that killing Picture bear,
The Face disfigure, or the Canvas tear! (lines 41-44)

Any sense of mockery that might arise from the revelation that Flavia is surrounded by pictures of herself in her room is crushed by the real despair in the final two lines of this passage, in which Flavia calls for the destruction of the pictures, symbols of herself and her past life. As Grundy explains, 'Flavia is a creation finely balanced between satire, pathos, and self-representation: her complete submission to the beauty myth combines the astringency of the other eclogues with a plangent note of its own.'⁸⁴ Although Wortley Montagu is a very early practitioner of mock-eclogues, she introduces a capacity for deep sympathy and reader identification that later female poets would use in mock-heroic verse, and that they would employ to gain attention for their own complicated perspectives on their lives and the domestic expectations they faced.

⁸⁴ Grundy, *Comet of the Enlightenment*, p. 102.

Chapter Two

Mary Leapor

One of the notable strands of mock-heroic at the beginning of the century is its play with pastoral expectations: as has been discussed, the debate that arose from Pope's and Ambrose Phillips' pastoral war meant that formal expectations about the pastoral had been made explicit for mock-heroic readers and writers. The humour that Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's town eclogues derive from the removal of a pastoral eclogue into the city and that which Jonathan Swift's 'Description of a City Shower' attains from the contrast between country and city very much depend on the upending of commonly-understood pastoral conventions. Little attention has been paid to a further upending that occurs at mid-century: the transplantation of the town pastoral back to the country, and the shift in form that occurs as a result. Mary Leapor, the daughter of a gardener, who worked as a kitchen-maid in a grand house and spent her life in the country, demonstrates not only a deep understanding of mock-pastoral and its antecedents in her work, but also a much more developed sympathy for her characters than had been evident in the urban pastorals that preceded her writing. Her poems are set in the country town in which she grew up, and she creates her own imagined coterie in the country, moving not only the town eclogue but also poetic debate into her community.

This rural concern, however, does not imply that Leapor's work is that of an uneducated 'natural poet' – although she was self-educated, her poems demonstrate an understanding not only of Pope, Gay, and Swift but also a sense of Virgil and Ovid in translation. Many writers did not have access to the coterie of large cities or upper-class drawing rooms, and it is true that Mary Leapor had very few creative connections. Yet her use of mock-heroic, especially mock-pastorals, creates a circle for her. Mock-forms work through shared knowledge; a reader must know about pastoral to appreciate mock-

pastoral. Similarly, occasional poems depend upon shared knowledge of the occasions that inspired them, and responsive poems (which imitate, add to, or answer other poems) depend upon an understanding of their originals. All of this shared knowledge creates a community among Leapor and her readers, her subjects, and the poets who inspired her. The fundamentally responsive and allusive nature of mock-heroic is crucial in Leapor's poetry to the creation of a sense of connection that helped her to develop as a poet. Ultimately, the current critical picture of Leapor is incomplete without an understanding of her engagement with mock-heroic and not only its contribution to her poetry, but also her contribution to mock-heroic.

'A Simple Maid'

In the first volume of Leapor's *Poems Upon Several Occasions*, the pastoral dialogue 'The Month of August' depicts Sylvanus ('a Courtier') trying to convince Phillis ('a Country Maid') to join him, first in a garden, then – when she declines – in a 'majestic Hall' (line 32).⁸⁵ When these enticements fail to tempt her, he offers feasts and music; she prefers the pleasures of her father's farm and house, and dinner with the shepherd Corydon. 'Then strive no more to win a simple maid,' she concludes, 'From her lov'd cottage and her silent shade' (lines 71-72). As a rural poet positioning herself as an 'untutored genius,' Leapor certainly plays into audience expectations with the poem's conclusion, which reiterates the common trope of a contrast between city and country while reinforcing the idea that those with 'natural genius' belong in the country. Yet examining the poem's references and sources reveals a sophisticated commentary on, not just the relative values of city and country, but also education and poetic voice. The

⁸⁵ Richard Greene and Ann Messenger (eds.), *The Works of Mary Leapor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). Unless otherwise noted, all subsequent quotations of Leapor's poetry will be from this edition.

poem is also an example of Leapor using recurring characters to create what might be called an imaginary coterie for herself. In its demonstration of Leapor's many approaches to the juxtaposition between 'high' and 'low,' 'The Month of August' encapsulates the poet's use of mock-heroic references, language, and discourse to establish her right to poetic critique and stylistic innovation, and to comment on both personal and social issues in her work.

A humble country maiden like Phillis is exactly the way Leapor's patrons presented her in a 1747 call for subscribers to a posthumous edition of her poems. Yet this strategy is a complicated one: while Leapor must seem to be of the country, she must also seem unusual among her peers (as she certainly was). The subscription emphasizes that Leapor

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, and a perpetual Pursuit after Knowledge, not only acquired a Taste for the most exalted and refined Authors in our Language, but 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.⁸⁶

As Leapor biographer Richard Greene has identified, the suggestion that Leapor had 'no helps from the converse of her country companions' is a deliberate ploy to attract prospective subscribers interested in the idea of natural genius.⁸⁷ Indeed, Jennifer Batt has recently uncovered evidence that the young poet's background may have been more literary than has been generally assumed; her father read periodicals and in at least one instance submitted a solution to a puzzle in *The Northampton Miscellany or Monthly*

⁸⁶ *Proposals for Printing by Subscription The Poetical Works, Serious and Humorous, Of Mrs. Leapor, lately Deceased* (London, 1747). Oxford University, Bodleian Library, Ballard MS 42.

⁸⁷ Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 158.

Amusements, a short-lived literary periodical.⁸⁸ Batt's article also establishes that at least the first two issues of this 1721 periodical included poems that influenced Mary Leapor some two decades later. Like other poets of the time, Leapor largely consumed and responded to products of the London literary world – a world far removed from her daily life. The tension between the poetry to which she wished to respond and the community in which she lived might be seen as a real-life conflict between city and country – but, instead of being stymied by it, she finds in the discord between city and country an opportunity for playful commentary and innovation.

The struggle of finding success as a 'natural genius' is epitomised by the case of Stephen Duck, best known for his georgic *The Thresher's Labour* (1730). In an article discussing different representations of that poet, Batt describes the public's inability to reconcile Duck's two identities: man of the land and man of letters. Comparing an account of Duck by Joseph Spence with a satiric letter in the *Grub-Street Journal*, Batt says that 'As Spence showed, [Duck] could represent theories of natural genius or demonstrate the benevolence of the queen, or conversely ... he could illustrate the debased cultural and literary standards of the ruling elite.'⁸⁹ Similarly, the call for subscribers describes Leapor as isolated from her neighbours, associating her instead (through her reading) with 'the most exalted and refined Authors' – yet the introduction to the first volume of her poems emphasizes that she was 'courteous and obliging to all, chearful, good-natured, and *contented in the Station of Life in which Providence had placed her*' (emphasis is mine).⁹⁰ Like other labouring-class poets, Leapor had to be seen

⁸⁸ Jennifer Batt, '“A Muse / To Grace the Page of Evening News”: Mary Leapor and the Periodical Press,' *Review of English Studies*, 68.283 (February 2017), pp. 79-98.

⁸⁹ Jennifer Batt, 'From the Field to the Coffeehouse: Changing Representations of Stephen Duck,' in *Criticism* 47.4 (Fall 2007), 451-470, p. 463.

⁹⁰ Mary Leapor, *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (London: J. Roberts, Warwick Lane, 1748), p. 4.

as simultaneously superior to most labourers and content to remain among her labouring-class peers.

That she wrote poems set in the countryside mocking country life suggests Leapor identified with the urbane wit of poets like Pope and Swift, despite her decidedly rural surroundings. Meanwhile, poems featuring her poetic persona, Mira, make it clear that her literary aspirations did set Leapor apart from her neighbours in the small community of Brackley—yet, as we will see, those poems also depict her neighbours defending Leapor from the criticism of visitors. It is perhaps not surprising that most contemporary critics discuss Leapor as a lonely prodigy: it is difficult to firmly place her in a community, whether geographic or intellectual.⁹¹ As Batt explains,

... responses to Leapor's writing have frequently shared the Proposals' preoccupation with the Northamptonshire servant maid's apparent geographical and cultural isolation: in recent years, for example, she has been characterized by Richard Greene as an inhabitant of an 'isolated world'; by Valerie Rumbold as 'alienated'; by Susan Goulding as an 'outsider'; and by Anne Milne as a 'misfit.'⁹²

Yet the idea of Leapor as working in solitude is belied, not just by the support she received from friends such as Bridget Freemantle and Susanna Jennens, but also by her poetry itself. By this, I do not mean the way that her poetry engaged with authors such as Pope, Swift, and Gay. As Batt points out, 'critics have focused on Leapor's engagement with canonical writers, exploring the ways in which she sought to transcend her apparent isolation by becoming, through reading and writing, part of a community of poets.'⁹³ Indeed, mock-heroic might be seen as a fundamentally 'social' form of poetry, in that it presumes a shared literary knowledge. But it is also clear from her writing that Leapor enjoyed a wide acquaintance in Brackley and the other places she lived during her short

⁹¹ For a discussion of the persistence of the idea of Leapor's isolation, see Batt, pp. 1-2.

⁹² Batt, 'Mary Leapor and the Periodical Press,' p. 80.

⁹³ Ibid.

life: characters with real-life analogues wander into and out of her poetry, even commenting upon her verse.

Leapor's writing is occasional: she writes responses to letters, jokes about visits, and several poetic 'essays on' abstract ideas which are addressed, like Pope's, to friends. In this, it presumes a coterie; yet her poems also make it clear she was not surrounded by other literary friends. Many of her poems are deeply intertextual, depending upon her readership having the literary background to recognize her allusions as well as an understanding of the people who lived in Brackley. Yet the group of those who would know both Brackley's inhabitants and the works of Pope, Rochester, Swift, and the other authors to whom Leapor refers in her work is small indeed, comprising perhaps only one person, Bridget Freemantle, her friend and patron. Ultimately, if Leapor is writing for a coterie, it is an invented one; yet her solitude, too, has been invented.

In this chapter, I trace different ways that Leapor uses mock-heroic: to establish her right to poetic innovation; to defend and critique her rural community; to place herself both within and outside the small town in which she lived. I will conclude with an examination of two poems from the last year of Leapor's life in which she appears to step into overt political commentary. By focusing largely on the mock-eclogue and on Leapor's use of pastoral names and characters, I hope to emphasize an important point about Leapor: that, beginning with the patronage of Freemantle and those who wrote the call for subscription, she has been treated as a more isolated and less educated figure than she was. In particular, her engagement with translations of Virgil that appeared in Dryden's *Miscellany Poems* offers insight both into her education and into her poetic intentions; and her use of what I call her 'rural coterie' demonstrates an understanding of poetic practice in London and an artistic decision to use that understanding to both critique rural life and elevate it.

Crumble-Hall: Poetic Innovation in the Kitchen

‘Crumble-Hall’ might be considered Leapor’s masterpiece, and (as Susan Goulding puts it) ‘perhaps the most written-about poem of Leapor’s.’⁹⁴ ‘Crumble-Hall’ is set among servants in a country house that includes mock-georgic and mock-epic elements. Brean Hammond says that ‘Leapor adopts the conventions of the traditional country-house poem as practiced by Ben Jonson and Alexander Pope, the point of which was to celebrate the lord of the manor as a generous and good landowner living in harmonious balance with the architecture of his house and the management of his estate.’⁹⁵ Certainly, country-house poems are one aspect of Leapor’s background to this poem. Instead of the harmonious balance of a well-managed estate, Leapor presents a house that has the capacity for chaos. The poem begins with an invocation to a curious muse, one who first witnesses Leapor (as Mira, her poetic persona) afflicted with ‘Head-ach, and eternal Whims’ (line 4) and vowing never to write again. In a few more lines, Mira has revived as a result of her friend Atremisia’s smiles, and she and the muse ‘frolick’ (line 10) before deciding to ‘sing...of Crumble-Hall’ (line 12).⁹⁶ The muse appears to be less an inspiration to Mira and more a companion, suffering when Mira does and celebrating when she revives. Once Mira and the muse enter the great house, they are confronted by carved wooden decorations:

Strange Forms above, present themselves to View;
Some Mouths that grin, some smile, and some that spew.
Here a soft Maid or Infant seems to cry:
Here stands a Tyrant, with distorted Eye:
The Roof – no Cyclops e’er could reach so high:
Not Polypheme, tho’ form’d for dreadful Harms,
The Top could measure with extended Arms.

⁹⁴ Susan Goulding, ‘Reading “Mira’s Will”: The Death of Mary Leapor and the Life of the Persona,’ *Modern Language Studies* 32:2 (Autumn 2002), 69-89, p. 83n21.

⁹⁵ Brean Hammond, ‘Verse Satire’ in Christine Gerrard (ed.), *A Companion to Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 369-385, p. 381.

⁹⁶ Fairer and Gerrard, p. 387. All subsequent quotations of ‘Crumble-Hall’ are from this edition.

Here the pleas'd Spider plants her peaceful Loom:
 Here weaves secure, nor dreads the hated Broom.
 (lines 43-47)

Here, what Fairer refers to as 'incoherence' is on clear display.⁹⁷ The carved oak pillars and ceiling are both ridiculous and horrifying: the amusing progression of 'grin ... smile ... spew' is undercut by the 'soft Maid or Infant' crying in the next line. The mention of the high ceiling allowing spiders to spin their webs in peace may be a reference to female creative genius such as that of Arachne, the master weaver who becomes a spider; or it may be a reference to critics and moderns, such as the spider in Swift's *The Battle of the Books*. Certainly, the Homeric allusion to Polyphemus (and the fact that the roof is larger than the giant cyclops) emphasizes the instability of Crumble-Hall: spiders spin their webs without fear of a broom, while mice run through the passageways 'safely' (line 52) and the windows are so dirty that visitors have to feel their way blindly along the dark hallways (line 54). Of the passage just quoted, Hammond says that Leapor demonstrates scepticism and even satire:

Naturalistic fruit carved out of wood comes to seem simply idiotic in Leapor's skeptical gaze; high ceilings and grand rooms are simply inconvenient places where spiders can be at their ease. Homeric reference to the Cyclops Polyphemus is here rendered amusing by its domestic application. 'Crumble-Hall' is a wonderfully quiet satire at the expense of a poetic mode, the country-house poem, that takes itself very seriously indeed.⁹⁸

Yet such an approach sets aside close attention to text and form in favour of a broader label: the satire on a country-house poem, or the idiocy of wooden fruit. Moreover, later sections of the poem are clearly mock-georgic or mock-pastoral; Leapor's pastiche is not of one form or another, but of several. Most interesting for this study is the description of domestic labour as performed by the cook, Sophronia; and the way that Sophronia, who

⁹⁷ David Fairer, "'Flying Atoms in the Sightless Air": Issues of Coherence and Scale in Leapor and Yearsley,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 34:1 (2015), 141-162, p. 152.

⁹⁸ Hammond, p. 381.

seems to have been a real person, coexists in the poem with archetypes such as the mock-pastoral Roger and Urs'la.

The sav'ry Kitchen much Attention calls:
Westphalia Hams adorn the sable Walls:
The Fires blaze; the greasy Pavements fry;
And steaming Odours from the Kettles fly. (lines 56-59)

With complex imagery appealing to taste and smell as well as touch and sight, Leapor claims the reader's attention for the kitchen, using Miltonic inversion to give the scene a sense of ridiculous grandeur. Yet the kitchen is also a site of creative genius, with Leapor's description of Sophronia's cooking offering a sympathetic portrait that owes something to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's use of sympathetic imagery in her mock-eclogues:

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. (lines 115-120)

This picture of culinary accomplishment, even of wisdom, demonstrates Leapor's affection for a real-life upper servant at Edgecote House. 'Sophronia' appears to be based on a friend, the character dismisses 'Mira' for thinking about writing when she should have been cooking in 'Epistle to Artemisia: On Fame.' In 1784, a writer in the *Gentleman's Magazine* said that her 'fondness for writing verses there displayed itself by her sometimes taking up her pen while her jack was standing still, and the meat scorching,'⁹⁹ a recollection very much in line with the scene of her dismissal in 'Epistle to Artemisia,' which begins with the cook scolding, 'You thoughtless Baggage, when d'ye mind your Work?' (line 154) and ends with Mira declaring she will not stop 'scribbling' (line 161) and Sophronia retorting 'Then get thee packing – and be aukward

⁹⁹ Quoted in Greene, *Mary Leapor*, pp. 14-15.

[sic] still' (line 162).¹⁰⁰ The affectionate moment describing Sophronia's cooking descends back into a bathetic mock-pastoral in Roger and Urs'la's passage. Urs'la mourns over Roger's neglect in terms that focus on her domestic labour for him:

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. (lines 142-145)

The farm-hand Roger benefits from Urs'la's work in the kitchen, but he appears not to notice her devotion any more. Much as Leapor labours in the kitchen but aspires to attention for her writing, Urs'la scolds Roger for not realising that all of her cooking is focused on him. One aspect of this passage is mockery of the couple, and especially of Urs'la's complaint, so similar to those of traditional pastoral, yet so suffused with georgic specifics of daily domestic labour. Yet, as Fairer reminds us, mock-heroic resists binaries, and the comedy of the kitchen workers in 'Crumble-Hall' does not deny their humanity:

If the poem refuses to idealize, does that constitute criticism? Is Crumble Hall's incoherence (or lack of cohesion) something negative? Is the house meant to represent a 'system,' and if so, is it one that has broken down or is functioning badly? Or does the poem take pleasure in the unsystematic and find something positive in the degree to which the life of the place seems to lie in its accumulation of unsorted materials?¹⁰¹

The incoherence of Crumble Hall, its 'unsorted materials,' may be seen as the representation of an entire world which Leapor found positive. The way that Leapor claims poetic voices, not just for herself, but for her fellow kitchen-workers, demonstrates her real attachment to those in her circle; although they are not a source of literary support, they are worthy of Leapor's attention.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Greene and Ann Messenger, *The Works of Mary Leapor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 179-180.

¹⁰¹ Fairer, 'Flying Atoms,' p. 152.

Reading and Influences

One crucial issue in the study of her poems is the question of what Leapor's influences were, or could have been. Largely self-educated, she apparently owned fewer than twenty books herself, but must have read many more than that: Greene establishes her knowledge of and allusions to Milton, Gay, Congreve, Butler, Pope, and Duck, among others, and surmises that she must have read Virgil, Ovid, and Homer in translation. As well as borrowing books from her friend Brigit Freemantle (the daughter of a clergyman), Leapor likely had access to the library of Weston Hall during her employment there as a maid to Susanna Jennens. In his biography of Leapor, Richard Greene helpfully catalogs the books to which he believes she would have had access (leaving out those published after her time at Weston, and those that seem to have been later acquisitions).¹⁰² These would not of course have been the entirety of Mary Leapor's influences; she could have borrowed books from others, and according to Freemantle owned 'about sixteen or seventeen single Volumes, among which were Part of Mr. *Pope's Works*, *Dryden's Fables*, some Volumes of Plays, &c.'¹⁰³ Interestingly, the books mentioned – John Dryden's *Fables*, some of Alexander Pope's works, and volumes of plays – are in the Weston Hall library. Perhaps Leapor's books were given to Susanna Jennens after her death. In any event, some of the books that Greene lists as part of the Weston Hall library must have been an influence on Leapor's dialogues: the first part of Dryden's six-volume *Miscellany Poems*, which includes translations of Virgil's eclogues; the third volume of *The Works of John Dryden*, which includes 'Mac Flecknoe'; and *The Works of the Right Honourable Joseph Addison*, including Addison's

¹⁰² Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 210.

¹⁰³ Mary Leapor, *Poems on Several Occasions...the Second and Last Volume* (London: J. Roberts in Warwick Lane, 1751), p. xxxii.

essays on laughter (*Spectator* No. 249) and on mythological imagery in modern verse (*Spectator* No. 523). This is enough to establish that Leapor's understanding of neo-classicism was not simply through Pope, Swift, and Gay's mock-epics, as some scholars have assumed. Her reading included translations of Virgil by Dryden and others, and critical essays that discussed how such poems should be written and understood. As we will see, she followed Virgil's example – not simply Virgil's example through Gay's burlesque – in her eclogues, adding sympathy and a sense of affection to the mock-eclogue as practiced Pope, Swift, Gay, and even Montagu.

City and Country in Dialogue

It is particularly appropriate that Leapor should demonstrate connections to Virgil, because the Roman poet was rewriting Theocritus' earlier bucolics in a way that might be seen as parallel to Leapor's innovations to Pope and Gay's mock-pastoral. As R.O.A.M. Lyne explains, Virgil wrote what at first seem to be Roman versions of Theocritus' *Idylls*: idealized portraits of the countryside with very little relationship to reality: 'While Latinizing Theocritus, Virgil is also referring to contemporary politics and events: to the land confiscations in Italy around the year 41 BC supervised by Octavian and designed to settle discharged soldiers.'¹⁰⁴ Virgil's eclogues gesture towards Theocritus' idealized world, but more importantly describe a large-scale political event from the perspective of the shepherds it affected most personally. 'Eclogue I' is a dialogue between two shepherds: a young man, Meliboeus, who has lost his land to a returning soldier, and Tityrus, an older former slave who has used city patronage to retain his. This political complaint about Augustus Caesar's land seizure to reward a

¹⁰⁴ Virgil, R.O.A.M. Lyne (ed) and Cecil Day Lewis (trans.), *The Eclogues and the Georgics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. xvi.

victorious army is notable as a background to the original *Georgics*, written to educate soldiers who received land in how to become rural labourers.¹⁰⁵ Meliboeus laments having to leave behind his home and farm, and Tityrus offers the younger man a bed for the night; the poem ends on a note of friendship, but the loss of Meliboeus' land is poignant:

Yet surely you can rest with me tonight and sleep
On a bed of green leaves here? You're welcome to taste
my mellow
Apples, my floury chestnuts, my ample stock of cheese.
Look over there: smoke rises already from the rooftops
And longer fall the shadows cast by the mountain
heights.¹⁰⁶

Tityrus' lush imagery, which includes the green of leaves, the taste of apples, the smell of smoke, and, ultimately, the darkness of shadows, emphasizes Meliboeus' loss: Virgil is presenting a paean of exile, with war and politics intruding on the beauty of the countryside. This eclogue is an important allusion in Leapor's poetry; her work with the dialogue underscores that she is defending her countryside, her own land, from the encroaching Scriblerian satire of urban pastoral.

Leapor updates Virgil's first eclogue in the dialogue 'The Friend in Disgrace,' between Lycander – who has lost his fortune and his connections at court – and Damon, who will not acknowledge his former friend. Like Virgil, Leapor uses the eclogue to highlight patronage and loyalty; and just as Tityrus offers Meliboeus the cold comfort of a night spent in beauty before commencing his exile, Damon covertly buys Lycander a drink before hastily departing: 'I'll order half a pint of red / And if you'll drink it, sir, you may' (lines 31-2). As is often the case for Leapor, the names in this poem are ironic: 'Damon' seems to refer to the Greek pair Damon and Pythias, known for their ardent

¹⁰⁵ Chalker, John, *The English Georgic: A Study in the Development of a Form* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 8.

¹⁰⁶ Virgil, *The Eclogues and the Georgics*, p. 9.

friendship, while ‘Lycander’ may be Shakespeare’s fickle Lysander from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In Leapor’s poem, Lycander is spurned, and Damon fickle. The title ‘The Friend in Disgrace’ also allows for multiple readings: Lycander is in disgrace with the court, but Damon behaves disgracefully to his friend. Leapor subtly reminds her readers that, in her poems and in the country, literary allusions and formal expectations may be the objects of ironic play. Much as dialogue does in the real world, Amebean eclogues present the contrast of opinions, different perspectives, and new information – while the form simultaneously reminds the reader of the eclogue’s classical background.

Of course, the debate about whether to write pastorals that mimicked the high language of their classical antecedents or offered a plainer, more realistic tone began with Pope and Ambrose Phillips (see Chapter 1, ‘Mock Heroic and Its Forms’). Greene surmises that Leapor must have been aware of this debate, and sees her pastorals as allied with those by Philips: ‘In some areas of her work, it must be observed, Leapor moves away from Pope—her pastorals, for example, use images from actual rural life. As a reader of the *Guardian*, she must have known about the controversy on this point, and chosen to follow Philips rather than Pope.’¹⁰⁷ Yet this reading ignores the layers of meaning in Leapor’s poems: her clear allusions to Gay and to Virgil, as well as her engagement with the differences between city and country, suggest she is not imitating either Pope or Philips, but rather adding another voice to their dialogue.

Alexander Pope advocated the representation of an idyllic world in pastoral poetry, one far removed from the experience of contemporary English labourers; Edmund Spenser and Ambrose Philips set the pastoral in the English countryside, but their verse remains removed from the actual experience of workers like Mary Leapor.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 181.

The mock-pastorals written by John Gay in *The Shepherd's Week*, and by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu in the *Town Eclogues*, use the juxtaposition between polished language (pastoral poetry) and low matter (the concerns of rustic labourers and amoral courtiers) to emphasize the imperfection of human nature in comparison with the ideals of the pastoral. Leapor draws on her own experience in the countryside, and in doing so adds a layer of sympathy to the form that Montagu's and Gay's mock-pastorals, which were removed from their subject matter by their writers' class and geography, are unable to reach. Gay's and Montagu's mock-pastorals undermine pastoral expectations, calling into question their audience's beliefs about the countryside and about society.

Similarly, Virgil's original *Eclogues* also brought reality to bear on a previously idealized countryside. As Gregson Davis explains, 'the world of the *Eclogues* is permeated through and through with portrayals of human infelicity, catastrophic loss and emotional turbulence. The defining tenor of these poetic sketches is a profound anxiety about the human capacity to cope with misfortune.'¹⁰⁸ Leapor, then, combines the realistic portrayals of Virgil with the irony of eighteenth-century mock-pastorals to present a complicated version of her own experience as a laboring-class woman living at some distance from London.

Batt states that 'as has been repeatedly reiterated in studies of Leapor's writing (typically in relation to her engagement with Pope), when she engages with other literary texts she transforms them into something new.'¹⁰⁹ This is certainly true of Leapor's pastoral poetry: her work in the Amebean eclogue represents one of her most interesting innovations. Some of Leapor's dialogues, like 'The Friend in Disgrace,' seem to be apprentice works: imitations in which the young poet is still experimenting with form.

¹⁰⁸ Virgil, Len Krisak and R.A.B. Mynors (eds.), *Virgil's Eclogues* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2010), p. ix.

¹⁰⁹ Batt, 'Mary Leapor and the Periodical Press,' p. 91.

‘Damon and Strephon’ is a seemingly sincere lament in which the titular characters mourn for their friend Sylvius, while ‘Fuddling Dicky and Scolding Nelly’ is a broad burlesque in which the singing-contest is reframed as an argument between a drunken country couple. But other dialogues complicate ideas about pastoral in a new way, with Leapor using the form to address just those contradictions in her life with which today’s critics have struggled. These dialogues enable Leapor to bring conflicting sides of her nature – the educated satirist, the self-educated maid, the affectionate neighbour, the lonely poet – together on the page. They set the implied perspective of the author up as, in effect, ‘judge’ to the singing-contest between the two voices. At times, this voice resolves the Amebean conflict; at others, it complicates it further. ‘The Month of August’ offers a good example of the layers of meaning in Leapor’s dialogues.

In ‘The Month of August,’ Leapor works within expected parameters: Phillis remains an innocent pastoral maiden, while Sylvanus is the tempting city rake. What is innovatory, though, is the way that the two speakers’ voices demonstrate the author’s alliance with her rural community. Just as in the more complex ‘Corydon. Phillario. Or, Mira’s Picture’ (examined in more detail below), the voice of the city is banal. Sylvanus’ rhymes range from common (sky/eye [lines 1-2]), eye/dye [lines 7-8], sky/fly [lines 35-36], rise/skies [lines 57-58]) through cliché (yields/fields [lines 3-4]) to repetitive (resound/sound [lines 33-34] followed by around/sound [lines 59-60]) to imperfect (charm/barn [lines 43-44]). In contrast, Phillis’ defense of her home is warmly melodic. Her first two lines in the dialogue re-cast Sylvanus’ clunky ‘yields/fields’ rhyme, setting up a direct comparison, not just between decorative garden and productive field, but between his voice and hers:

Not all the sights your boasted gardens yield
Are half so lovely as my father’s field,
Where large increase has bless’d the fruitful plain

And we with joy behold the swelling grain. (line lines 9-12)

While Sylvanus works in cliché, calling Phillis ‘joy of my heart, and darling of my eye,’ (line 2) and compares her cheeks to various fruits, she describes her surroundings in a passage full of rich agricultural details:

In vain you tempt me while our Orchard bears
Long-keeping Russets, lovely Cath’rine Pears,
Pearmains and Codlings, wheaten Plumbs enough,
And the black Damsons load the bending Bough.
No Pruning-knives our fertile Branches tease,
While yours must grow but as their Masters please.
The grateful Trees our Mercy well repay,
And rain us Bushels at the rising Day. (lines 23-30)

This seems to be a reference to Andrew Marvell’s ‘The Garden,’ in which fruit harvests itself into the speaker’s hands:

Ripe apples drop about my head;
The luscious clusters of the vine
Upon my mouth do crush their wine;
The nectarine and curious peach
Into my hands themselves do reach. (lines 34-38)

This is an instance in which close attention to Leapor’s writing may offer insight into how widely-read she was. It is possible that Leapor had read Marvell’s poem, which appears in the second part of Dryden’s six-part *Miscellanies*. Although only the first part of Dryden’s *Miscellanies* appears on Greene’s list of the volumes in the Weston Hall library, it could well be that the second part was in the library during Leapor’s time, and was sold or lost at some later time. Nature yields its fruits to man similarly in Ben Jonson’s ‘To Penshurst,’ which has ‘fat carps that run into thy net’ and fruit that grows ‘that every child may reach.’ Leapor combines and intensifies these metaphors, with the trees delivering fruit to the workers *sponte sua*— indeed, already in bushel baskets. The passage also echoes Pope’s pastoral ‘Summer: Alexis,’ in which the shepherd tells his love that nature will work to please her:

Where'er you walk, cool gales shall fan the glade;
 Trees, where you sit, shall crowd into a shade;
 Where'er you tread, the blushing flowers shall rise,
 And all things flourish where you turn your eyes.
 (lines 73-76)

Whereas nature does this only for a special woman in Pope's poem, it works this way for all of the rustics in Leapor's version – suggesting sympathy between nature and the labourers. Yet Leapor's poem also echoes Gay's 'The Shepherd's Week,' which keeps her poem from being too earnest. The 'Cath'rine Pears' of Leapor's poem echo Gay's 'Wednesday; or, the Dumps,' in which Sparabella compares herself favourably with Clumsilis: 'Her wan Complexion's like the wither'd Leek, / While Katherine Pears adorn my ruddy Cheek' (lines 55-56). Far from the work of an untutored rustic, this poem uses allusions to other pastorals to respond to them with a different approach to the relationship between the city and the country than that of the urbane Scriblerians.

While Sylvanus tries to dominate the branches (and, perhaps, Phillis), she and her fellow labourers work in concert with nature, which rewards them by 'rain[ing] ... bushels' of harvest. Similarly, Sylvanus' home is filled with artifice that 'teach[es] us to evade [the sun's] ray,' including the clunkily alliterative 'forc'd fountains,' and 'well-wrought' paintings, as well as perfume and carpets that serve as barriers between people and elements of the natural world (air and earth, respectively). The rake's language of exclusion and force (and his failed final rhyme 'charm / barn') gives way to Phillis' simple yet lyrical description of her cottage:

Tis true our Parlour has an earthen Floor,
 The Sides of Plaster and of Elm the Door:
 Yet the rub'd Chest and Table sweetly shines,
 And the spread Mint along the Window climbs:
 An aged Laurel keeps away the Sun,
 And two cool Streams across the Garden run. (lines 47-52)

Phillis, too, avoids the sun, but she is protected from it by a tree and two natural streams, instead of hiding as the inhabitants of Sylvanus' hall must. The smooth phrase 'sweetly

shines' contrasts with Sylvanus' unsuccessful alliteration, and her 'shines/climbs' slant rhyme is particularly lovely when compared with Sylvanus' poor 'resound/sound' rhyme. The poem anticipates poems like Oliver Goldsmith's 'The Deserted Village,' which celebrate the 'humble happiness' of the rural poor. Phillis' furniture shines from having been well-kept, while the laurel and the streams keep the cottage naturally cool: another example of nature taking care of those who live in harmony with her. Although this poem is not overtly framed as a singing-contest, Phillis is clearly the superior poet and victor of their debate. Instead of a passive shepherdess receiving romantic addresses, she is an active and effective defender of country values and country life.

In the final exchange, Sylvanus offers Phillis 'dainties' from the 'ransack'd Earth' and music that will 'pierce the glad air and gain upon the skies' – again, language of domination rather than cooperation. Phillis responds with a detailed description of the harvest party that she will attend that night, including a culinary passage that anticipates Crumble Hall's 'good old *English* fare' (line 19). The epithet recalls the house's past 'of old' hosting 'knights and hungry squires' (line 16) and 'The Month of August,' too, features simple food as part of hospitality connected to an historic rural tradition:

Then Beef and Coleworts, Beans and Bacon too,
And the Plumb-pudding of delicious Hue,
Sweet-spiced Cake, and Apple-pies good Store,
Deck the brown Board; who can desire more? (lines 65-68)

The specificity of the catalogue appeals to several senses at once ('delicious hue,' 'sweet-spiced') and offers an appealing alternative to the vagary of Sylvanus' 'dainties.' The poem concludes with Phillis' declaration that Sylvanus should 'go seek some nymph who equals your degree / And leave content and Corydon for me' (lines 75-76). And while this is a poem in which the *status quo* is preserved and labourers are happy remaining in their particular sphere, 'The Month of August' is also a radical poem in that it makes the wooing man a fool and the rural maiden a poet. City dwellers who value the

country do not understand it – nor do they understand that country labourers do not yearn for their approval. Leapor claims for Phillis (and, in a sense, herself) the ability to speak persuasively in describing the home she loves – the laurels of the song-contest.

Knowing that Leapor had read translations of Virgil's *Eclogues* offers another dimension of meaning to this poem: it contains echoes of the second eclogue, a monologue by the shepherd Corydon about his love for the boy Alexis. In one of the two translations to which Leapor would have had access, Corydon offers Alexis 'Poppy, Violet, and Daffadil, / The Rose, and thousand other fragrant Flowers, / To please thy Senses in thy softest hours,' while 'the Lawrel [sic] and the neighboring Myrtle Tree ... send their boughs to thee.'¹¹⁰ Leapor seems to recall this eclogue in 'The Month of August' with Sylvanus' aromatic enticements to Phillis ('choice Perfumes shall give a pleasing Gale, / And Orange-flow'rs their od'rous Breath exhale,' lines 39-40). Virgil's Corydon offers 'glossie Plumbs, and juicy Pears' while Leapor's Sylvanus describes similar fruit to Phillis: 'With gaudy Plumbs see yonder Boughs recline, / And ruddy Pears in yon Espalier twine' (lines 19-20).¹¹¹ Finally, Virgil's Corydon laments that Alexis is not satisfied with him: 'Oh that with me, thee humble Plains would please, / The quiet Fields, and lowly Cottages!' while Leapor's Phillis declares that her rustic home and Corydon are the only things that please her: 'strive no more to win a simple Maid, / From her lov'd Cottage and her silent Shade. / Let *Phillis* ne'er, ah never let her rove / From her first Virtue and her humble Grove' (lines 71-74).¹¹² The repetition of 'humble' and the similarity of 'quiet' and 'silent,' 'lowly Cottages' and 'lov'd Cottages' clearly point to Leapor having been inspired to give Virgil's Corydon a happier ending. In her version, a maiden chooses him over the enticements of the city. She includes the

¹¹⁰ John Dryden, *The first part of miscellany poems....by the most eminent hands*, 4 vols (London: 1716) Vol.1, p. 323.

¹¹¹ Dryden, *The first part of miscellany poems*, p. 323.

¹¹² Ibid.

names ‘Amyntor’ and ‘Amaryllis’ as minor characters, just as they are in Virgil’s original. As with much of Leapor’s intertextual play, this poem is meaningful even without the reader noting her allusions to Virgil; however, in missing her inspiration critics also miss part of Leapor’s game. She is not merely rescuing the countryside from the bathetic mockery of Gay; she also is elevating it through her allusions to Virgil.

Recurring Characters: An Imagined Coterie

Montagu’s *Town Eclogues* and Leapor’s work both step back from the burlesque to allow their characters, and the societies in which they live, to attract the reader’s sympathy in addition to their laughter. Unlike Montagu’s, however, Leapor’s work does not consist of one song cycle, but instead many of the poems from both volumes of her collected works. Like Virgil in his *Eclogues*, Leapor uses the same character in several poems, effectively creating a community in which any reader may participate by recognizing the repeated names. The literate reader will recognize Leapor’s use of Virgilian and Swiftian names.

The names ‘Mira’ (Leapor), ‘Artemisia’ (Freemantle), and ‘Parthenissa’ (Jennens) are of course references to real people; one poem in the second volume of *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (1751) appears to be the work of Jennens herself.¹¹³ Other characters appear repeatedly, and also seem to be references to real people. Of course, Leapor is by no means the first female poet to participate in a verse exchange which used classically-inspired pseudonyms in verse. It is not unusual that she wrote poems about or addressed to Freemantle and Jennens as ‘Artemisia,’ and

¹¹³ Mary Leapor, *Poems Upon Several Occasions: The Second and Final Volume* (London, 1751); Richard Greene and Ann Messenger, *The Works of Mary Leapor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. xx, 199.

‘Parthenissa,’¹¹⁴ as well as others such as the (as yet unidentified) patron ‘Lucinda.’ At the end of the seventeenth century, for example, Katherine Philips – known to her circle as Orinda and commonly described as ‘the matchless Orinda’ – formed what she called a Society of Friendship, a group of like-minded friends and poets all given a pastoral nickname and addressed in occasional verse. Similarly, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, who often referred to herself in verse as ‘Marissa,’ wrote poems to Mary Astell (‘Almystrea’) and Elizabeth Thomas (‘Corinna’), as well as to other women who have not yet been identified (as Margaret Ezell points out, “‘Cleanthe,’ ‘Clorissa,’ ‘Lucinda,’ and ‘Eugenia’”).¹¹⁵ What is interesting about Leapor’s pastoral names is that several members of her ‘coterie’ are not other poets or patrons, but labouring-class residents of Brackley and the villages that surrounded it: Phillis; the cook Sophronia; Octavia, who is choosing among several men in two different poems titled ‘Mira to Octavia’; Vido, who flatters Mira’s poetry and seems to be part of the household in which she worked for Sophronia; and others. As Leapor’s social equals, these people naturally formed part of her social circle, and she makes them a part of her poetic circle as well – as characters if not as readers.

The repetition of the name (and character) ‘Phillis’ is more significant than it might at first appear. In ‘The Month of August’ Phillis turns away from the temptations of Sylvanus in favour of dinner in the country with Corydon. Phillis is mentioned in the dialogue ‘The Charms of Anthony’ as looking ‘as tho’ she wou’d have swoon’d’ (line 50) with jealousy when Anthony pays attention to one of the speakers. Another dialogue, ‘Damon and Strephon: A Pastoral Complaint,’ describes the mourning of Damon and Strephon for their friend Sylvius – and mentions a Phillis who should ‘rend [her] Hair’

¹¹⁴ For an explanation of the evidence that Parthenissa is likely Susanna Jennens, see Greene, *Mary Leapor*, pp. 10–14.

¹¹⁵ *Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed. Margaret J.M. Ezell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. xxviii–xxix.

(line 10). (A less complex work than ‘The Month of August,’ the poem contains echoes of Pope’s ‘Winter’ and is, according to Greene and Messenger, one of three poems in which Leapor mourns Pope as ‘Sylvius.’¹¹⁶) The brief mention of Phillis creates an irony: she will mourn for Sylvius, a man with a similar name to that of her would-be lover in ‘The Month of August,’ Sylvanus. Leapor’s play with names here establishes a link between Sylvius and Sylvanus – both names are associated with Phillis’ lover – and therefore between the Phillis characters in the two poems. The same Phillis who rejected Sylvanus mourns for Sylvius. The similarities between the two names seem unlikely to be coincidence, and the interplay between the poems brings Pope himself into Leapor’s rural coterie. This link is only in Leapor’s imagination, yet it represents an elevation of that traditionally considered ‘low’ (Phillis, a labouring-class maiden) to the refined world of Pope and his poetry.

These names would seem merely an unusual detail were it not for the additional insight they offer into ‘The Month of August.’ Leapor’s references to Sylvius/Sylvanus and Phillis emphasise that this dialogue describes the tension she felt between the urbane wit of the Scriblerians and her own experience of country life. Phillis rejects the clichéd advances of the older, more experienced and urbane Sylvanus – and Leapor rejects the brittle satire of Pope. Moreover, Phillis’ voice triumphs over Sylvanus’ clichés in the poem; Leapor is, obliquely, claiming for herself the lays in a singing-contest with Pope. The reference in ‘Damon and Strephon’ and the sincere grief in all three elegies to Pope/Sylvius establish that Leapor respected Pope, even while she used Sylvanus as a figure of dissipated urbanity in ‘The Month of August.’ Leapor admired and sought to imitate Pope, according to Brigit Freemantle—but, crucially, in ‘The Month of August’

¹¹⁶ Richard Greene and Ann Messenger, *The Works of Mary Leapor* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 313.

she uses him to represent a type of poetry she chose not to write. This nuance to her relationship with Pope has been overlooked by many contemporary scholars, who have taken Freemantle's description of Pope as Leapor's favourite poet, 'and the one whom she chiefly sought to imitate' to mean that Leapor would never question Pope, or choose to write in a different way than he did.¹¹⁷ Yet this poem draws a clear distinction between his work and hers.

Another example of her approach to naming demonstrates that Leapor was much more than a passive admirer of the Scriblerians; her character Celia both recalls Jonathan Swift's work 'The Lady's Dressing Room' and appears to be a reference to a real resident of Brackley. The name 'Celia' appears in several of Leapor's poems. Celia brings a five-thousand-pound dowry to Strephon in 'The Mistaken Lover,' and has a stake in the South Sea Scheme in 'Strephon to Celia: A Modern Love Letter.' In 'The Cruel Parent,' Mira has a dream in which Celia is starved by her father. Of course, Celia and Strephon first appear in Swift's 'The Lady's Dressing Room,' in which Strephon discovers Celia's chamber pot and her human imperfections ('Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shifts,' line 118).¹¹⁸ In part, Leapor is responding to and building upon his poem with the two she writes about Strephon and Celia. Yet 'Celia' also refers to a woman Leapor knew well enough to invite for tea in a lively tone with 'The Sacrifice. An Epistle to Celia.' This merging of poetic tropes with quotidian characters emphasizes that Leapor's coterie is an imaginary one: either she is imagining addressing one of her (and Swift's) characters in 'The Sacrifice,' or she has created a vivid but imaginary life for a Brackley friend in the other poems. Of course, the truth lies somewhere between these two readings, and it is not necessary to determine exactly who Celia really was to appreciate

¹¹⁷ Greene, *Mary Leapor*, p. xli.

¹¹⁸ Swift, Jonathan, *The Lady's Dressing-Room. A Poem.*, 2nd ed. (London and Dublin: 1732), p. 7.

the merging of everyday rural details with poetic allusion in Leapor's introduction of characters from Swift's work into her own, or from her home into her poetic coterie. In total, Leapor writes eleven poems in which Celia appears: two in which she and Strephon are lovers, written with a witty and slightly artificial tone and set within a fashionable London circle; four in which Celia appears to be a resident of Brackley ('The Disappointment,' 'The Head-Ach,' 'Mira to Octavia,' and 'The Sacrifice: An Epistle to Celia'). Celia is associated with beauty and flirtation, but also with romantic disappointment and misogyny: all concerns, it might be argued, of Swift's original Celia. Lines about her in 'Mopsus' epitomize Leapor's characterization of Celia: '*Celia*, the fair, the wretched, ruin'd Maid, / Whose fatal Charms an early Conquest came; / A young Proficient in the School of Shame' (lines 306-308). First fair, then wretched, then ruined, Celia is a victim of her own charms, which have led to her conquest and then her shame. Leapor's co-opting of Swift's character is another demonstration of her confidence in relation to other poets: her Celia poems represent a verse exchange of a sort with Swift.

Leapor also writes more familiar verse exchange poems, such as those she exchanged with Susanna Jennens ('The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy,' 'The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthanissa,' and Jennens' 'Parthenissa's Answer to the Pocket-Book's Soliloquy,' all published in the second volume of her poems), the many that she wrote to Freemantle, and individual poems to Brackley residents, such as the two poems entitled 'Mira to Octavia,' both about marriage, and several addressed to other individuals, including one searing epistle to a critic of her poems, 'To Gramaticus,' which works along similar lines as that to Minutius. What I have called her imaginary coterie is wide and deep, combining her real friendship and verse exchange with Artemisia and

Parthanissa; her one-sided addresses to Octavia, Grammaticus, and others; her responses to and revisions of the poems and characters of Pope, Swift, and even Virgil.

Classical Reference

Phyllis/Phyllis' reappearances create a sense of a vital, changing community in Leapor's work, a community at least inspired by that of her small town. If she was at times isolated from her neighbours by her literary interests – and some poems do indicate that she was – Leapor clearly observed, interacted with, and felt affection for her neighbours. More crucially to an understanding of Leapor's education, 'Phyllis' also seems likely to be an allusion to the generic love object 'Phyllis' who recurs as a song topic in Virgil's eclogues (III, V, VIII, and X). The gently mocking 'The Charms of Anthony' establishes Leapor's understanding of human nature, but also her poetic antecedents and her attitude toward the limited role of women in pastoral poetry.

In 'The Charms of Anthony,' two women discuss the titular character's attractions, but with competitive language and a conclusion that makes it clear that triumphing over other women is more important to each of them than is Anthony himself. Leapor begins with a mock-heroic invocation to the muse:

Ye Swains, attend; let ev'ry Nymph be near;
Be still, ye Rivers, that the Swains may hear:
Ye Winds, be calm, and brush with softer Wing;
We mean the Charms of Anthony to sing;
See all around the list'ning Shepherds throng;
O help, ye Sisters of immortal Song. (lines 1-6)¹¹⁹

Here, men are listening and women are singing; already, the masculine role is a passive one. 'Anthony' himself is the object of admiration and at first seems to hold power over the women – but by the end of the dialogue between 'Lucy' and 'Phebe' we learn that,

¹¹⁹ Mary Leapor, *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (London: 1748), p. 249.

when Anthony is away, other men serve a similar purpose for the women. The relationship among the women in the poem – their vying with one another for Anthony’s attention – is more important than any they might have with Anthony. The early exchanges build on one another, emasculating Anthony with comparisons of him to ‘the young Daisy dress’d in Morning Dew’ (line 15) as well as several other flowers and of his singing to ‘tuneful *Stella*’ (line 24). Descriptions of his ‘curling locks’ (line 29) and the ‘wisp of flow-ry Hay’ (line 32) he weaves into a hat complete the feminisation of the swain, while Lucy and Phebe establish their focus on other women with a series of stories about Anthony slighting their peers. Their only interactions with him have been fleeting: he helped Lucy over a stile once, and tossed an apple over Phebe’s head:

As I was dancing late amongst the Crew,
A yellow Pippin o’er my Head he threw:
Sue bit her lips, and Barbaretta frown’d;
And Phillis look’d as tho she wou’d have swoon’d.
(lines 47-50)

The pippin here recalls Gay’s ‘Thursday; or, The Spell,’ in which Hobnelia casts various spells to learn the name of her true love, including throwing the peel of an apple on the ground to form the first letter of his name: ‘This mellow Pippin, which I pare around, / My Shepherd’s Name shall flourish on the Ground. / I fling th’ unbroken paring o’er my Head’ (lines 91-93).¹²⁰ In Leapor’s reworking, it is Anthony who throws the Pippin, and Phebe who is the object of attention. Yet, unlike in Gay’s original, the superstition doesn’t confirm a clear preference: Anthony also pays attention to other women, and Phebe herself is more interested in her friends’ reactions to the apple-throwing than in Anthony himself. The women compete until Colin and Rodrigo come to take them to town for cider, and the poem concludes:

¹²⁰ John Gay. *The shepherd’s week. In six pastorals. By Mr J. Gay* (London: 1714), p. 36. Via *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Oxford.

Thus sung the Maids till *Colinet* came by,
 And *Rodrigo* from weeding of the Rye;
 Each took his Lass, and sped 'em to the Town,
 To drink cool Cider at the *Hare* and *Hound*:
 The Damsels simper like the sparkling Beer,
 And *Colin* shines till *Anthony* is near. (lines 51-56)

This stanza rewrites the final lines of Gay's 'Friday: or, The Dirge,' in which shepherds are mourning the death of Blouzelinda. In the last stanza of Gay's work, they find comfort in another woman:

Thus wail'd the Louts in melancholy Strain,
 'Till bonny Susan sped a-cross the Plain;
 They seiz'd the Lass in Apron clean array'd,
 And to the Ale-house forc'd the willing Maid;
 In Ale and Kisses they forget their Cares,
 And Susan Blouzelinda's Loss repairs. (lines 159-164)

A close comparison of the two passages clearly demonstrates Leapor's familiarity with Gay's poem, and her changes to his work offer further insight into her stance on male-female relationships. While Susan is 'seiz'd' and 'forc'd' to the ale-house, the men in Leapor's poem '[come] by' and '[speed]' the women to town. While Gay's men exhibit real callousness by quickly (and forcibly) replacing the woman their poem mourns, Leapor's women enjoy only temporary consolation. The company of Susan completely 'repairs' the men's mourning for Blouzelinda in Gay's work, but in Leapor's version Colin only 'shines' until Anthony's return. Her echoes of 'Friday' show Leapor rewriting Gay's poem in particular and men's treatment of women in general. Leapor's women may be fickle, the last stanza tells us, but they are powerless. More interestingly, Gay's 'wailing louts' become Leapor's 'singing maids' in the first line of the stanza, and 'Damsels' later: Leapor's language leaves room for sympathy with her characters, tempering Gay's burlesque with something more heartfelt. She also introduces better detail into the passage, substituting the specific 'cool Cider at the Horse and Hound' and 'Damsels simper like the sparkling beer' for Gay's 'the Ale-House' and 'Ale and

Kisses.’ She reclaims the rural locale from Gay, demonstrating her greater familiarity with the country. Gay’s poem, while it includes lovingly detailed passages describing the countryside and labour, ultimately treats labourers as ridiculous. Leapor, on the other hand, steps back from mockery to humanize her neighbours and to carve out a place for them in pastoral poetry. In other dialogues, she uses the character of ‘Mira’ to place herself into the pastoral landscape she has created, and to move the voice of poetry from the city poet to the country labourer. In ‘Crumble-Hall,’ Leapor creates characters reminiscent of John Gay’s rustics from *The Shepherd’s Week*; she is writing from experience, whereas Gay wrote what he imagined rustics would be like, dealing in archetypes rather than reality. In other poems, however, Leapor allows her rural community to speak more realistically, and suggests that visitors from the city are the foolish ones.

‘A Neighbour’s Child’

In two further dialogues, Leapor places poetry in the mouths of her rural workers and – as in ‘The Month of August’ – depicts city visitors as bad rhetoricians. ‘Corydon. Phillario. Or, Mira’s Picture’ is a self-portrait in which Leapor uses the singing-contest to mock herself, her purported suitors, and the conventions of the form itself. An eclogue in which two men rival each other in disparaging, rather than praising, their ‘mistress’ is already a subversion of the pastoral form, but Leapor further complicates the dialogue by introducing a neighbourly sympathy in one of the speakers, the local farmer Corydon. Through allusions to Pope and Swift, Leapor establishes Corydon and his companion, Phillario, as ignorant and shallow, respectively, and herself (as Mira) as a true poet, the real winner of the singing-contest despite her silence in the poem.

Corydon, a ‘harmless shepherd swain’ with ‘smiling features’ and a ‘cheerful mind’ who lives near a ‘friendly hill’ (lines 2-5), meets the ‘gay Phillario,’ a visitor from London. The poem’s topic, Leapor tells us, is not how Phillario spent his time in Brackley, nor what he ate, nor ‘whether he longed for ombre and bohea’ (line 12) nor whether he was bored during his stay. The only thing that makes Phillario and Corydon’s discussion notable is its subject: Mira. Although they offer nothing but insults about her, their only significance lies in speaking about her. The allusion to Pope in ‘ombre and bohea’ is notable: Phillario is from London, and like Belinda in ‘The Rape of the Lock,’ he dreads

... some lone isle, or distant northern land;
Where the gilt chariot never marks the way,
Where none learn ombre, none e’er taste bohea!
(IV, lines 154-6)¹²¹

Leapor’s poem shows Phillario visiting the (relative to London) ‘distant northern land’ that Belinda fears, then emasculates the rake by describing him and Corydon as ‘a couple’ (line 17) walking to the top of a hill ‘to hear the Linnet sing’ (line 17). Leapor’s natural description and pure rhymes add to the satire of ‘Mira’s Picture:’ familiar pairs such as tale/vale, sing/spring, and reigns/plains suggest that she is telling a well-known tale, but her diction reveals that she is subverting it. Phillario asks Corydon about the women in the neighbourhood, positing that the ‘shiv’ring Beauties of this Northern Clime’ (line 22) cannot compare to ‘Arcadian nymphs’ (line 21). The shepherd mentions a few women, but his companion asks about Mira, who

...walks from yonder Hill,
With studious Brows, and Night-cap Dishabille?
That looks a Stranger to the Beams of Day;
And counts her Steps, and mutters all the Way? (lines 29-32)

¹²¹ Alexander Pope and John Butt (ed.), *The Poems of Alexander Pope: A One-Volume Edition of the Twickenham Pope* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 236-7.

Mira is no nymph: she is pale, with her night-cap askew; her brow is furrowed in thought, and she looks at the ground, muttering, as she walks (perhaps composing poetry). Yet it is she who catches Phillario's attention, not any of the beautiful women Corydon describes (and not the linnet, their original objective). Later in the poem, Phillario notes her eyebrows, 'not quite so even as a Mouse's Hide,' a reference to Swift's 'A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed' and Matthew Prior's 'On the Same [A Reasonable Affliction],' both of which feature beautiful women using false eyebrows made of mouse fur. Leapor's 'shape' is 'where Mountains upon Mountains rise!' much as 'hills peep o'er hills, and Alps upon Alps arise' (line 232) in the conclusion to a passage on education and ambition in Pope's 'An Essay on Criticism.' Again, Leapor's references establish that she belongs among poets: far from being a society beauty, she has natural eyebrows, and her poetic ambition is literally inscribed upon her body. Meanwhile, the two swains are her inferiors: Corydon, the kinder of the two, is so uneducated that he cannot remember the word 'rhyme,' and Phillario is so bad at the singing contest that he uses the word 'plains' twice as an end rhyme, and 'plain' once. The two struggle to put lines together, interrupting one another and finishing each other's sentences. Neither thinks highly of Mira's appearance, but Corydon does defend her as one of his circle: 'Hold, Phillario! She's a Neighbour's Child' (line 40), and eventually excuses himself from the conversation, explaining that his rye field must be weeded, 'Lest the rude Brambles over-top the Corn' (lines 66-67), as perhaps the rudeness of Phillario's behaviour has the capacity to over-top the corn of Mira's actual worth. Ultimately, Leapor depicts herself as free, impervious to Corydon and Phillario's opinions, and – in contrast to Phillario's state of exile – surrounded by neighbors who, even if they do not approve of her, defend her against criticism.

In a less well-known poem, ‘Minutius. Artemisia. A Dialogue,’ Mira is again attacked by an outsider and again defended by a neighbor – this time, her friend Artemisia (Freemantle). On this occasion, it is not her body but the physical state of Mira’s poems to which a visitor from the city objects. The aptly-named critic Minutius is shocked not just at Mira’s appearance, but at the sight (and smell) of the entire town of ‘Br---ly.’ He came to the country expecting a pastoral idyll, and instead finds ‘putrid Drains’ (line 5) where ‘sweating Nymphs’ (line 6) and ‘sprawling Swains, / On either Side, before, behind, / Provide a Stench for ev’ry Wind’ (lines 6-8). One can imagine Minutius declaring of Brackley, like Swift of Corinna in ‘A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed,’ that ‘who sees, will spew; who smells, be poison’d’ (line 74).¹²² Placing this Swiftian description in the voice of a stuffy critic allies Minutius with the urban pastoral for which Swift was known; the sexual image of nymphs and swains sprawling ‘before, behind’ offers an almost orgiastic picture of Brackley and its residents. Swift, of course, was famously both fascinated with and disgusted by the aromas of people (‘The Lady’s Dressing-Room’) and cities (‘Description of a City Shower’) alike. This places Brackley, Mira/Leapor, and Mira/Leapor’s poetry in opposition to Swift and Minutius, as the critic attacks town, poet, and poetic amanuensis alike based on appearance. The countryside has confounded Minutius’ pastoral expectations, just as Leapor’s poetry plays with her audience’s expectations of the form. Meanwhile, Minutius is so distracted by the dirt on Leapor’s paper and the errors of punctuation in her writing that he cannot understand what Artemisia calls ‘her Thought, her Language, and Invention’ (line 50). Artemisia shows him Mira’s poems to get her friend some helpful advice, but the critic’s fussiness prevents him from seeing their content. Mira’s friend defends her, telling

¹²² Christine Gerrard and David Fairer, *Eighteenth Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (London: Wiley, 2014), p. 87.

Minutius that he ‘step[s] beside the Question quite’ (line 48). Urging him to be patient with the poet’s handwriting, Artemisia reminds him, ‘I never try’d / To recommend her for a Scribe’ (lines 55-56). This good-natured humour emphasizes the critic’s inability to focus on the true value of Mira’s work, and Leapor’s discomfort with outside critics. Artemisia, in contrast, ‘[c]an bear [the author] nigh – yet calmly sit / Without a Qualm, or fainting Fit’ (lines 29-30) and has gained the author’s friendship. Education, then, is not as important to Leapor as the ability to look beyond the surface of both a person and a poem. In this pair of dialogues, she expresses gratitude to her friend for accepting her, and an allegiance to Brackley that is not often discussed in criticism of her work.

Leapor steps outside Brackley with poems written in the final year of her life, a time when she was preparing a collection of poems for publication and sending her play to London for possible production. ‘Cicely, Joan, and Deborah: An Eclogue’ sees her addressing the aftermath of the Jacobite rising of 1745-1746 through a mock-pastoral in which the expectations of the genre are once again confounded. The poem begins with a description of Cicely distraught, ‘in Sorrows drown’d, / with eyes cast downward, and disheveled hair’ (lines 6-7), and – as Joan describes her – ‘Like Verjuice sowre, and as pale as Whey’ (line 12) bathetically suffering. Just as in Gay’s ‘Wednesday’ and Pope’s ‘Summer: Alexis,’ the poem is set up theatrically, with a description of the speaker, followed by the speaker stepping forth (or, as in ‘Wednesday,’ leaning on a rake) and beginning her (or his) complaint. Cicely tells her friend that she has been crying all night; Joan assumes that her beloved cow must have died:

Ah! Tell me, Cicely—tho’ to ask I dread;
 Yet, pr’ythee, tell me; is old Brindle dead?
 (Since yester Morn I have not heard her lowe)
 If so—who would not weep for such a Cow? (lines 17-20)

Leapor overturns expectations here, presenting a maiden the reader assumes is lovesick, who is instead perhaps mourning livestock. But the poem takes another turn: Cicely is

crying because her lover, Colin Clumsy, has become a soldier. This double shift represents a neat parallel in the development of the pastoral genre: Cicely is first a sincere lover, then a comical rustic, and then sincere again – but mourning not because of heartbreak but because of real events caused by a political situation far away. The triple possibilities of pastoral here – idealized, ridiculous, and political – coexist for the rest of the poem. Colin's recruitment is described in romantic terms, but also tragic ones, and with a hint of comedy:

For ever curs'd be that same Market-day,
When a vile Serjeant led my Youth astray!
Far from his Home my *Colin*'s doom'd to die,
My lovely *Colin* with the rolling Eye. (lines 27-30)

Colin is wooed away from Cicely by the recruiting officer, and will tragically die 'far from his home,' yet still is described comically, 'with [a] rolling Eye.' A similar description occurs in Gay's 'Wednesday,' as Sparabella describes herself as having eyes like plums ('the black Sloe turns in my rolling Eye' [line 52]). The comic turn at the end of Cicely's plaint keeps the reader from entirely sympathizing with her. The complexity of 'Cicely, Joan, and Deborah' has been overlooked by scholars, possibly because it descends into a drinking song with the entry of Deborah. There are some indications that Deborah in this poem is the same character as the speaker in 'The Epistle of Deborah Dough': in the latter, better-known poem, Deborah Dough mentions her 'brindled cow' (line 8) and 'young daughter Cicely' (line 21). Dough is a comic character, who compares her daughter favorably with 'neighbour Mary' (line 9), Leapor herself. Cicely is a foot taller than the poet, and 'better learned' (line 22): she can knit a sock in a day and is an excellent cook of bacon, pudding, and pancakes. 'Neighbour Mary,' by contrast, 'sits scribble-scribble all the day' (line 11) and is 'mighty proud' of her poems, but her verses cannot cure corns or toothache – as those of a man in the village can, if the paper on which his work is written is applied to the ailing body part. Written in

Hudibrastic couplets, ‘The Epistle of Deborah Dough’ mock-heroically details Brackley news, including the decline in the price of oats, Dough’s gratitude for a gift of cheese, and her triumph at Leapor’s supposed inferiority to both Cicely and the rhyming conjuror. This poem emphasizes Leapor’s isolation in Brackley society even as it demonstrates her ability to imitate the voice of someone very different from herself. The character’s reappearance in ‘Cicely, Joan, and Deborah: An Eclogue,’ then, represents Leapor’s attempt to contextualize a political issue with the reaction of women from Brackley. Deborah arrives with beer, celebrating a victory over the Jacobite rebels:

We’ve kill’d two thousand of the Rogues (d’ye mind?)
 Egad, their Gen’ral durst not look behind;
 Tho’ Gaffer Doubt-man (with the blinking Eye)
 Says, ‘tis but Fifty—and that’s pretty nigh. (lines 43-46)

The difference between two thousand and fifty is insignificant to Deborah, who is primarily interested in having a reason to drink. Joan, too, finds in the rebellion an escape from a difficult life: she recounts a few misfortunes, but concludes ‘yet we’ll drink, because the Rebels fly’ (line 58). ‘Gaffer Doubt-man’ may be an allusion to ‘Gaffer Tread-well,’ who tells the mourners in John Gay’s ‘Friday: The Dirge,’ to drink cider to Blouzelinda’s memory, because ‘excessive Sorrow is exceeding dry’ (lines 151-152). Like the mourners of ‘Friday,’ the trio of women in Leapor’s poem finish with a celebration: bonfires are lit, and Deborah opens another pot of beer.

Richard Greene suggests that this poem demonstrates support for the Duke’s campaign against the rebels, but this reading misses the irony in Deborah’s praise of ‘This Duke of what d’ye call it—*Cumberland*. / Heav’n bless this Duke, and all his Train! Say I. / Let’s pledge thee, *Cicely*; for I’m deadly dry’ (lines 52-54). It is worth noting the echo of Tread-well’s words in ‘deadly dry;’ these parallels, and the phrase itself, remind the reader that Colin Clumsy may die in the service of the Duke. As Greene notes, the father of Leapor’s close friend Freemantle was probably a Jacobite.

The Leapor biographer dismisses the question of Bridget Freemantle's politics as 'intriguing ... [but] not crucial to an understanding of Leapor's poetry' and suggests that 'to a labouring woman, the world of high politics may have seemed distant, for she touches on it rarely.'¹²³ Yet the tone of her later poetry suggests otherwise. As Greene establishes, '[in] August 1746 Leapor looked forward to a career as a writer,' and it may be that the young poet was preparing herself for a larger audience, and the ability to comment on issues outside of Brackley.¹²⁴ The two poems associated with that time suggest that she was looking beyond her small town. Greene establishes that 'To Lucinda' addresses a patroness (as yet unidentified) in a flattering tone unlike that in earlier, more private poems addressed to Freemantle. In 'August 1746,' Leapor writes about a national concern: the punishment of the Jacobite rebels. Both poems represent a new direction for the poet, one away from Brackley: it must have seemed, to Leapor and her patrons, that her imagined coterie was likely to be replaced by a real one.

In the poem titled 'August 1746,' Leapor attempts serious commentary on the punishment of the Jacobite rebels in Scotland, calling on God to have mercy on 'the wretched Bands / Who to their Fellows lift their weary Hands / In vain—for Pity (that celestial Guest) / Is found but seldom in a Victor's Breast' (lines 13-16). This sincere and affecting poem seems an attempt at political commentary. But, after an emotional description of the frenzy of public executions, Leapor breaks off: 'My Heart, no more--- but thy own Business mind: / 'Tis not for me---to regulate Mankind' (lines 37-38). She seems to find that she is not suited for this kind of political commentary, but instead to represent the individuals of the crowd through 'Cicely, Joan, and Deborah: An Eclogue' and the more subtle commentary of Cicely's grief and Deborah's ignorance. It is notable,

¹²³ Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 21.

¹²⁴ Greene, *Mary Leapor*, p. 125.

too that Leapor labels 'Cicely, Joan, and Deborah' an 'Eclogue,' a reminder of Virgil's originals, which also described the domestic aftermath of battle. Taken in the light of what Greene calls the 'blood sports of public execution,' Cicely, Joan, and Deborah come to represent those in the crowd who support the punishment of the rebels, not because they hate Jacobites, but because they (respectively) have loved ones in the Duke's army (Cicely); have worries which the executions obscure (Joan); and simply enjoy celebrating (Deborah).¹²⁵ The rough language of the three speakers, so similar to that of Corydon and Phillario in 'Mira's Picture,' underscores that the country's support for punishing the rebels did not always come from those who understood the ideological underpinnings of the conflict.

Conclusions

In an article about Leapor and Ann Yearsley, David Fairer suggests that critics have avoided a purely formalistic approach to labouring-class poets' work out of a concern that their poetry would not stand up to such scrutiny: that, without the context of their lives and our ideological frame for them, the poetry itself would seem less important. In retaining a biographical approach to these poets, however, Fairer suggests that critics are limiting them.

... their world, rather than being liberating, can become a predictable restriction that we impose, a move that on our part is simultaneously aggressive and yet defensive. While we may hope to claim them for a critique of ideology, make their radical voices ours, or our radical voices theirs, the thought arises that in doing so we may be avoiding an individuated analysis of the poetry, perhaps because in our heart of hearts we are unsure whether their texts, or our agenda, can withstand scrutiny.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Greene, Mary Leapor, p. 21.

¹²⁶ David Fairer, "'Flying Atoms in the Sightless Air": Issues of Coherence and Scale in Leapor and Yearsley,' *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 34:1 (2015): 141-162, p. 143.

In the case of Leapor, I have not stripped away a biographical or ideological frame, but in foregrounding her contribution to the development of one aspect of mock-heroic verse I believe I have demonstrated her technical skill and fundamental worth as a poet. In her mock-heroics, Leapor demonstrates her ease with a fundamentally intertextual form. The irony and satire with which she re-visits the idealized countryside of pastorals, georgics, and also (implicitly) mock-heroic poems that contrasted city and country reveals a subtly different kind of mock-heroic, one which begins to allow sympathy to co-exist with satire. Placing mock-heroics in the countryside was not new, but Leapor deploys mock-heroic as a resident of the countryside herself. This complicates her poetry: her characters are more nuanced than the satirised characters of Gay and Swift, and she also turns satire on herself as a resident of the countryside she depicts. Moreover, she self-satirises not just implicitly, but explicitly, in the character of Mira. By including herself as a member of the group she mocks, Leapor positively claims a place for herself in the country – and a place for this realistic country in the literature of her time. Far from the lone genius her patrons described in their subscription proposal, Leapor is resident of a community both literary and realistic, and much of her poetry draws on this landscape.

Recent scholarship has recognized the importance of community and debate among eighteenth-century writers; Moyra Haslett, for example, delineates the various ways in which eighteenth-century writing was conversational, including the increase in print circulation and literary criticism as well as ‘the popularity of literary groups and coteries, the frequency of collaborative authorship, or the tradition of answering or continuing works by other authors and the tendency to publish revised editions of one’s own or one’s friends’ works.’¹²⁷ Writing was an opportunity for collegial debate and

¹²⁷ Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1789: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 6.

community. Yet where women's writing is concerned, collaboration is all too often treated as proof that women's friendships were more important than those of men, and that women writers required coterie in order to write. Discussion of collaboration contributes to a stereotype of women as writing collectively and plays into speculation about the degree to which a (often more public) male poet may have written poems attributed to a female poet. Well-known examples of these include discussions of the authorship of the *Town Eclogues* by Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (who was part of a coterie with Gay and Pope) and of the work of Mary Barber, who received encouragement and advice from Jonathan Swift. Labouring-class poets like Leapor are even more at risk of having their accomplishments diminished by well-meaning but ultimately misguided assumptions about their lives and the scope of their poetic accomplishments. As we have seen, Leapor's poetry responds with complexity to the work of Pope, Gay, and Virgil himself, adding an important new voice to the Pope-Philips debate over pastoral: one from a poet who lived – and worked – in the country.

Chapter Three

Mary Jones

Introduction

In ‘Epistle from Fern Hill,’ Mary Jones describes a visit to her friend Charlot Clayton, with the two women sitting together in the evening, ‘You wisely with your cat at play, / I reading *Swift*, and spilling tea’ (lines 72-73).¹²⁸ On the surface, this picture of domestic felicity reinforces the way contemporary critics approach Jones: as a middling-class woman who wrote occasional poetry, largely to a group of female friends. Yet closer attention to this line offers a far different understanding of both this poem and Jones’ work in general. Charlot and the cat ‘wisely ... at play’ suggest Christopher Smart’s cat Jeffrey, while the long ‘a’ rhyme on ‘tea’ places the poem in a tradition of those about women – like Alexander Pope’s Queen Anne, ‘Great Anna! Whom three realms obey,’ and who ‘sometimes counsel take[s]—and sometimes tea’ (III, lines 7-8).¹²⁹ Jones is spilling her tea – taking Pope’s comic deflation one step further – as a result of reading Jonathan Swift, a hint about an important influence in Jones’ work. Far from the decorous verses expected of the female poet, her writing is complicated, innovative, and sometimes shocking – occasionally, even (like Swift’s) scatological. The epistle figures Jones’ and Clayton’s mutual civilities during her visit as a series of hostile

¹²⁸ Some sources, such as the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, have erroneously taken the ‘Charlot Clayton’ referred to in Jones’ poetry to be Charlotte [née Dyve] Clayton, later Lady Sundon, the wife of MP William Clayton, who was appointed a woman of the bedchamber to Princess Caroline in 1714 and was thought to exert too much influence over Caroline after she became queen. But, as Deborah Kennedy has established, Mary Jones’ Charlot Clayton was an unmarried cousin of Martha Lovelace, and the daughter of Gen. Jasper Clayton, who had at one time been Lieutenant-Governor of Gibraltar. See Philip Carter, ‘Clayton, Charlotte, Lady Sundon (c. 1679–1742)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5568>], and Kennedy, Deborah, *Poetic Sisters*, Bucknell University Press, Lewisburg, 2013, p. 170. To distinguish the Charlotte Clayton of Fernhill from the better-known Charlotte Clayton, Lady Sundon, I refer to her as ‘Charlot Clayton’ in this chapter – the spelling of the first name that Jones uses in her poetry.

¹²⁹ Alexander Pope, ‘The Rape of the Lock,’ in Christine Gerrard and David Fairer, *Eighteenth Century Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (London: Wiley, 2014), p. 121. All subsequent quotations from ‘The Rape of the Lock’ are from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

acts, and culminates in an excremental mock-epic simile that compares the inconvenience of entertaining a houseguest to the physical pain of trapped wind, with Charlot as the sufferer and Jones herself as the troublesome vapours. Ultimately, Jones uses mock-heroic verse to distance herself from the domestic matters she describes, carving out for herself a space in which she can experiment with poetry much bolder and bawdier – much more honest and unashamed – than that of other female poets in the eighteenth century.

A Mask of Diffidence

Admired by such eminent critics as Samuel Johnson and Ralph Griffiths, Jones declined further publication after publishing one collection of poetry and prose by subscription. Today, she is known largely for two poems, the widely-anthologized ‘After the Small Pox’ and ‘Epistle to Lady Bowyer.’ The latter echoes Alexander Pope’s ‘Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot,’ and adopts a stance of self-effacement before the poet:

Whilst lofty Pope erects his laurell’d head,
No lays, like mine, can live beneath his shade:
Nothing but weeds and moss, and shrubs are found:
Cut, cut them down, why cumber they the ground? (lines
9-12)

As a result of this extreme expression of diffidence, Jones is remembered largely as a Pope imitator and a modest writer of entertaining but decorous poetry. As early as 1774, Mary Scott’s *The Female Advocate* described Jones largely in terms of Pope:

To Oxford next the Muse transported turns,
Where Jones with all a poet’s ardour burns;
Jones, in whose strain another Pope we view,
Her wit so keen, her sentiments so true. (lines 215-218)¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Mary Scott, *The female advocate; a poem. Occasioned by reading Mr. Duncombe’s Feminead. By Miss Scott* (London: printed for Joseph Johnson, No. 72, St. Paul’s Church-Yard, 1774). Accessed via *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, University of Oxford.

Scott places Jones in a traditional role for a female poet, ‘burning with ardour’ and imitating Pope – yet there is a very real and profound compliment in her placement of Jones as ‘another Pope,’ and in particular following Pope through a keen wit and the expression of true sentiments. The status of Jones as a truth-teller and a deployer of wit has been largely forgotten today, but is available for the careful reader.

Deborah Kennedy nicely untangles the history of some of Jones’ connections, but falls into the trap of considering Jones ‘a conservative woman in many ways.’ As we will see, in her poetry Jones was anything but conservative. Her debt to Swift is particularly clear in ‘Epistle from Fern-Hill’ and ‘Holt Waters,’ in that both are scatological poems similar to some of his, but references to Swift abound in Jones’ writing, and an examination of these demonstrates not just that he was a model for her work, but that Jones was working in a more complicated way than is recognised today. Just as it is reductive to call her a Pope imitator, it would be incorrect to simply establish Jones’ debt to Swift. This chapter examines Jones’ references to Swift and others to establish that her writing, far from minor, adds a new voice to several key debates in this period.

A Community Formed Around Mockery

The mock-heroic impulse to use high language to laugh at a common situation is at play in a letter Jones included in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*. In ‘Reasons humbly offer’d to the Consideration of the Hon. Miss L. why the Treaty of Fern-Hill, concluded in the year 1732, should be totally set aside; or remain to Posterity with the following Emendations,’ Jones posits that she and Martha Lovelace (a maid of honour to Queen Caroline, and cousin to Charlot Clayton) have been following a treaty in which Jones provides two letters for every one that she receives from Lovelace. Observing ‘[t]hat her real and natural interests are closely connected with, and absolutely depend upon, the

Frequency of the said Lady's letters' (p. 309), Jones calls for the treaty to be set aside.¹³¹

She continues:

it has always been a Rule, from time out of mind, for all
and every Correspondent to reply as often as they receive;
but that by this Treaty, the said M.J. has not only suffer'd
in her natural Rights as a Correspondent, but has also been
greatly abridg'd in those more inviolable ones, her
Pleasures ... (p. 309).

As Moyra Haslett observes, Jones discusses the correspondence in the political language of 'rights and responsibilities' (p. 216), using this effect to demonstrate (and ironize) the importance of letters and social interaction – indeed, of friendship – in women's lives.¹³² Haslett rightly identifies mock-heroic as empowering: 'We can see Mary Jones using women's exclusion from the world of official legislature as a source of private joking, of wry amusement, and, as a result, of literary confidence' (p. 216). Of course, it is not only women who were excluded from the corridors of power: strictures on Catholics deprived Pope of a university education as well as the right to hold public office or own land, while both Swift and John Gay were bitterly disappointed in their attempts to gain influence in London.¹³³ Indeed, Gay's *Trivia* and Swift's *Journal to Stella* were written as the authors came to terms with exclusion from circles of influence, and may be seen as a turn to domestic subjects after failures in public life. But Haslett's formulation – that exclusion from Parliament leads to inside jokes about that exclusion which only the marginalized understand – points to a more explicit inversion, in which writers exclude those with political power from their (domestic) humour and thereby create a supportive, exclusive space in which they may feel free to write.

¹³¹ Mary Jones, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (Oxford, 1750).

¹³² Moyra Haslett, 'The Love of Friendship,' *The History of British Women's Writing, 1690-1750*, ed. Ros Ballaster (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 215-231.

¹³³ Valerie Rumbold, *Women's Place in Pope's World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 2; David Nokes, *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 200.

Certainly, manuscript circulation afforded such a private space to many writers, and Jones first shared her work in manuscript. Yet her letters were also then printed: the *Letter to Dr. Pitt* (1745) was first published on its own five years before *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1750). Jones' literary confidence may thus be considered as, not just arising from female friendship, and not dependent on the private space that Haslett identifies, but related to something more outward-facing: her education and the reception her writing received. Far from solely depending upon private interactions to give her confidence, Jones was self-assured enough not just to demonstrate her literacy in her collected works, but also to mock the conventions of formal prose through her published letters, which may be seen as both private and public.

Jones' public connections were much more distinguished than might be expected of the daughter of an Oxford cooper. She knew Samuel Johnson well; he called her 'The Chantress,' a play on her brother Oliver's position as cantor of Oxford's Christ Church Cathedral and a reference to the term Milton uses for the goddess Melancholy in his *Il Penseroso*. In a footnote in his *Life of Johnson*, Boswell quotes Thomas Warton's recollection that 'Miss Jones was often of our parties ... I have heard him often address her [as chantress].'¹³⁴ Judging from the popularity of two poems that were circulated without her permission, it seems likely that she was encouraged in her writing by those who saw her manuscripts. In 1742, she was surprised (but, judging by subsequent letters, pleased) to learn that her poem 'The Lass of the Hill' had been pirated and printed in London; similarly, her poem 'In Memory of the Rt. Hon. Lord Aubrey Beauclerk, who was slain at Carthage,' written in 1743, was soon after published by his widow without

¹³⁴ James Boswell, *Boswell's Life of Johnson, together with Boswell's Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides and Johnson's Diary of a Journey into North Wales*, 6 vols, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill and Laurence Fitzroy Powell (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1934), p. 322, n4.

Jones' permission.¹³⁵ Her circle included women of the court; Johnson himself; and Ralph Griffiths, editor of *The Monthly Review*. She knew Griffiths well enough to send him highly playful, entertaining letters; in one, a cataloguer of the Bodleian Library observes, she 'luxuriates in roundabout language.'¹³⁶

The usual invitation to see Jones as modest and retiring is made in the Advertisement at the beginning of *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, in which she disclaims any desire to print her writing, 'but for the sake of a relation, grown old and helpless thro' a series of misfortunes' and says that it was 'quite accidental, that her thoughts ever rambled into rhyme.'¹³⁷ There is no indication of who such a 'relation' might have been in any current biographical information about Jones. While it is entirely possible that eighteenth-century readers would have discounted these disclaimers as the usual defences included at the beginning of most female writers' books at the time, they appear to have contributed to the focus on Jones as retiring woman rather than an ambitious writer (much like the persistence of the critical impression of Leapor as being simply a modest rural poet). It is clear that Jones was aware of the necessity for female writers to appear not to value their own work, and that she chafed against it: regarding a quarto edition of Mary Barber's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1734), Jones writes of being 'highly delighted at the sight of so pompous an edition from a person of my own sex' and pleased that Barber writes of other matters than romantic love.¹³⁸

In fact, Barber claimed to have written poetry only to educate her children, because 'Precepts convey'd in Verse would be easier remember'd.'¹³⁹ Despite having

¹³⁵ Based on letters published in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, Jones refused to give the widow permission to publish 'In Memory of the Rt. Hon. Lord Aubrey Beauclerk,' but was pleased with its success.

¹³⁶ Kate Pogsen, James Henry Hall Minn, and Colin Bertram Hunt (eds.), Bodleian Card Catalogue record for '16 Mar 1761: Jones, Mary, 1707-1778, to Griffiths, Ralph, 1720-1803' in Early Modern Letters Online, Cultures of Knowledge, <<http://emlo.bodleian.ox.ac.uk>> [Accessed January 2016]

¹³⁷ Mary Jones, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (London, Oxford, and Bath, 1750), pp. v, iv.

¹³⁸ Ibid, p. 320.

¹³⁹ Mary Barber, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: Printed for C. Rivington, 1734), pp. xvii-xviii.

worked assiduously to assemble a subscription list of more than 900 names (with more than 200 of these from the aristocracy), she claimed to be allowing her work to be printed only with ‘diffidence and reluctance,’ and because of ‘the Prospect of some Advantage to my Family.’¹⁴⁰ It does seem likely that Barber needed to support her family because (according to her letters to Swift) she was often in need of money.¹⁴¹

Jones’ own subscription list was even more extensive than Barber’s; as Kennedy notes, it was ‘one of the largest and most illustrious lists of subscribers on record, with nearly two hundred members of the nobility and an array of highly ranked members of the government, the army, the navy, and the clergy.’¹⁴² The writer ‘J.O.’ in an 1879 issue of *Notes & Queries* posits that ‘the lady’s capability, or rather influence, must have been great, for she exhibits no less than 1,680 subscribers, including 332 on royal paper. It is not that the number is unexampled, but rather the eminent names of patrons, composed of the elite of society.’¹⁴³ Of course, some subscribers to books such as Jones’ would have known very little of the author, signing for a book because of the author’s connections to the court. Jones’ dedication to the very popular Princess Royal, and the royal family’s support of her subscription, must have been one reason for its success; yet this could not have been the only one. Jones had already had three works published, although without her consent, and one, the ballad ‘The Lass of the Hill,’ had proven extremely popular in London. Moreover, the *Gentleman’s Magazine* had reprinted one of her poems in 1748. She was already a public figure, and while she may have felt some uncertainty about publishing her collection she was not the purely private character some critics have assumed.

¹⁴⁰ Barber, xxiii.

¹⁴¹ For more on Barber’s subscription list, see Adam Budd, ‘Merit in Distress: The Troubled Success of Mary Barber,’ *The Review of English Studies, New Series*, 53: 210 (2002), 204-227, pp. 205-207.

¹⁴² Deborah Kennedy, *Poetic Sisters* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2013), p. 171.

¹⁴³ J.O., ‘Books Published by Subscription,’ *Notes & Queries* s5-XII, (297) (London, 1879), p. 198.

In Jones' introduction, the trope of poetic modesty and a needy relative, with the extreme claim that her poetry was the product of pure luck and the wry excuse that 'almost perpetual interruptions' slowed her progress on the volume, coupled with the more serious mention of the loss of 'the dearest and best of mothers' and gratitude for her 'numerous and generous subscribers' demonstrate the nuanced way Jones approaches the complicated questions of female authorship as well as class differences.¹⁴⁴ On its face a show of diffidence, allusions in her introduction lay claim to a natural genius like Pope's: where the male poet says that he 'lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came' ('Epistle to Arbuthnot,' lines 128-129), Jones says that it was 'quite accidental, that her thoughts ever rambled into rhyme,' and calls her poems 'the produce of pure nature.'¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Jones' reference to interruptions in the preparation of her manuscript recalls Pope's claim in its advertisement that 'Epistle to Arbuthnot' was 'drawn up in snatches, as the various occasions offered': an excuse for any seeming incoherence, but also perhaps a claim to another kind of genius, one that can create great work in 'snatches' of time. The idea of the interrupted poet is of course typified in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's much later *Kubla Khan*, the record of a dream that the poet had, only a fragment of which he had written down when interrupted by a visitor. Housewives faced perpetual claims on their time and interruptions to their work. A roughly contemporary example of an interrupted poem is Elizabeth Moody's 'The Housewife' (1798). Jones claims both poetic genius through her allusions to Pope and intellectual modesty through her mentions of gratitude and hesitation at publication. In this introduction, then, Jones appeals to two different audiences. To some, she appears a modest, conventional woman publishing her work with great hesitation; to others, she reveals her ambitious side

¹⁴⁴ Jones, p. vi.

¹⁴⁵ Gerrard and Fairer, p. 159; Jones, pp. vi-v.

through the parallels she draws between herself and Pope. Lively contradictions in the personal letters reprinted in her collection suggest that such doubling was a deliberate strategy for Jones. She writes of allowing a mutual friend to read her correspondent's last letter over her shoulder, but in another complains facetiously of her correspondent showing Jones' last missive to the same mutual friend.¹⁴⁶ She writes proudly of the success of 'The Lass of the Hill,' printed without her permission, yet complains (again, probably flippantly) of the circulation of her poem about Lord Aubrey Beauclerk by his widow:

But tho' I've no such designs [to publish] myself, what shall I do with Lady A. Beauclerk? She prints 'em, tho' I won't; and has so powerfully exhausted her first Edition, that She's now preparing to persecute her friends with a Second. I told her at first 'twould never answer; I still remonstrate, but 'tis to no purpose. She modestly assur'd me, she would print, with my Consent, if she could get it; if not, without it. And truly so she did.¹⁴⁷

Jones celebrates the success of her work in print, even as she complains of it having been printed. Just as mock-epic is both mock- and epic, both undermines and elevates, Jones embraces contradiction: she is both private and public, both modest (refusing permission to print) and proud (mentioning the second printing of the poem). What is absolutely clear is that Jones writes of her modesty, both in the public/private letters and in her introduction, with a sense of her own ambivalence to public attention, and with a full understanding of the tradition of female authorial modesty within which her words fall. Like Mary Leapor and Mary Barber before her, Jones knew what the public expected from a woman in print; that she delivered it with her apologetic introduction does not mean she was a diffident writer, as evinced by the references she deploys within that

¹⁴⁶ Jones, pp. 215, 235.

¹⁴⁷ Jones, pp. 235, 241.

introduction. Jones, then, was a highly self-conscious writer, adopting styles and making references with a good understanding of their effects.

Medals as Mock-Heroic

Jones uses a mock-heroic tone in several works of semi-private and public prose works. In the *Letter to Doctor Pitt* (1745) the speaker upbraids her physician neighbour about his dilapidated fence using medical terminology. *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* contains other mock-heroic letters, including one announcing the conferral on ‘Melissa’ of an honorary degree from Oxford and permission to work in the Bodleian Library and one in which Jones compares the correspondence between herself and Martha Lovelace to the terms of a peace between nations. In these works, a mock-heroic tone enables Jones to both challenge and diminish the strictures placed on women at the time. In essence, she both makes the case that her sex is worthy of competing on the same field as men, and at the same time suggests that the field of battle is unworthy of her. Looking at the two latter pieces more closely demonstrates that Jones’ work, although on the surface both occasional and domestic, also grapples with very public, even political, matters.

According to a paper presented to the Royal Society in 1744, ‘taking the ... impression’ of a medal was a method of transferring the medal’s images onto paper via a wax impression of the coin. The impression was painted carefully and used as the plate in a very small printing press (‘a couple of flat smooth iron plates, about 2 inches square ... [in] a little press, made of two iron planks’).¹⁴⁸ The image was then pressed into a piece of sturdy paper. This process is so close to that of printing words in type on paper that it must be seen as a metaphor for the act of writing and printing one’s work.

¹⁴⁸ Royal Society (Great Britain), *The Philosophical Transactions (from the year 1743, to the year 1750)*, Vol. 2 (London: 1756), pp. 1339-1340.

Moreover, the method – a copy (paper) of a copy (wax) of a medal that itself is a representation of something else – may be seen as evocative of mock-heroic's position at mid-century, as a 'copy' of the early mock-epics of Pope, Swift, Gay, and Montagu, which themselves were in a sense 'copies' of classical epics. Here, then, Jones is representing her work: she is a woman 'taking a copy' of something that uses classical imagery to celebrate current figures. Of course, she is also entering into the decades-long quarrel between ancients and moderns, between what Joseph Levine calls the 'imitative arts' (2) and the 'cumulative' (2), respectively.¹⁴⁹ The collection of medals in the Bodleian, assembled by Elias Ashmole and at the time considered to be among the most important in the library, was in a sense both cumulative and imitative, but Melissa's copies are certainly imitative – indeed, imitations of imitations.¹⁵⁰

In 'Abstract of an Order of Convocation in Relation to Melissa's Taking Off Medals, &c., in Paper,' Jones writes a letter to 'Melissa' to tell her that a convocation of all Oxford's 'Doctors, both the Proctors, all Heads and Governors of Colleges and Halls, together with a numerous appearance of Masters' had agreed to give her both an honorary degree and access to the Bodleian Library to allow her to continue her work in 'taking off medals,' particularly if she will perform her work on the medals struck to celebrate the Duke of Marlborough's military achievements.¹⁵¹ Medals, of course, are themselves innately mock-heroic in terms of scale: they reduce important events and people to miniature representations. At the same time, as Howard Erskine-Hill observes, medals and coins were seen as powerfully resisting the passage of time: 'coins [could] convey information on other aspects of antiquity; they [bore] images of buildings and

¹⁴⁹ Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁰ Barbara Benedict, 'The Moral in the Material: Numismatics and Identity in Evelyn, Addison, and Pope,' in *Queen Anne and the Arts*, ed. Cedric D. Reverand II (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2015), 65-83, p. 69.

¹⁵¹ Jones, p. 159.

statues long since destroyed, or of ancient weapons, or fashions of dress.’¹⁵² Medals, then, are both small and powerful: both trivial and important, perhaps like women themselves. Jonathan Swift famously dwelled on the failure of Princess Caroline (and, later, Queen Caroline) to send him medals she had promised him in an audience, even complaining about them in ‘Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift.’

Jones’ mention of paper impressions as ‘more safe’ than war (‘the present bloody one now in use’) may be understood as a version of what Claude Rawson terms ‘bloodless war’ regarding Pope’s mock-epics. Pointing out that the altars in both *The Dunciad* and *The Rape of the Lock* are ‘unsanguinary, and tacitly so,’ he maintains that this bloodlessness is highly significant, continuing, ‘the tribute to epic proposed in all the major Augustan mock-heroics comes with an astonishing reticence about bloodshed and war, considering that war is the central preoccupation of the primary prototypes and prowess in war the highest value in the heroic code.’¹⁵³ Indeed, he says, ‘Loyalist mock-heroic seems marked by a determination to avoid the subject of war, as though to suppress the connection between a revered genre and the deplorable activity habitually celebrated within it.’¹⁵⁴ There is some anxiety, then, to establish that a mock-epic does not celebrate war; for Jones, it may be that the anxiety also was to remind readers that, although a woman ‘working in paper,’ or writing, she represented no threat to the *status quo*.

The political angle to this endeavor is buried in the associations of ‘taking off medals,’ and made overt in Jones’ emphasis on ‘Melissa’ taking impressions of the medals made of the triumphs of the Duke of Marlborough. As Joseph Hone comments in

¹⁵² Howard Erskine-Hill, ‘The Medal Against Time: A Study of Pope’s Epistle to Mr. Addison,’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 28 (1965), 274-298, p. 276.

¹⁵³ Rawson, Claude, ‘Heroic Notes: Epic Idiom. Revision and the Mock-Footer from the *Rape of the Lock* to the *Dunciad*,’ in *Alexander Pope: World and Word*, ed. Howard Erskine-Hill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 69-110, pp. 78-79.

¹⁵⁴ Rawson, ‘Heroic Notes,’ p. 82.

an article about medals made for Queen Anne, ‘by the time of Anne’s death in 1714 ... medals had become a regulated mode of ministry propaganda, subject to the same pressures and interventions as government-funded pamphlets, poems, and newspapers.’¹⁵⁵ Understood in this context, what on the surface sounds like a bland female hobby like the painting of flowers on screens actually involves reproduction of notably political items. Indeed, Hone continues, ‘the frequency with which newspapers commented on medal designs, and the ferocity with which they debated them, suggests a general familiarity with medals was taken for granted.’¹⁵⁶ Similarly, Jones’ detail about Marlborough’s successes appears at first simply one detail that would appeal to an Oxford native; Blenheim Palace, built to celebrate the Duke’s victory at the Battle of Blenheim, is just north of the university city. But these medals take the metaphor of women copying men’s achievements one step further. Observing that paper is ‘a more safe, and expeditious, way of taking Towns than the present bloody one now in use; and might be therefore be of infinite service to vast numbers of the Gentlemen of the Army and Marine,’ the speaker informs Melissa that she will have full access to the Bodleian’s collection of medals, and suggests that, since that collection includes ‘those which were *struck* upon the Duke of *Marlborough*’s battles ... ’tis pray’d that this fair Student may have leave to take all his towns again in paper; and put his famous Battle of *Blenheim*, which cost so many millions, within the compass of a Crown Piece.’¹⁵⁷ Here, a pun on the word ‘take,’ suggesting that the acts of taking coin impressions and of taking a town in a battle are the same, leads to the effective miniaturization of the Duke of Marlborough’s victories for Queen Anne, and a brief comment on the expense of war. The medals in question typically included pictures of the towns Marlborough had

¹⁵⁵ Joseph Hone, ‘Isaac Newton and the Medals for Queen Anne,’ *The Huntington Quarterly* Vol. 79, No. 1 (2016), 119-48, p. 119.

¹⁵⁶ Hone, ‘Isaac Newton and the Medals for Queen Anne,’ p. 122.

¹⁵⁷ Jones, pp. 161-162.

conquered (see, for example, Fig. 1); hence the sense that Melissa would be ‘taking’ towns when she made impressions of the medals.

Fig. 1. One of the medals honouring the Duke of Marlborough: the obverse depicts ‘Bonn besieged; Duke of Marlborough in the foreground on horseback commanding’ (British Museum catalog description). The British Museum translates the inscription as ‘The good city (Bonn) snatched from the hands of the wicked.’ © *Trustees of the British Museum*



As Benedict notes, ‘For the philosophers of the Royal Society, including John Evelyn, antiquarian coins and medals were seen to contain historical information because they depicted rulers’ heads and commemorated places or events. Hence, collecting them became one of the most widespread, emblematic practices of virtuosi.’¹⁵⁸ This is why the taking of impressions of medals was of interest to the Royal Society, and why a paper was presented to them on the best way of doing so. Yet this process of transferring medals’ historical information onto paper changes the object studied: Benedict points out that objects fascinate in part because of their permanence, their ‘magical defeat of time, and their witness of eternity.’¹⁵⁹ Just as historical medals carried the images of ancient leaders through time to be examined by Evelyn and others, so the medals commemorating Queen Caroline, Marlborough, and the towns he captured will carry those images forward in time. Not so the paper impressions Melissa takes of those

¹⁵⁸ Benedict, p. 69.

¹⁵⁹ Benedict, p. 68.

medals. Making the images available to a wider audience by taking their impressions on paper – a process which can be repeated many times to provide enough ‘medals’ for anyone who wishes to see them – also takes away their permanence, reducing them to images on paper and, as Jones points out, turning great battles into tiny pictures.

The history of the Marlborough medals offered another way for Jones to point toward her work in mock-heroic. As Hone has established, ‘Perhaps the most politically volatile medal of Anne’s reign was produced in early 1704 to commemorate the previous summer’s military campaign, in which Marlborough had captured the cities of Bonn, Huy, and Limburg with minimal loss of life. Hence the motto ‘sine. clade. victor.,’ meaning, ‘a conqueror without slaughter.’¹⁶⁰ The depiction on this medal of a crowned woman presenting the keys to the three cities to a man on horseback led to the suggestion that the woman was Queen Anne – that Anne was effectively pictured giving Marlborough control of her kingdom (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. A medal depicting Marlborough accepting keys from a kneeling female figure.
© Trustees of the British Museum.

¹⁶⁰ Hone, p. 137.

The resultant furor led to a temporary cessation of medal production, followed by greater oversight of medal designs. What is interesting about this in terms of Jones' essay, however, is the concept of 'bloodless slaughter.'

This detail about the work for which 'Melissa' is honoured, then, both mirrors Pope's avoidance of the battles of conventional epic and gives Jones an opportunity to elevate (while also laughing at) the decidedly female pastime of paper-craft. Instead of writing on her paper, Melissa creates little towns out of it – instead of conquering a town, its likeness is 'taken.' Melissa is rewarded for not using paper for the questionable pastime of writing, as Jones does, but instead for decorative arts – and this is how she gains entrance into the Bodleian Library as well as an honorary degree from Oxford. There may also be a reference to Sarah Churchill, Duchess of Marlborough (1660-1744) in Jones' treatment of the Battle of Blenheim. The Duchess of Marlborough was Queen Anne's Groom of the Stole, and one of the Queen's closest friends. Her status as Anne's confidant eventually made her one of the most powerful women in Anne's court.¹⁶¹ Jones' essay may be drawing a parallel between Sarah's political power, based in female friendship, and 'Melissa's' intellectual conquest of Oxford University through her mastery of paper-craft. The allusion to Marlborough, to Blenheim, and to the high cost of the war in which the Duke of Marlborough triumphed, almost suggests that Sarah's path to power was more effective than that of her husband. Jones' critique of women's roles is clear: she acknowledges women's usual sphere, while emphasising that they find ways to enter the public arena despite social constraints.

Jones's essay also establishes for her sex the expertise necessary for work with medals, the collecting of which was still considered, according to Barbara Benedict, 'an

¹⁶¹ James Falkner, 'Churchill [née Jenyns], Sarah, duchess of Marlborough (1660-1744)' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

aristocratic hobby, because coins ... required a classical education to decipher.’¹⁶²

Melissa’s expertise with medals and her honours from the Bodleian stand in contrast to Laetitia Pilkington’s account of Jonathan Swift showing her his collection of medals, telling her to select two as gifts, and then laughing at her when she ‘began to Poize them in my Hands, chusing them by Weight rather than Antiquity, of which indeed I was not then a Judge.’¹⁶³ This account had been published in 1748, and with her interest in Swift it seems likely Jones would have read Pilkington’s memoirs, which describe her friendship with the Dean in Dublin. Jones, then, is claiming back for ‘Melissa’ and her sex an understanding of classical imagery and art – similar to the classical education necessary for a full understanding of the references made in mock-heroic writing. Swift, of course, had a large collection of medals and famously expressed resentment that Queen Anne had promised him medals and never sent them to him in ‘Verses on the Death of Dr. Swift.’ If Swift is a collector, then, Jones (through Melissa) is setting herself up to be his imitator.

The connection between medals and the mock-heroic tension between large and small is epitomized in Alexander Pope’s ‘To Mr. Addison, Occasioned by His Dialogues on Medals.’ Jones might not have read John Evelyn’s *Numismata: A Discourse of Medals, Ancient and Modern* (1697), or Addison’s *Dialogues Upon the Usefulness of Ancient Medals* (1726), but it seems likely that she had read Pope’s poem, in which Ambition determines that medals are more durable than monuments:

... she now contracts her vast design,
And all her triumphs shrink into a coin.
A narrow orb each crowded conquest keeps,
Beneath her palm here sad Judea weeps:
Now scantier limits the proud arch confine,
And scarce are seen the prostrate Nile or Rhine:
A small Euphrates thro’ the piece is roll’d,

¹⁶² Benedict, ‘The Moral in the Material,’ p. 66.

¹⁶³ Laetitia Pilkington, *The Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A.C. Elias Jr. (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 27.

And little eagles wave their wings in gold.
(lines 23-30)

Here, Pope treats coins as a kind of burlesque, 'shrinking' great moments in history to fit on a tiny coin. Later, his description of the interplay between poetry and visual arts could be a description of Melissa's medal-printing: 'art reflected images to art' (line 52), and draws from Addison's *Spectator* essays on imagination, which describe the way that nature and art reflect on one another:

But though there are several of these wild scenes that are more delightful than any artificial shows, yet we find the works of nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of art; for in this case our pleasure rises from a double principle, from the agreeableness of the objects to the eye, and from their similitude to other objects; we are pleased as well with comparing their beauties as with surveying them, and can represent them to our minds either as copies or originals.¹⁶⁴

Here, although nature (the original) has primacy over art (the copy), the two reinforce each other's impact as they resemble one another. Melissa's ability to copy medals, then, represents a double reinforcement: the medal itself is a copy of nature, while the paper impression is a copy of the medal. Although there is a way in which such a remove from the original could seem to be too removed from the original to be meaningful, Jones' allusion to Pope and to Addison emphasises instead the reinforcement which Addison posits that art and nature can offer one another. This complex treatment elevates 'Melissa's' hobby to the same exalted level as the process by which imagination inspires humanity, even as Jones' letter congratulating 'Melissa' depends for its humour on the assumption that Melissa's hobby is really negligible. The fact that the essay works on both levels at once is a testament both to Jones' ability and the flexibility of the mock-heroic mode.

¹⁶⁴ *The Spectator* No. 414 (Wednesday, June 25, 1712) in Joseph Addison, *The Spectator*, ed. Donald Bond, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), vol. 3, pp. 549-550.

Women and Commerce

That Jones had read John Philips' 'The Splendid Shilling' is clear from her poem 'Soliloquy, on an Empty Purse,' which addresses a purse that lacks even one coin. Unlike Philips' poet, who celebrates the single shilling that stands between him and poverty, enabling his continued participation in commerce, Jones' poet, and her purse, have nothing. She is forced to celebrate economy and self-denial. While Philips' mock-Milonic was written in blank verse, echoing (and parodying) *Paradise Lost*, Jones' poem is in Swiftian tetrameter, with rhyming couplets making her comic intent clear – but she uses Milonic inversion to indicate her debt to both Milton and Philips. The poet's small fortune (now gone) is described as 'mixt with keys, and coins among' (lines 8-9), while the various merits which she now must glorify are

...Self-denial, slim and spare,
And Fortitude, with look severe;
And Abstinence, to leanness prone,
And Patience worn to skin and bone:
Prudence, and Foresight on thee wait,
And Poverty lies here in state!
Hopeless her spirits to recruit,
For ev'ry virtue is a mute. (lines 24-41)

The progressively leaner list of 'mute virtues,' qualities to which the poet does not aspire but which nevertheless accrue upon (or within) her as her poverty advances, is indebted to lists of personifications such as those in Thomas Gray's 'Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College' (1747). This particular list is notable for the progressively insubstantial nature of the virtues to which one does not necessarily aspire. Self-denial is 'slim and spare' (line 24) and abstinence 'to leanness prone' (line 26), while patience is 'worn to skin and bone' (line 27). This list leads to an unexpected shift, when poverty itself is described as '[lying] ... in state' (line 29): born of absence (the empty purse), the poet's accumulation of virtues destroys its own source, as poverty itself dies and is mourned.

Poverty leads to a kind of power for the poet. She is free from the pull of consumption when her purse is empty ('Safe shall I walk the streets along / Admidst temptations thick and strong' [36-37]), and she and her purse have a bold liberty now: 'fearless now we both may go / Where Ludgate's Mercers bow so low' (lines 42-43), and 'nor dun, nor pick-purse shalt Thou fear / Nor flatt'rer base annoy My ear. / Snug shalt thou travel thro' the mob, / For who a Poet's purse will rob?' (lines 47-50). The mention of theft in a crowd recalls the epic simile comparing a pickpocket to a hunted fox in John Gay's *Trivia: Or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* (III, lines 59-76), and that of safety in the mob surely refers to Gay's warning about walking in London at night:

Where the mob gathers, swiftly shoot along,
Nor idly mingle in the noisy throng.
Lur'd by the silver hilt, amid the swarm,
The subtil artist will thy side disarm (III, lines 51-54).

Jones' speaker travels 'snug ... thro' the mob' (line 49), both because of her purse being empty and because she is a poet. Having nothing frees her of the constraints of both commerce and social conventions. The purse also connects Jones' speaker with the freedom that may come of a lack of power. As Lucy Razzall notes of pockets in Henry Fielding's novels, 'pockets, as locations of both concealment and revelation ... are sites of anxiety' for both character and reader, but an empty purse, concealing – and therefore revealing – nothing, protects its owner from prying eyes.¹⁶⁵ The idea of the empty purse as protective is reinforced in the final lines of Jones' poem.

The end of 'The Empty Purse' signals a connection to Philips' poem, echoing his speaker's regret for the loss of pleasure ('nor taste the fruits that the sun's genial rays / mature...Nor the downy peach, / Nor walnut...nor medlar' [116-119]) with a paralipsis of her own: 'Nor dun, nor pick-purse shalt thou fear, / Nor flatt'rer base annoy my ear'

¹⁶⁵ Lucy Razzall, 'The Pockets of Henry Fielding's Writing,' *The Cambridge Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2006), 361-77, pp. 362-363.

(lines 47-48). Jones replaces Philips' yearning for what is lost with a sense of liberation from what is not there: because she has no money, her speaker is free of harassment by shopkeepers, those who wish to borrow money, and thieves. Where Philips' speaker lives 'in garret vile' (line 18), Jones' dwells 'in garret high' (line 51). In place of the dark and extended epic simile on a hole in the speaker's trousers with which Philips ends his poem, Jones ends with a scant four lines describing her poet, 'sweetly soft, in garret high' (line 51) celebrating the purse's virtues and 'gently rhyming rats to death' (line 54). As Kennedy notes, the last line is an allusion to a motto 'about using rhymes as a magical charm to scare away rats.'¹⁶⁶ Yet while Kennedy finds the ending grotesque, there is another way to read it: Jones' poetry protects her from vermin, while her poverty shields her from the predators of society. While 'The Splendid Shilling' ends with an epic simile about the 'horrid chasm' (line 124) of poverty represented by the holes in his stockings, culminating in a shipwreck, the death of all on board the ship, and the final line 'The Ship sinks found'ring in the vast Abyss' (line 143), Jones ends on a note of autonomy, even of literary power.

Jones explores similar themes in a poem clearly influenced by Swift's 1721 'Stella's Birthday' poem, as well as by Montagu's Eclogue 'Saturday. After the Smallpox. Flavia.' Her poem is also called 'After the Small Pox,' and addresses Charlot Clayton, whom Jones calls 'Stella' in several poems and to whom she had written birthday poems, just as Swift wrote them to his 'Stella,' Esther Johnson. It is likely that Clayton really did have smallpox, because Jones also wrote a poem to Martha Lovelace entitled 'On Her Attending Miss Charlot Clayton in the Small-Pox.' That poem celebrated Lovelace's 'pious care' and 'gen'rous heart' (lines 17, 20) in consoling their mutual friend, and 'After the Small Pox' offers a consolation of its own through Swift's

¹⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Poetic Sisters*, p. 182.

idea of the face as a 'sign.' In 'Stella's Birth-Day,' Swift develops the argument that, at first, travelers will select an inn (or tavern) by its sign, but that they are loyal to it because of what they find inside, such that new signs will not tempt them away:

And though the Painting grows decay'd
The House will never loose it's Trade;
Nay, though the treach'rous Rascal Thomas
Hangs a new Angel two doors from us
As fine as Dawbers Hands can make it
In hopes that Strangers may mistake it,
They think it both a Shame and Sin
To quit the true old Angel-Inn. (lines 7-14)¹⁶⁷

For Swift, then, beauty leads to the discovery of inner virtue, which then supersedes external appearances: those who know Stella will never throw her over for younger beauties, though her face is 'a little crack't' (line 16). Jones, though, takes Swift's metaphor of the tradesman to its next logical conclusion, and then overturns it. For Jones and her Stella, the disfiguring nature of smallpox threatens to mar Charlot's face, which is the way that she advertises herself to any would-be suitors. First explaining that tradespeople hang out signs to advertise their wares – grapes at the vintner's, boots at the shoemaker's – Jones reminds her readers that women's stock-in-trade is their appearance:

So fares it with the nymph divine;
For what is Beauty but a Sign?
A face hung out, thro' which is seen
The nature of the goods within. (lines 9-12)

What Swift had hinted at – that women depend on their beauty to advertise them to men – and then tried to solve, Jones freely acknowledges. She goes on to reassure Charlot that time and her own inner worth will soon heal her face: 'Nature's pencil soon shall trace, /

¹⁶⁷ Jonathan Swift and Harold Williams (ed.), *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, Vol. 2 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958) DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oseo/instance.00042517>.

And once more finish off your face' (lines 30-31). But her mechanism for this healing is commercial:

Yet grieve not at the fatal blow;
For if you break a while, we know,
'Tis bankrupt like, more rich to grow. (lines 25-27)

The only way for Stella to regain her beauty is to declare bankruptcy. This metaphor is not entirely effective, since it is not clear what 'bankruptcy' means for the young woman, perhaps a period of solitude in which to heal. Yet in its very imperfection it calls attention to Swift's imperfect consolation, and in its image of a woman withdrawing entirely from the world of commerce it mirrors 'The Empty Purse.' For Jones, it seems, removal from the system which treats women as commodities is one path to happiness, and artistic independence.

Philips begins 'The Splendid Shilling' with an epigraph building on the line from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, 'things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme' (I, line 26). Philips continues, 'A Shilling, Breeches, and Chimera's [sic] dire.' The poem is an extended joke on the idea that Milton's work is anti-epic, describing ideas never before discussed in poetry. As Samuel Johnson said of Philips' poem, 'To degrade the sounding words and stately construction of Milton, by an application to the lowest and most trivial things, gratifies the mind with a momentary triumph over that grandeur which hitherto held its captives in admiration; the words and things are presented with a new appearance, and novelty is always grateful where it gives no pain.'¹⁶⁸ He goes on to suggest that the next person to write a mock Miltonic would be only 'the repeater of a jest,' and would only receive 'but a small part of the praise' which Philips received. Yet Jones uses Philips' model to reflect upon Milton's words: her poems, too, are 'things unattempted yet,' in

¹⁶⁸ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 1:316-17.

that they turn the state of ‘lack’ associated with femininity (lack of power and, of course, lack of a penis) into a positive, the key to independence. Jones’ empty purse may be seen as vaginal, if we remember the association of ‘purse’ with the scrotum and the broad biological definition of ‘purse’ in the Oxford English Dictionary as ‘a natural receptacle in an animal...resembling a bag or pocket.’¹⁶⁹ In several of her letters, Jones archly refers to herself with the title of ‘spinster,’ and in one she explains that most women of Oxford will remain single because fellows of the colleges cannot marry: ‘In vain then do we Female Philosophers preach up the Necessity and Usefulness of Marriage, when those who ought to have been our Help-mates are under a Vow of Celibacy. So that were we never so desirous of changing this solitary State of Life (to which we Virgins of *Oxford* are more peculiarly call’d) ‘tis to no purpose to think of it’ (emphasis is Jones’).¹⁷⁰ This brief allusion to a companionate marriage between a Female Philosopher and the fellow of an Oxford college suggests that Jones will not marry unless she finds a man who is her intellectual equal, and that she has nothing to offer a man who is not her equal – an empty purse indeed. This very subtle suggestion of a sexual aspect to the main point of Jones’ poem would seem implausible were it not for the way Jones embraces her ‘spinster’ title, and praises poets (such as Mary Barber, as noted above) who do not write about romantic love.

Whenever I meet with a sister in print, I always expect to hear that *Corydon* has prov’d false, or that *Sylvia*’s cruel parents have had prudence enough to keep two mad People from playing the Fool together, for Life. I’ve often wish’d, for the honour of our Sex, that these Subjects had been exhausted seventeen hundred years ago; but am afraid that seventeen hundred years hence, we shall have the same false *Corydon*’s, and the same complaining *Sylvia*’s. ‘Tis pity, that this passion alone should set us to Rhyming. The subject is so beaten, that it can’t possibly afford us any thing new; and probably that’s one reason, why we so

¹⁶⁹ “purse, n.” in *OED Online* <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/155036>> [accessed 3 January 2019].

¹⁷⁰ Jones, p. 326

seldom succeed in our Poetical Excursions.¹⁷¹

For Jones, then, avoiding even writing about passion is crucial to success as a female poet. Yet she does not avoid references to the female body; indeed, in two poems she calls attention to bodily functions as boldly as did Swift, and there is some suggestion that these references may have led to her decision not to publish her writing after *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* appeared.

Epic Similes, Epic Lewdness

Margaret Anne Doody and other critics have established Jones' connection to Swift in 'Holt Waters. A Tale. Extracted from the *Natural History of Berkshire*,' in which Cloe, a '[nymph] of chaste Diana's train' (line 1) out driving (and gossiping) with a friend feels the call of nature.¹⁷² She excuses herself by saying that she needs to make a condolence call on a friend whose parrot has died, and races into a nearby dairy. After relieving herself in several containers there, including both a cream-pot and a milk-pan, she returns to her traveling party. A milkmaid, Baucis, returns to the dairy and mistakes Cloe's urine for beer. Drinking it, she declares, 'Our beer is dead, but no great matter, / 'Tis better still than common water' (lines 143-144). Jones immerses the reader in this excremental moment through appeals to sight, taste, and even smell. Baucis notes the urine's aroma: 'She smelt it, and no full-blown rose / Sent half the fragrance to her nose' (lines 133-134) and Jones herself describes the liquid as 'The reservoir of near a quart, / The liquor pure, as amber fine, / But stocked with particles saline' (lines 125-127). As Doody points out, Baucis' name is 'obviously derived from the Ovidian 'Goody Baucis' of Swift's 'Baucis and Philemon' (1709) in which the cottagers are impressed with the

¹⁷¹ Jones, p. 320.

¹⁷² Jones, p. 93.

miraculously filled jug, 'replenished to the Top' (line 3).¹⁷³ Cloe's name seems likely to be a reference to Swift's 'Strephon and Chloe,' in which Chloe uses a bedpan in front of her husband on her wedding night:

Strephon who heard the fuming Rill
As from a mossy Cliff distill;
Cry'd out, ye Gods, what Sound is this?
Can *Chloe*, heav'nly *Chloe* ——?
But, when he smelt a noysom Steam
Which oft attends that luke-warm Stream...
He found her, while the Scent increas'd,
As *mortal* as himself at least. (lines 175-180; 184-185)

Jones recalls Swift's focus on the aroma of Chloe's 'stream' with her couplet on the fragrance of her Cloe's urine, and she takes the scatology of her poem one step further with Baucis' consumption of the liquid. Yet both Swift's and Jones' poems have a note of acceptance, even celebration, of the body. At first shocked, Strephon soon relaxes into an easy marital give-and-take:

How great a Change! how quickly made!
They learn to call a Spade, a Spade.
They soon from all Constraint are freed;
Can see each other *do their Need*. (lines 203-206)

In this ease, the married couple are more powerful even than the poet who writes about them; Swift's narrator must rely on euphemism and italics to indicate what his characters are doing, while they are comfortable enough together to 'find great society in stinking' (line 210). Swift's poem does not exactly celebrate such openness, but neither does he condemn it. Swift carefully delineates the difference between romance and marriage in the succeeding stanzas, with an ironic gap between himself and his shocked narrator, who declares that some distance between husband and wife must be maintained, or women will lose their sexual power.

¹⁷³Margaret Anne Doody, 'Swift Among the Women,' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1 January 1988, Vol. 18, 68-92, p. 85.

Swift returns to sincerity in his description of true happiness in marriage:

Let Prudence with Good Nature strive,
To keep Esteem and Love alive.
Then come old Age whene'er it will,
Your Friendship shall continue still:
And thus a mutual gentle Fire,
Shall never but with Life expire. (lines 309-314)

While Swift is not advocating the complete freedom of Strephon and Chloe, he says that 'good nature' fosters the 'esteem and love' and 'friendship' of marriage, rather than passion. The 'mutual gentle Fire' of companionate marriage will last for life, then, unlike the romantic idealism and misconceptions that attracted Strephon to Chloe initially.

In Jones' poem, she is calling on Swift's complicated sense of physicality, not just of women, but of men, in her poem. She reminds her audience that Cloe's need was natural, shared by both audience and poet: 'Yet trust me, prudes, it was no more, / Than you or I have wish'd before' (lines 25-26).¹⁷⁴ The reader is therefore implicated in both urge and action when Jones describes Cloe's urine stream in an outrageous epic simile:

So in an aqueduct I've stood,
And heard aghast the headlong flood:
What tho' with Stentor's lungs you call,
I hear you not, I'm deafness all. (lines 100-103)¹⁷⁵

The strength and noise of Cloe's relieving herself is as great as that of an aqueduct, in which the poet cannot hear her audience ('I hear you not,') no matter how loudly they speak. In addition to the classical reference implicit in an epic simile, Jones anchors her comparison firmly in the classical world with the aqueduct and Stentor, a Greek herald in Homer's *Iliad* whose voice was as loud as that of fifty men. Following the logic of the poem, then, a woman's physical nature is so loud that it drowns out everything else. Yet, for the poet, that noise is so loud that it also drowns out the voice of her audience – and

¹⁷⁴ Jones, p. 94.

¹⁷⁵ Jones, p. 98.

her critics. Jones, then, can write without concern for her audience's reaction, as 'Holt Waters' itself demonstrates. This is a neat example of what Haslett observes about Jones' letter to Lovelace, in which she turns a negative – here, a women's association with gross physicality – into a positive – an artist's protection from outside influence.

Few female poets inspired by Swift seem to have embraced his bodily humour; indeed, even Swift devotee Laetitia Pilkington indicated that she found his obsession with the body indecorous, and reported that her mother vomited after reading 'The Lady's Dressing-Room.'

I say not this as any Reflection to this sacred Memory,
Heaven forbid I should; but with all the Reverence I have
for the Dean, I really think he sometimes chose Subjects
unworthy of his Muse, and which could serve for no other
End except that of turning the Reader's Stomach, as it did
my Mother's, who, upon reading the Lady's Dressing-
room, instantly threw up her Dinner.¹⁷⁶

Undoubtedly, it was a risk for Jones to write poems that speak so overtly of women's bodily functions. Yet Jones' use of a woman's literal 'relief' here gives her a way out of the bind in which women find themselves: women are inextricably linked with physicality, yet expected to transcend bodily grossness. The prodigious volume of Cloe's urine is reminiscent both of the pissing contest over Eliza Haywood in Book II of Pope's *The Dunciad*, and of Lemuel Gulliver urinating on the Lilliputian palace in Chapter 5 of *Gulliver's Travels*. Such allusions, associating volume of urine with power (in Pope, through victory in the contest; in Swift, through physical size), also serve to align Jones with two of the great mock-heroic poets of her age. Moreover, Jones' allusion to the pissing-contest, a nadir in the treatment of women (and a passage which led to Haywood controlling her letters and biographical information tightly lest such shocking attacks

¹⁷⁶ Pilkington, *Memoirs*, p. 314

recur in print), redeems the Eliza of Pope's poem: Cloe surely has won the pissing-contest with her aqueduct-like stream of urine.

Given that even Swift's scatological poetry disturbed his audience, it is likely that 'Holt Waters' met with a mixed reception; what little evidence we have is unclear. The poem was reprinted with others by Jones in the well-respected miscellany *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755), then in *The Muse in Good Humour* (1766), and finally in *The Literary Miscellany; or, Selections & [sic] Extracts: Classical and Scientific* (1804). Indeed, a search in the Digital Miscellanies Index, which compiles the contents of miscellanies between 1700 and 1780, suggests that 'Holt Waters' was – with the exception of one of her poems erroneously attributed to someone else – the only poem by Jones reprinted in a miscellany other than *Poems by Eminent Ladies*.¹⁷⁷ Its subject matter is such that Jones' reputation must have been affected, even distorted, by these re-printings of one her most outrageous poems – although it is difficult to be sure how it was affected. Eminent reviewer Ralph Griffiths praised Jones' work in *The Monthly Review*, calling her poems 'superior to those of any other female writer since the days of Mrs. Catherine Philips' and her prose 'perhaps superior to any pieces of the kind that our own country has produced, from the pen of a woman.'¹⁷⁸ He continues,

She is mistress of a perpetual fund of wit, which she always expresses with a freedom and negligence peculiar to herself; ever sprightly, good-humoured, gay, yet never trifling, affected, nor injudicious; her reflections are sensible, solid and truly moral; her stile clear, natural, animated and diffuse; and her language enriched by an extensive reading, from whence it borrows the grace of learning, at the same time that she preserves all the freedom of her native humor, and easy elegance of expression.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ 'Jones, Mary (DMI Person ID 1766)', Digital Miscellanies Index <http://dmi.gnostyx.com:8899/exist/dmi/search.xml>, accessed 2 January 2016.

¹⁷⁸ Ralph Griffiths, 'Art. XXVI: Miscellanies in Prose & Verse. By Mary Jones,' *Monthly Review, Or, Literary Journal*, 1752-1825 6 (March 1852), 213-223, p. 214.

¹⁷⁹ Griffiths, 'Art XXVI: Miscellanies in Prose & Verse,' pp. 214-5.

Griffiths became an ardent supporter; as *The Orlando Project* explains, ‘in 1754 [Griffiths] reproved John Duncombe for omitting her from his *Feminead*; in 1755 he used her name to represent a generic excellent literary woman in reviewing Thomas Amory, while in 1759 the *Monthly* cited her as a predecessor of Mary Latter.’¹⁸⁰

On the other hand, Kennedy says that

...more than one writer criticized ‘Holt Waters’ as unfit for a lady’s reading, citing a letter from Catherine Talbot to Elizabeth Carter in which Talbot indicates she finds Jones’ work indelicate: ‘I never answered you about the authoress of certain Miscellanies. Is it possible you could really admire them? Is it the cleanliness and delicacy of ‘Holt Waters’ or the ‘Letter to a Physician’ that delights you?’¹⁸¹

The names of both Bluestockings appear in the subscription list of *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, but only one of them enjoyed the book – an important reminder that the appearance of a name on a subscription list does not signify approval of the work in question, or even having read it. Yet the second author (of the ‘more than one’ to whom Kennedy refers) appears to be N.I. Bowditch in his book-length survey *Index of Suffolk Surnames* (1861), neither a contemporary of Jones’ nor a literary critic, and who wrote his criticism of Jones before any details of her biography had been established.¹⁸²

It is unclear, then, how widespread the shock over Jones’ work was. Still, other than the *Eminent Ladies* reprints, Jones’ poetry remains notably absent from miscellanies of the time, and in a letter to Griffiths she turns down the opportunity of further publication. It may be that responses to ‘Holt Waters’ affected both Jones’ reputation and her willingness to remain in the public eye. ‘Epistle from Fern-Hill,’ another poem that

¹⁸⁰ Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy (eds.), ‘Mary Jones entry: Life & Writing screen’ within *Orlando: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press Online, 2006). <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>>.

¹⁸¹ Kennedy, *Poetic Sisters*, p. 183.

¹⁸² N.I. Bowditch, *Suffolk Surnames* (London: Trubner & Co.; Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1861), xiv-xv.

centers around bodily humour, does so within a work about the social rules governing hostesses and their houseguests.

In 'Epistle from Fern-Hill,' Jones describes (probably to Charlot's cousin, Martha Lovelace, a maid of honor to Queen Caroline,) her stay in the home of her friend Charlot Clayton and Charlot's father, Gen, Jasper Clayton. It begins by referring to Charlot as Jones' 'controuler' and explaining that, out of 'pure perverseness, call'd good-breeding' her friend gives her the best of everything: wine when she compliments the beer at dinner, and a seat of honour near the fire.

Whether in pity, or in ire,
Sometimes I'm seated next the fire'
So very close, I pant for breath,
In pure good-manners scorched to death. (lines 19-22)

Clayton and Jones were good friends, so Jones does not really believe her friend is tired of seeing her, or trying to torture her through civil attention; instead, the poet mockingly demonstrates the way that formal politeness binds them both from doing or saying as they wish: 'But still in all I do or say,' she complains, 'This nuisance Breeding's in the way' (lines 25-26). Of course, Jones is making a larger point here about how the forms of politeness and social expectations stifle her expression as a poet, not to mention using the double meaning of 'breeding' to comment upon how her gender (specifically, fertility; the ability to breed) stands in her way. Seen in this light, Jones' writing about flatulence and urine may be seen as a protest against the social strictures that delineate what should and should not be written about – and who should or should not write.

Every time Jones says that she should end her visit, Clayton responds that she must stay longer; although the poet suspects she insists out of courtesy, still she must accept the invitation, also out of politeness. Caught in this tangle of social niceties, Jones and Clayton can no longer tell what each other are thinking: the intimacy of friendship is destroyed by the conventions of a friendly visit. Jones suspects that Clayton has tired of

her company, 'for well-bred folks are ne'er so civil, / As when they wish you at the devil' (lines 41-42) – but cannot release her to her next visit. Just as, when her father has stomach trouble due to 'pork, or pease, or wind, or worse' (line 50), he must '[mount] a zephyr to the skies' (line 56), Charlot would feel better if she let Jones leave. The poet envisions herself like General Clayton's trapped wind:

In Charlot's chamber ever rumbling,
Her pamphlets and her papers tumbling,
Displacing all the things she places,
And, as is usual in such cases,
Making her cut most sad wry faces. (lines 59-63)

Yet her friend is 'too well bred to let me out' (line 65) for fear of what 'you squeamish nymphs at court' (line 66) – Martha Lovelace – will say. This highly unusual epic simile has in common with 'Holt Waters,' and with Swift, a fascination with the body. Yet Swift's poems about defecation and urination are about men's discomfort with women's bodily functions, or – as in the case of 'Strephon and Chloe' – about the discomfort of both sexes with their bodies. Swift sees the power in naming the ways our bodies work that embarrass us, but he still engages with the embarrassment. Jones' poems are different. She uses urination and flatulence as, respectively, tenor and vehicle in two epic similes, the power of which increases the impact of her imagery and of her comedy. In this, they are in a sense like paradoxical encomia – praising that which is usually reviled. Even paradoxical encomiums on the body such as 'The Best Perfume: In Praise of Farting,' or the pamphlet (at times attributed to Swift) 'The Benefit of Farting Explain'd' must acknowledge our discomfort with their subject before praising it; indeed, their humour depends on this discomfort. Yet there is little sense of shame in Jones' work about the bodily functions themselves. It may be this basic comfort with the body that made Jones a challenging poet for her contemporaries: she was, in a certain sense, a woman without shame. Her poems advocate for a physical 'release' (urination and

breaking wind) that is associated with a release from social constraints. The elevating effect which mock-heroic sometimes confers on its base subject matter here facilitates Jones' wry, matter-of-fact engagement with the physicality that disturbs Swift's characters and that was, and still is, a stumbling-block for many female writers.

Elevation of the Small

Mock-heroic's elevation of ideas and objects typically considered to be minor is a feature in other of Jones' poems that combine sexual imagery with an ironic tone. The mock-epic simile central to 'The Spider' approaches women's sexuality, and men's predation, using the spectre of a spider frightening Charlot Clayton. Yet here Jones again reaches beyond the question of men, women, and sex, instead finding in this poem a way to align herself with Swift, and the 'ancients,' in the debate between ancients and moderns from the beginning of the century. In this poem, Clayton is in bed when she sees a spider. Jones describes the scene with details reminiscent of epic: the sun has 'left the western road' (line 1) and driven 'his steeds to rest' (line 2) when the spider, 'this bloody-minded wretch' (line 14) sees Charlot, 'her milk-white bosom bare, / A fresh'ning bloom o'er-spread her cheek, and loosely fell her hair' (lines 18-21). Jones sexualizes the spider's attention to her friend: 'his bowels yearn' (line 21) and he descends to her on a spider-web. An epic simile reminds the reader of Zeus descending to seduce maidens: 'So grandsire Jove ... descended on a sunbeam down, / And sunk into her arms' (lines 25, 27-28). After the spider lands on Charlot's breast, descriptions of her change from pure to compromised: Jones says that she 'cannot here in language paint / How great was her surprise' (lines 39-40), a suggestion perhaps that she may have sworn. So far, the poem is a playfully sexualized account of a common household event. But Jones emphasizes that the spider does not represent a man: she says that, had Charlot

‘an Armed Man espy’d there’ (line 42), he would not have scared her ‘half so much’ (line 43). If the spider is not a seducing man, what is he? To Jones’ readers who knew Swift, the parable of the spider and the bee in ‘The Battle of the Books’ would come to mind in Charlot’s triumphant speech after dashing the spider from her body: ‘fraud, and guile, and cobweb art / May flourish long in vain’ (lines 55-56). In Swift’s allegory, the spider represents the Moderns, the group of critics and writers who Swift saw as simply digesting the work of the Ancients (classical authors) and spinning it into webs. The work of the spider is derivative; the work of the bee is original. Swift aligns himself with the bee and antiquity; Jones depicts Charlot and her maid, Sarah, as triumphing over the spider and his ‘cobweb art.’ The women are pictured here as warrior maidens, pure and victorious. Jones excels at demonstrating the importance of small events in her world – an important delineation of the tensions both of a woman’s life and, perhaps, of the life of a courtier.

Two other poems, printed together in *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, compare minor events in Maid of Honour Martha Lovelace’s life at court to nothing less than the fall of man. The poems to Lovelace, ‘The Fall,’ and ‘On her Bed-Chamber’s Chimney being blown down at St. James’s,’ were both written after Lovelace became a maid of honour to Queen Caroline, and some of the comedy here arises from the teasing tone Jones is taking with her elevated friend. Just as Lovelace has been elevated to a position at court, Jones seems to say, everything that happens to her has been elevated – but the fact that comedy can be derived from these events through the use of mock-epic language actually means that the events remain trivial.

‘The Fall’ begins with an emphasis on the tiny details of Lovelace’s position: ‘‘tis hard,’ Jones says, for maids of honour in the current age ‘to hold One’s dish upright’ (lines 3-4). The association of a china dish with women’s purity was a popular trope in

eighteenth-century poetry; although the association of women with porcelain comes up in Book 2 of *The Dunciad*, Rosalind Ballaster explains that

The equation of women with china/porcelain was a familiar one by the time the *Dunciad* was written; perhaps the best-known examples are the scene in William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675) when Horner and Lady Fidget copulate under the guise of viewing his collection of china; and John Gay's satirical 1725 poem 'To a Lady on her Passion for Old China.'¹⁸³

Here, Jones uses the mention of china as an indication of the overall theme of her poem: fallen women. All women, 'the strongest of us all, / And eke the steadiest too' (lines 5-6) are fated, doomed, to fall, she tells us. The first of 'the falling sex / Was *Eve*, our parent frail' (lines 9-10; emphasis is Jones'), but the second was Delia, or Lovelace. Fate places 'a ball, three footmen, and a chair / And eke a Beau likewise' (lines 19-20) in Delia's way, making the case that these items are as dangerous temptations to women as the serpent was to Eve. That morning, Delia 'miss'd her prayers' (line 26) leading to her tripping and falling down the stairs. Jones ends with a warning to women – 'To *look, before you leap*' (line 32; emphasis is Jones') and a reminder that Lovelace is doing 'penance for her sin' (line 34), at home with a broken leg. In the second poem, 'On her Bed-Chamber's Chimney being blown down at St. James's,' Delia again neglects religion in favour of pleasure, and again comes to mischief. On a cold night, she tells her maid to warm her bed and – with the saucy observation 'how can One be warm alone?' (line 4) – asks her to replace the book of 'Psalms and Hymns' (line 9) with 'Farquhar's Constant Pair' (line 8) next to the bed. George Farquhar's second play, *The Constant Couple; or a Trip to the Jubilee* is a restoration comedy about sex – certainly livelier than a prayer book, and perhaps more likely to 'warm [Delia's] spotless virgin bed' (line

¹⁸³ Rosalind Ballaster, *Fabulous Orient: Fictions of the East in England 1662-1785* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 222.

2). Before she can get between the sheets, though, a storm begins, shaking both the china on display and the chimney in her room. Ultimately, the chimney falls: 'Down comes China, Chimney, all!' (line 18) Jones exclaims, again using a reference to chinaware as a reminder of the fragility of women's purity and reputation. Here, the poem takes an unexpected turn: instead of offering a mock-moral on Delia's neglect of her prayers, Jones reassures her friend. Reminding her that 'thunder, lighten, rain, or shine / the Bed of Honour still is Thine' (lines 27-28), Jones may also be referencing Alexander Pope's praise of Martha Blount in 'Epistle to a Lady': 'Spleen, Vapours, or Small-pox, above them all, / And Mistress of herself, tho' China fall' (lines 267-268).¹⁸⁴ Jones encourages Lovelace to persist in the face of courtly anxieties, praising 'the conscious mind, which dares endure' (line 43) in the face of 'unnumbered waves and storms' (line 41). From a teasing poem on a small though likely frightening event, Jones transforms 'On Her Bed-Chamber's Chimney' into a consolatory work that encourages her friend to remain stoic in the face of life's vicissitudes – perhaps an important reminder for a young woman at court. Poetic treatment of this incident is surely inviting comparison of a passage in Anne Finch's 'On the Hurricane,' which mentions the death of the newly-installed Bishop of Wells Cathedral when a chimney collapsed in a hurricane in 1703. In her poem, Finch suggests that the previous Bishop, the high-church 'strictly pious Ken' (line 100) who had been replaced by Queen Anne, would have been spared had he retained his place. Jones' poem uses the episode of Lovelace's chimney as a mock-heroic signal: although Lovelace has been elevated to a post of influence, she emphasizes, the events of her days at court remain small. The strength of 'On Her Bed-Chamber's Chimney' lies in the way its tone mimics Jones' questioning of the relative values of great and small, and

¹⁸⁴ Fairer and Gerrard, p. 166.

in her deft use of natural elements to emphasize the transience of courtly concerns in the face of eternity.

Another poem about a storm, 'Sublime Strains. On the author's walking to visit Stella, in a windy morning, at privy garden,' also praises persistence, while also calling attention, like 'The Empty Purse' and 'After the Smallpox,' to the possibility that lies in lack. In a mock-pastoral beginning, Stella, or Clayton, is

...nymph divine! As op'ning morning fair!
Bright as the sun! yet lighter than the air!
Harmless as bleating lambs, or mountain hinds!
Yet more uncertain than the whistling winds! (lines 1-4)

The idyll of the pastoral gives way in the face of Clayton's elusiveness: 'Like happiness,' Jones says, 'you're nowhere to be found' (line 10). Clayton is not home, so the poet visits Lovelace instead. First, however, she describes her walk to find Charlot, implicitly comparing it to a heroic quest, simultaneously undercutting her complaint as frivolous:

Like a small skiff my little bark was hurl'd,
Toss'd to and fro amidst a laughing world;
And, what is worse—my tresses all uncurl'd. (lines 21-23)

Like Odysseus near the end of his journey, Jones is tossed in the ocean of a 'laughing world,' the social equivalent of a storm – but her speaker is most concerned about her appearance. The simile referencing 'a small skiff' and the reference to the 'tresses all uncurl'd' may be an allusion to *The Rape of The Lock*, with Belinda's boat journey down the Thames (II, line 47) and Clarissa's reminder that 'curl'd or uncurl'd ... locks will turn to gray' (V, line 626). Unlike Pope's heroine, Jones tosses aside concern for her hair with wry self-mockery. Again, it is Jones' ability to undercut herself which makes these poems particularly effective. The situation, too, echoes that of Aaron Hill's 'Whitehall Stairs,' in which Hill takes a boat to visit Martha Fowke but finds she is not home. Hill, however, finds no respite in the coffee-house to which he repairs, talking there only of

his loss; Jones, it would seem, has better resources, both social and personal, to console herself. A simple burlesque on finding a friend out when one visits is amusing, but not particularly important. Jones pushes through disappointment to significance: she describes finding ‘gallant Lovelace safe in port,’ and deploys an epic simile for her final stanza, comparing her reaction to the relief a lost sailor would feel if, in search of India, he found ‘some hospitable shore at length in view’ (line 32) and realized that his unintended discovery is better than what he sought: ‘There, pleas’d, the myrtle’s fragrant breath inhales, / Nor envies India, or her spicy gales’ (lines 34-35). Just as Jones is pleased to find Lovelace at home and no longer misses Clayton, so Christopher Columbus sought India but was glad to find what would eventually be called America. This allusion to Columbus gains significance given the Clayton family’s connection with the American colonies (Gen. Clayton’s brother John had served as attorney-general of the colony of Virginia) – and might explain why Jones was popular in America.¹⁸⁵ Under the influence of Jones’ mock-heroic, what would have been an occasional poem to a friend about missing a meeting becomes a meditation on exploration and serendipitous discovery; on friendship and consolation.

Similarly, in a poem on an entirely negligible item – the heel of a shoe – Jones muses on the power of creativity. In ‘On the Heel-Piece of Her Shoe (Stella Requiring More Rhymes, and the Author at a Loss for a Subject),’ Jones follows the mock-heroic impulse of elevating the small to comment both upon Charlot Clayton’s request for another poem and upon obscurity in general. She describes her friend’s shoe-heel in heroic terms, meanwhile celebrating her own ingenuity in writing a poem on a heel-piece. While claiming to be occasional, the poem must have been in part inspired by

¹⁸⁵ Henry K. Hepburn, *Papers of the Historical Society of Delaware XLI: The Clayton Family*, The Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, 1904, p. 14; Kennedy, *Poetic Sisters*, p. 172.

Jonathan Swift's lines in 'On Poetry: A Rhapsody,' about a would-be poet's faulty meter:

Or oft, when epithets you link,
In gaping lines to fill a chink;
Like stepping-stones, to save a stride,
In streets where kennels are too wide;
Or like a heel-piece, to support
A cripple with one foot too short. (line 20)

The figuring of bad poetry as a cripple's short foot, with the intentional pun on the word 'foot' as a unit of meter, leaves an opening for Jones to align herself with the quotidian heel-piece and with bad poetry – then to transcend that alignment with her own well-written poem. The detail that Charlot Clayton's heels were part of women's fashion, rather than (in Swift's simile) built up to conceal the flaw of a cripple's foot, represents a neat claim to writing 'regular' feet of verse, and hence to poetic accomplishment.

Like Philips' poem, which begins by enumerating the many blessings of he who 'retains / a splendid shilling' (lines 2-3), 'On the Heel-Piece of Her Shoe' begins with the heel-piece claiming to be 'blest' (line 8) because she is 'at *Stella*'s feet' (line 10) all day, and sits by her bed at night. Stella dances with the heel-piece, of course, but also walks with her to church. Indeed, if Stella were to go on a pilgrimage to the River Jordan, Jones says, the heel-piece would support her. The heel-piece is even a crucial part of Stella's faith. with the hymn-like line 'Weary tho' and faint she be, / All her cares shall *rest* on Me' (lines 35-36). On its face a comic, occasional poem, 'On the Heel-Piece of Her Shoe' is also a meditation on a small and quotidian item, and an item that 'circulates.' The mock-religious tone of the end of the poem is a nod to the growing importance of material items during the eighteenth century – a sharp moment of social commentary. Like many poets in the century, Jones recognizes the significance that possessions are beginning to have: the sense that objects reflect on their owners and, in turn, that their owners' identity in some way depends upon them.

The first mock-heroic poem William Cowper wrote was also about a heel-piece: the mock-Milonic ‘Verses Written at Bath, on Finding the Heel of a Shoe, in 1748.’ Although the poem’s date indicates that it was written when Cowper was 17, it seems not to have been published until 1803, in William Hayley’s *The Life and Posthumous Writings of William Cowper* (3 vols, 1803-1804).¹⁸⁶ Like Jones’ poem, Cowper’s ‘On Finding the Heel of a Shoe’ owes much to ‘The Splendid Shilling.’ It is written in blank verse and includes several Milonic inversions, such as ‘this ponderous Heel of perforated Hide / Compact’ (lines 21-22), the serious tone of which is neatly undercut by alliteration; and the shoe’s rustic owner, who without the shoe-heel ‘with toilsome steps and difficult moves on’ (line 35). Cowper’s poem, like Philips’, begins with a description of poverty and ends with a sense of defeat. Like Jones, Cowper sees the heel as a ‘support,’ although his poem’s heel has abandoned its wearer. Cowper’s poem concludes with an epic simile equating the shoe-owner’s heel with the support a higher-born ‘statesman’ receives from family and friends; after he loses it,

Betray’d, deserted, from his airy height
Head-long he falls; and thro’ the rest of life,
Drags the dull load of disappointment on. (lines 44-46)

This dire conclusion echoes Philips’ image of the hole in the poet’s trousers that allows in ‘dire chilling Blasts, / portending Agues’ (lines 128-9). In contrast, Jones’ poem begins with the shoe-heel’s claim to being ‘blest’ (line 8) and ends with a declaration of the shoe-heel’s constancy. Jones’ idea of material objects keeping faith with their owners (and Cowper’s of them breaking that faith) are examples of the growing importance of material culture at mid-century, and the way that poets responded to that cultural shift.

¹⁸⁶ The Oxford edition of Cowper’s poems lists the first printing of this poem as Hayley, 1803. *The Poems of William Cowper, Vol. 1: 1748–1782*, ed. by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

It is tempting to read these poems together, and to suggest that one is a response to the other. There is no evidence that Jones (1707-1778) ever met Cowper (1731-1800), and the printing histories of the poems do not appear to offer an opportunity for either to have read the other in print before writing their version, if Hayley's dating of the poem as written in 1748 is correct. Hayley was good friends with Cowper, and there is no reason to doubt his information. Still, both William Cowper's aunt, the poet Judith Madan (née Cowper), and the Countess of Cowper (the wife of his first cousin once removed) appear on the list of subscribers for Jones' *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* (1750). It is possible that the Cowper poem date is erroneous, or that Jones' poem was printed elsewhere before 1748 – or that there was a now-unknown connection between Jones and Cowper that led to Cowper seeing Jones' poem in manuscript (or vice versa). It is also possible that the two authors separately thought of a poem about a heel-piece, or that one or both read Joseph Mitchell's 'The Shoe-Heel: A Rhapsody' (London, 1727), although that poem is a sincere (and long-winded) 'effusion,' as Baird and Ryskamp put it, not a mock-heroic.¹⁸⁷

Similarly, a poem that purports to have been given with a gift of game turns into a meditation on mortality and on sympathy for animals. 'Sent to Mrs. Clayton, with a Dead Hare,' is a curious combination of thing-poem, it-narrative, and poem of animal sympathy. Beginning with lively octosyllabics and clear rhymes that seem to signal a comic poem, Jones describes a 'squire who long had fed on ale' (line 1) who went hunting 'last Thursday morn', ere Phebus rose' (line 4), a pastoral note undercut almost immediately by Jones' true stance: compassion for the hare. The squire, she says, spread

¹⁸⁷ William Cowper, *The Poems of William Cowper, Vol. 1: 1748–1782*, ed. by John D. Baird and Charles Ryskamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 4.

‘Dire horror ... where’er he came’ (line 7) and the hare’s ‘tears and intreaties come too late’ (line 13). Before she dies, the hare asks to be taken to Mrs. Clayton as a present.

Only when this my house of clay,
Shall to the hounds become a prey,
(As soon, ah cruel hounds! it must,)
And these sad eyes return to dust
May this my last request be heard,
And decently my corps interr’d
Within a concave basket’s womb. (lines 17-23)

The description of a ‘return to dust’ evokes a (human) burial service, as does the request for her corpse to be ‘decently...interr’d.’ The reference to the ‘womb’ of a basket and to the hare’s body as a ‘house of clay’ further humanizes her. Jones then turns to the animal’s fate: to be eaten.

And now farewell what once was mine!
With pleasure I these fields resign:
Happy, if that good Lady owns
My flesh was good, and picks my bones. (lines 27-30)

The poem ends on the grotesque description of Clayton picking the meat off the bones of the speaker: hardly the comic poem promised at the outset. Certainly, Jones’ sympathy for the animal is not unusual; poems to and about animals were common in the eighteenth century, ranging from satirical to sympathetic as the century progressed.¹⁸⁸

The compliment suggested by the final lines of the poem – that the hare will be happy if Mrs. Clayton enjoys her meat – is overshadowed by the way Mrs. Clayton is implicated in the animal’s death. This aspect of the poem gives rise to an interesting question: who was ‘Mrs. Clayton’? At first, the answer appears obvious: it must be Charlot Clayton, Jones’ good friend and the ‘Stella’ to whom she writes in many poems. Yet Charlot is referred to as ‘Miss Clayton’ in every other poem, and is described as living at Fern-Hill,

¹⁸⁸ I.H. Tague, ‘Dead Pets: Satire and Sentiment in British Elegies and Epitaphs for Animals,’ *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 41.3 (2008), 289-306.

the Clayton family home in Buckinghamshire. In contrast, ‘Mrs. Clayton’ lives in London: the hare cries to be sent

With this inscription on my tomb;
To Mrs. Clayton [sic], Poland Street ---
Bear me, ye porters! while I’m sweet (lines 24-26).

Poland Street in London runs between Oxford Street and Broad Street in Westminster, and during the time Jones was writing was ‘a fashionable residence, with a number of peers, titled widows and military officers living there,’ according to the *Survey of London* (1963).¹⁸⁹ The Burney family lived in Poland Street from 1760 to 1770; Burney scholar Percy Scholes suggests that Dr. Burney moved to Poland Street in the hope of attracting pupils from other residents. In her memoir of her father, Fanny Burney recalls that

Mr. Burney ... had successively for his neighbours, the Duke of Chandos, Lady Augusta Bridges, the Hon. John Smith and the Miss Barrys, Sir Willoughby and the Miss Astons; and, well noted by Mr. Burney’s little family, on the visit of his black majesty to England, sojourned, almost immediately opposite to it, the Cherokee King.¹⁹⁰

‘Mrs Clayton,’ then, lived in an area that, if not as fashionable as it was in the 1760s, was on its way there. There thus appears to be a class difference set up in this poem, and the hare’s voice describing Mrs. Clayton ‘pick[ing] [his] bones’ takes a still darker tone with the idea of an upper-class woman preying on the gifts of her friends. Of course, the hare was meant by the speaker to be eaten, just as the poem was meant to be delivered with the hare, in the long tradition of ‘lines delivered with’ gifts. Yet giving the hare a voice within the poem aligns him with the poet herself, a woman who wrote to her social betters with great frequency, and without apology.

¹⁸⁹ Sheppard, F.H.W. (ed), ‘Poland Street Area’ in *Survey of London: Volumes 31 and 32, St James Westminster, Part 2*, (London: London County Council, 1963), pp. 243-249.

¹⁹⁰ Madame D’Arblay [Fanny Burney], *Memoirs of Doctor Burney, Arranged from his Manuscripts, from Family Papers, and from Personal Recollections* (London: Edward Moxon, 1832), vol. I, p. 134.

Conclusion

As we have seen, Mary Jones' poetry hides in plain sight a plea for attention to the more complicated aspects of life, the grosser, lesser, and less beautiful parts of her world. As Koehler explains, 'mock-heroic, by its very definition, engages the notion of an attentive filter; it tests what happens when petty subjects are admitted into the exclusive realm of heroic style. The mock-heroic poet deliberately flouts a more typical or 'automatic' tendency to restrict trivial materials in this elevated domain and instead insists that readers exercise a more active and voluntary filter of attention to notice the incongruous combinations that result.'¹⁹¹ Jones might appear to be stretching the bounds of elevated language by writing poems featuring bodily functions and intensely trivial items – except that Swift and others wrote such poetry before she did. Yet she is not merely an imitator or even a follower of the poets to whom she alludes; her keen eye and unembarrassed depiction of the seedier side of a woman's life makes her work unique, and worthy of greater critical notice.

¹⁹¹ Koehler, *Poetry of Attention*, p. 61.

Chapter Four

Elizabeth Moody

Richard Terry attributes to early eighteenth-century mock-epics a sense of ‘nostalgia, or at least a feeling of being wrenched uneasily between the old and the new.’¹⁹² Such ambivalence makes mock-heroic an appropriate mode of expression for Elizabeth Moody (1737-1814), who began her writing career as a gentleman’s daughter sharing her poetry with a small coterie, and ended it as a published book reviewer and poet, the wife of a Dissenting minister. Her use of the mock-heroic form and mock-heroic discourse demonstrates changes in both over the latter half of the century, while at least one contemporary review of her work illustrates differences in audience expectations by gender that made it both possible and even expedient for mock-heroic writing by women to be mistaken for sincere support of the *status quo*, rather than subversive mockery. Five years older than Anna Letitia Barbauld, and with some of the same Dissenting connections as the renowned educator and poet, Moody also stands as an example of the way that Dissenting communities supported women’s literary careers.

Born Elizabeth Greenly, she was christened in All Saints, the parish church of Kingston, in 1737, and raised in an upper-middle-class home, the daughter of a successful lawyer and his heiress wife.¹⁹³ But at age 40, after her mother’s death, she married 23-year-old Christopher Lake Moody, a Dissenting minister, editor, and literary critic. Christopher Moody was Elizabeth’s social and financial inferior, but their relationship seems to have been a companionate one, based on mutual interests, and he was supportive of her writing. Soon after their marriage, Elizabeth began writing for *The Monthly Review*, the first periodical dedicated to literary criticism, for which Christopher

¹⁹² Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 3.

¹⁹³ Jan Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1997), pp. 2-3.

was already a regular reviewer (and to which, at different times, Barbauld, her father, and her brother also contributed). Over the course of the next few years, Elizabeth published 29 reviews in *The Monthly Review*, and six poems in *The St. James's Chronicle*, a periodical in which her husband owned a share and which he helped to edit. In 1798, Cadell and Davies in London published a collection of her work, *Poetic Trifles*. Many of the poems in the collection may be read as mock-heroic, yet their subtlety and the lack of critical understanding of Moody's background has contributed to their being overlooked or misread. In this chapter, I will give more details about Moody's life and writing experience than I have about the other, better-known poets in this thesis. This is to give the reader the information they need to make a judgment about Moody's use of allusion and irony in her poetry.

A Professional Writer

Today, Moody's work has been out of print for more than 200 years, save a handful of anthologised poems and book reviews, and according to the English Short Title Catalogue, only ten copies of *Poetic Trifles* are available in Great Britain and North America.¹⁹⁴ Yet she had a successful literary career: she earned money from her writing and was a confident literary critic. Poems by Moody also appear in George Hardinge's *Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse* (1818) and Edward Lovibond's *Poems on Several Occasions* (1785), and in magazines; she was part of an active coterie with Hardinge and Lovibond, as well as having circulated her poetry in manuscript with friends as a young woman. As Mary A. Waters has observed, Moody is an early example

¹⁹⁴ Moody's work is included in Roger Lonsdale's *Eighteenth Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989), Paula Feldman's *British Women Poets of the Romantic Era* (Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1997), and Mary A. Waters' *British Women Writers of the Romantic Period: An Anthology of their Literary Criticism* (Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire and New York, 2009). Lonsdale appears to be the original researcher who re-discovered Moody's verse, with Jan Wellington (see note below) expanding on his work.

of 'literary professionalism'; in her book reviews, she discusses not only individual works but also general principles of authorship.¹⁹⁵ Her review of *The Denial; or, the Happy Retreat*, by the Rev. James Thomson is an early call for novelistic realism, telling readers that 'a knowledge of the world, and of mankind, are essential requisites in the writer; the characters should be always natural; the personages should talk, and think, and act, as becomes their respective ages, situations and characters.'¹⁹⁶ As a critic, she was keenly aware of literary taste, and her work for *The Monthly Review* demonstrates not just her knowledge of literature, but also her wit and ability to adopt a different voice according to her audience and her aims.

In more than one case, Moody uses the traditional anonymity of the book review to play with her readers' assumption that she is a man – as Wellington puts it, she is 'a kind of cross-dressing double agent.'¹⁹⁷ Instead of simply not mentioning that she is female and allowing her readership to assume she is male, Moody references being a male critic, using that identity as a buttress to her credit with the reader. For example, in her review of Thomson's *The Denial*, Moody uses the assumption about her gender that most readers would make to distinguish herself from fellow female writers and then to claim authority to set out exactly how a novel should be written. After suggesting that female writers 'appropriate to themselves an exclusive privilege in [romantic] writing,'¹⁹⁸ Moody (in her guise as a male reviewer) observes that

...the portraiture of the tender passions, the delicacy of sentiment, and the easy flow of style, may, perhaps, be most adaptable to the genius of the softer sex; but however that may be, politeness, certainly, will not suffer us to dispute this palm with our fair competitors. We, though of the harder sex, as men, and of a still harder *race as critics*,

¹⁹⁵ Mary Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789-1832* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 141.

¹⁹⁶ 'Mrs. M-y -G,' 'ART. VII. the Denial; Or, the Happy Retreat,' *Monthly Review, or, Literary Journal*, 1752-1825 3 (1790): 400-2, p. 402.

¹⁹⁷ Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody*, p. 23.

¹⁹⁸ Waters, *British Women Writers of the Romantic Period*, p. 18.

are no enemies to an affecting well-told story: but as we are *known* not to be very easily pleased, it may be imagined that those performances only will obtain the sanction of our applause, which can stand the test of certain criteria of excellence. (emphasis is Moody's)¹⁹⁹

Here, Moody calls on the familiar gallantry that women are the better writers of romance, seen as early as 1709 in Steele's review in the *Tatler* of Susanna Centlivre's play *The Busie Body*: 'The plot and incidents of the play are laid with that subtilty of spirit which is peculiar to females of wit, and is very seldom well performed by those of the other sex, in whom craft in love is an act of invention, and not, as with women, the effect of nature and instinct.'²⁰⁰ As Misty G. Anderson notes, 'the most pervasive tendency on the part of eighteenth century critics was to soften their assessments of women's intellectual and creative efforts as feminine themselves.'²⁰¹ In other words, any praise for a woman's achievements in novel-writing would be subsumed by the declaration that such success is due to an innate quality of her entire gender, rather than the capabilities of an individual writer. Moody turns this fair-sexing around, using its traditional gallantry to establish her critical voice's maleness as distinct from the female writer she is reviewing, and in the process separating herself, as writer, from the fair-sexed female. Her critical persona leaves to women the 'privilege' of writing romantic novels, while claiming for herself the attributes of the male critic, among them intellect, education, and the capacity for individual achievement. After ceding to female authors the 'palm' of excellence in writing novels – but due to 'politeness' rather than excellence – Moody-as-critic emphasizes that she (with other critics) is 'not very easily pleased,' and holds every work she reviews to 'certain criteria of excellence.' Here, Moody uses

¹⁹⁹ Waters, *British Women Writers of the Romantic Period*, p. 18.

²⁰⁰ *Tatler* No. 19, May 24 1709, in Richard Steele, *The Tatler*, Vol. I, ed. Donald F. Bond, 3 vols., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 154.

²⁰¹ Misty G. Anderson, *Female Playwrights and Eighteenth-Century Comedy: Negotiating Marriage on the London Stage* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2002), p. 29.

the assumptions readers would make about her gender to claim for herself the authority not merely to write, but to judge the writing of others to a very high standard. After making this claim, which is based on her purported gender, she sets out in a lengthy paragraph what she calls ‘a sketch of what a novel should be to *please us*’²⁰² (emphasis is Moody’s):

The story of a novel should be formed of a variety of interesting incidents; a knowledge of the world, and of mankind, are essential requisites in the writer; the characters should be always natural; the personages should talk, think, and act, as becomes their situations, and characters; the sentiments should be moral, chaste, and delicate; the language should be easy, correct, and elegant, free from affectation, and unobscured by pedantry; and the narrative should be as little interrupted as possible by digressions and episodes of every kind: yet if an author chuses to indulge, occasionally in moral reflections, in the view of blending instruction with amusement, we would not wish, altogether, to frustrate so good a design...²⁰³

Having established her claim to authority through an appeal to her purported gender, Moody is free to institute very particular rules for the novel in general, preparatory to offering her opinion on the novel she is reviewing. Her high-handed tone makes her authority clear, and she uses it to make very careful points about the way the author uses language – noting, for example, several redundant phrases as well as pedantic dialogue.²⁰⁴ Significantly, Moody doesn’t claim authority through the route of Steele’s fair-sexing, realising (as Rawson notes) that ‘such over-determined gallantries ... are a polite way of saying [women are] not equal,’ but Rawson’s observation that ‘this may appear more insulting now than it did then’ is overshadowed by his later assertion that ‘self-identification with the fair sex protected both authors from the risk of being taken

²⁰² Wellington, p. 229.

²⁰³ Waters, *British Women Writers of the Romantic Period*, p. 18.

²⁰⁴ See Moody’s footnote in the full review: Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody*, pp. 228-229.

too seriously, while leaving room for the reassuring complacencies of compliment.²⁰⁵ Moody knew that the fair-sexing language of Steele and his successors, based as it was on the idea of all women having an inherent sensibility rather than on individual skill or achievement by women writers, was fundamentally reductive. Instead, she chose to place herself on the other side of the gallantry, doling it out to other female novelists to demonstrate her authority to criticize a novel written by a man. This complex and deft manoeuvring demonstrates Moody's awareness of her critical stance and its limitations – and her willingness to push the boundaries of her role.

Moody employed such subterfuge even when not reviewing; in a letter to the *St. James' Chronicle* signed 'S___n' (for Surbiton, where she lived), she sends the editor stanzas from 'Ouabi; or The Virtues of Nature, an Indian Tale,' a poem by an American about a Native American hero. After copying out several stanzas, Moody interjects, 'This Lady Poet has evidently a good ear for verse ... were I to turn critick I should object to the conclusion.'²⁰⁶ Of course, Moody is a critic, and she appears to enjoy the ruse of pretending she is not one. It is notable that, in one sense at least, Moody's praise for the poet attributes her poem's beauty to a physical feature – although the term 'a good ear' refers to the poet's ability to write well, being praised for a 'good ear' (and the emphasis on her gender in the phrase 'this Lady Poet') still references the poet's ability in physical terms, rather than praise for her poetic achievement. While the poet Moody is praising appears unable to escape an association with her body and her gender, Moody shifts genders and roles as she pleases, enjoying the separation between herself and her writing that publication offers.

²⁰⁵ Claude Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment 1660-1830: Stress Points in the Augustan Tradition*, 2nd ed., (Yale University Press, New Haven, Conn., 2000) p. 210.

²⁰⁶ Wellington, p. 282.

In another review, of the romance *Rimualdo* by W.H. Ireland, Moody emphasizes her age (the review was published in 1801, so she would have been 64) as well as the gender of her critical persona, beginning with the first lines of the review: 'The title of romance still invigorates our spirits. Old as we are, it recalls to our recollection the stories in which our youth delighted.'²⁰⁷ She furthers her critical persona (and plays with the assumption that she is male) by describing her reaction to a ghost in the novel she is reviewing: 'Though familiarized very much, lately, to these apparitions, we did not feel inclined to go to bed, till we had puffed away the recollection of this spectre in a whiff of tobacco, and re-animated our fleeting spirits by a double draught of old October: which will not be a matter of surprise to the reader, when he learns that the hero himself, the brave Rimualdo, dropped down in a swoon immediately on seeing it!'²⁰⁸ This passage creates an understanding among three 'men' – the reader, whom Moody refers to as 'he'; the hero Rimualdo; and Moody (whom readers are assuming to be male). It is only within the masculine space of this passage, and with another male (Rimualdo) having shared her fear, that Moody can admit to having been frightened by the ghost in this novel. By emphasizing her purported masculinity by describing the traditionally masculine comforts of smoking and drinking, she is able to admit to what might be considered 'female' – being frightened by the ghost in a novel. This masking – which involves a description of drinking and smoking in a wryly convivial tone reminiscent of some numbers of *The Spectator* – seems to enable her to be more strident in general in her reviews; later in this review, she says that 'Mr. Ireland's language is animated and flowing, when it is *not inflated* with pomposity' and cites several overwritten passages, concluding 'Thus is poetic imagery blended with prose detail; producing a medley of

²⁰⁷ Waters, *British Women Writers of the Romantic Period*, p. 19.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

heterogeneous language totally destructive of good writing, by violating those principles of harmonious congruity which form the basis of a correct and uncontaminated diction.²⁰⁹ Moody's language moves from entertainingly wry to keenly critical in the course of this short review.

In contrast, other female critics remain at one register, often that of a somewhat disconnected concern for the moral effect on the reader of the imperfections of a novel. For example, Mary Wollstonecraft's review of Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde, or the Recluse of the Lake* in the *Analytical Review* points out some inconsistencies of characterisation and finishes, 'We cannot help wishing that Mrs. S. had considered how many females might probably read her pleasing production, whose minds are in a ductile state; she would not then have cherished their delicacy, or more properly speaking, weakness.'²¹⁰ While Wollstonecraft allows her personal reactions into this review, she retains that note of moral concern about the effect on the reader which typically attached itself to the novel. Moody has no such qualms. In the same review, lamenting that the modern romance follows a different format than those of her youth, Moody describes 'the oglio of the modern novel' in a series of fragmented phrases:

unnatural parents, —persecuted lovers, —murders, —
haunted apartments, —winding sheets, and winding stair-
cases, —subterraneous passages, —lamps that are dim and
perverse, and that always go out when they should not, —
monasteries, —caves, —monks, tall, thin, and withered,
with lank abstemious cheeks, —dreams, —groans, —and
spectres.²¹¹

This list of comically detailed generalizations about the makeup of the novel in the late eighteenth century follows what Rawson calls 'satiric summarizing,' the collection of details to create a full picture of a complex, busy scene.²¹² Elsewhere, she uses a

²⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 19-20.

²¹⁰ Ibid, p. 95.

²¹¹ Waters, *British Women Writers of the Romantic Period*, p. 19

²¹² Rawson, *Satire and Sentiment*, p. 272.

technique that Rawson calls ‘telescoping’ in a way that is reminiscent of Jane Austen’s satire ‘Plan of a Novel According to Hints from Various Quarters,’ in which Austen compiles advice from friends, family, and acquaintances into the précis of a novel. Explaining the plot of the book she is reviewing, Moody comically reduces the action, emphasising the ridiculous aspects of the end through compression and the rhythm of her summary:

...he becomes enamoured of a beautiful young lady. Named Olivia. Mr. Fennel, one of Olivia's lovers, is jealous of Mr. Wilton, and sends him a challenge: a duel ensues—Mr. W. disarms and wounds his antagonist; who is so enraged that he insists on being dead, that Mr. W. may be hanged: —the latter is therefore, with all due formality, ushered into a prison: but Mr. Fennel, having reported falsely of himself that he was DEAD, and being taken alive, Mr. Wilton is released from his confinement, and marries Olivia: who proves to be another Miss Silvertop. The old Lord, who had determined on an alliance with the family of the Silvertops, recalls his curses, and changes them into blessings: and a happy union likewise takes place, with regard to an episodical pair, whose adventures serve to diversify the work: — which here naturally concludes.²¹³

This is not necessarily a suggestion that Austen was influenced by Moody, but it is certainly worth noting that Moody uses some of the same techniques around the time that Austen was beginning to write, and that Moody demonstrates a level of proficiency and sensitivity to language in her reviews that makes it clear her poetry is also carefully and deliberately constructed.

Nevertheless, some reviews of *Poetic Trifles*, in Jan Wellington’s phrase, ‘misleadingly make her appear to write only about children, flowers, fashion, and friends,’ either mistakenly or deliberately figuring Moody as a writer of conservative paeans to domestic life.²¹⁴ In a particularly unfortunate oversight, the *Critical Review*

²¹³ Wellington, p. 229.

²¹⁴ Wellington, p. 32.

praises Moody's 'good sense and lively imagination.', but continues, 'We were surprised to find this lady's blank verse so bad. How her eye or ear could endure it, after she had read any one poem in that metre, is astonishing.'²¹⁵ The reviewer must be referring to the only example of blank verse in the book, 'The Housewife; Or, The Muse Learning to Ride the great Horse Heroic,' in which Moody uses mock-Miltonic syntax to describe the tasks of a housewife's day. Ironically, Moody's own review history for *The Monthly Review* includes comments about poor blank verse in *Le Paradis Reconquis: Poëme, imité de Milton* (1789), an 'imitation of Milton' by L.R Lafaye. Moody is harsh about Lafaye's treatment of Milton: 'What shall we say of this imitation? That we have searched for its appendage, a resemblance, and cannot find it. What can we say of an arrangement of words in the form of blank verse, destitute of cadence and harmony? What but, that it is prose in the shape of poetry?'²¹⁶ She also establishes her sense of nationalism by making clear her allegiance to England and to Milton:

... But as we cannot promise to steer this little French bark safe into port, through the channel of English criticism. We (without loading it with any more of our strictures) leave it to seek an harbour in its native coast - it may chance to meet there with a more propitious gale. As to ourselves, we must be candid enough to confess that our English Satan has obtained so much popularity, through the skilful management of our immortal Milton. that we can by no means tolerate French devils.²¹⁷

Her arch tone here demonstrates Moody's confidence as a writer and reviewer: she is willing to deploy a faintly ridiculous epic simile comparing a French imitation of Milton to a French ship in the English channel – an allusion to war with France as well as to differences in French and English taste in literature – because she knows her readers will understand that she is laughing with them at her mock-heroic prose.

²¹⁵ 'Poetic Trifles,' *The Critical Review, or, Annals of Literature* 25 (1799): 229-30.

²¹⁶ Wellington, p. 224.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

A poem like 'The Housewife' (discussed in detail later in this chapter) depends upon its audience to understand that the poet is deliberately over-writing, and to recognize her allusions; essentially, to trust that she knows how to write and is educated enough to draw upon previous poets (in this case, Phillips and Milton, among others). Despite Moody's accomplishments, the *Critical Review* writer assumed that she was simply a bad poet. Yet the publication of her collection actually demonstrates that she had gained a level of professionalism that Mary Leapor and Mary Jones had not.

Moody's publication of *Poetic Trifles* differs importantly from the publications of Leapor, Jones, and most other female writers at mid-century. Leapor's two collections of verse were published posthumously to benefit her grieving father, and Jones' *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse* was meant to aid 'a relation, grown old and helpless thro' a series of misfortunes.'²¹⁸ Sales of their books depended on the public's sense of charity, and on the aristocratic connections of patrons, for subscriptions and then an audience. In contrast, *Poetic Trifles* appears without a subscription, and without a dedicatee. Elizabeth Moody's collection was either a speculation by her publisher or printed at her own expense, and she relied on reviews for sales of her book.²¹⁹ While this was a tenuous position for Moody herself, it indicates an important shift in the literary marketplace: female writers began to be able to publish their work without having to appeal to prominent patrons or the public's sense of duty. Moody's preface demonstrates this new freedom: unlike Leapor and Jones, she does not imply that her poems are inferior, nor does she adopt a tone of modesty, as many female poets did. Stephen C.

²¹⁸ Jones, *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, p. v.

²¹⁹ Jan Wellington, whose doctoral dissertation is the only single-author study of Moody available, and collects many previously unrecognized Moody poems, letters, and reviews, suggests that Elizabeth and Christopher Lake Moody paid for the printing of *Poetic Trifles* (1798) themselves. Wellington bases this suggestion on an exchange of letters between Christopher Lake Moody and the publishing firm Cadell and Davies, but these letters do not explicitly mention how the printing of *Poetic Trifles* was financed. In either case, however, sales of the book would have depended upon advertisements and reviews.

Behrendt notes that her preface is 'engagingly witty' and her poems informed by 'aesthetic sophistication and ... intellectual commitment.'²²⁰

In the preface, Moody assumes that readers have purchased her work for the pleasure of reading her poems, and perhaps as a distraction from Britain's conflict with France and Spain:

At a season ... like the present,--when the monster WAR is sounding his terrific alarms;--when the spirit of discord is in the air, and ... not only stimulates the combatants in the field of battle, but in the field of *Literature* ... How I presume to ask, may the compilation of a few harmless Numbers be expected to engage the public attention?²²¹

She offers an apology, but notably it is not for being a woman in print, but rather for publishing verse during a time of war. More interesting still is the allusion to combat 'in the field of Literature,' a wry comment on the critical atmosphere in which Moody published her book. An awareness of the public nature of her career comes up many times in Moody's writing, and contrasts with the voice of the modest, retiring woman of letters that apologetic prefaces had previously adopted.

Of course, Moody was publishing at the end rather than the middle of the century. Yet the apologetic mode of prefaces to collections by female poets persisted to the end of the eighteenth century. The posthumous collection of Mary Alcock's poems, published by subscription in 1799, offers a more familiar picture of the female poet: Alcock's niece says that Alcock 'never held herself up as a writer: when she resorted to her pen, it was either to amuse a leisure hour, to gratify an absent friend, or for the sublimer purpose of pouring out her heart in praises and thanksgivings to her God.'²²² Anna Seward prefaces a collection of sonnets from 1799 with a confident disquisition on

²²⁰ Stephen C. Behrendt, *British Women Poets and the Romantic Writing Community* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 105.

²²¹ Elizabeth Moody, *Poetic Trifles* (London: Printed by H. Baldwin and Son; for T. Cadell, Jun. and W. Davies, 1798), pp. i-ii.

²²² Mary Alcock, *Poems by the late Mrs. Mary Alcock* (London: Printed for C. Dilly, 1799), p. iii.

the sonnet as a poetic form, but it begins ‘whatever other excellence may be wanting in the ensuing poems.’²²³ Such modest prefaces were so common at mid-century that Kathryn King characterizes Jones’ as containing ‘the usual apologies’²²⁴, and Dustin Griffin points to a preface by Charlotte Smith in 1792 as an example of women still feeling the need to excuse printing their poems: ‘Women authors, of course, laboured under a special burden, sneered at as “prostitutes” since before 1700, merely because they dared to present themselves in print. In 1792 Charlotte Smith, in the preface to her novel *Desmond*, still feels obliged to apologize for becoming an “Author by profession,” pleading that she is “compelled by [financial] circumstances.”’²²⁵

By contrast, Moody seems not to have felt pressure to excuse herself, either for writing poetry or for daring to publish it – only to explain the timing of her volume. When she does mention obscurity, she notes it as the fate of most poets: ‘It is true that [the bottom of a trunk] has been the *family vault* of many a Poet; but a Poet does not love to think of the death of his verse any more than of his own.’²²⁶ Her comic irony is well in evidence, but so is her confidence as a published reviewer. She addresses criticism as well as flattery by explaining, ‘It is the common practice of Authors to pay their court to Critics through the channel of fulsome Adulation; but I know, that like Macbeth’s apparitions,--*they will not be entreated*.’²²⁷ With her understanding of the literary marketplace and critical commentary, Elizabeth Moody surely chose the poems that appeared in her collection carefully, including those that used mock-heroic. Her use of

²²³ Anna Seward, *Original Sonnets on Various Subjects* (London: Printed for G. Sael, 1799), p. iii.

²²⁴ Kathryn King, ‘Scribal and Print Publication,’ in Ros Ballaster (ed.), *The History of British Women’s Writing, 1690-1750* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 127.

²²⁵ Dustin Griffin, ‘The Rise of the Professional Author?’ in Michael F. Suarez, S.J., and Michael L. Turner (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain, Volume V: 1695-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 143.

²²⁶ Moody, p. iii.

²²⁷ Moody, pp. iii-iv.

the mock-heroic in these poems is significant both in terms of the history of the form and the social issues that she addresses with them.

Mock-Heroic Commentary

Although Moody's career flourished at the end of the century, she began writing at mid-century and is clearly influenced by Pope and Swift, using mock-heroic's tradition of combining dissimilar concepts to call into question how some things come to be valued and others not. She uses poems centred largely around the domestic sphere to address larger social questions such as religious tolerance and the morality of commerce. The coexistence of intellectual pursuits with domestic concerns underpins her placing poems about contemporary intellectual figures such as Joseph Priestley, Erasmus Darwin, and Samuel Johnson alongside occasional poems set in country society with titles like 'Addressed to a Lady, on a New Carriage Taking Fire,' and 'On Hearing that Bob Wigs Were Coming into Fashion.' Other poems draw attention to lesser or literally smaller beings, including 'The Address of a Toad to Mr. Opie the Painter, While Sitting for His Picture,' 'From a Sick and Dying Plant at Hampton Court, to Her Vigorous Healthy Sister at Surbiton Farm,' and 'The Grateful Tribute of the Poor Dog, Usually Employed in the Experiment of the Grotta del Cane.' All of these poems show her working with the mock-heroic: that is, elevating the commonplace by writing about it in a high style. Yet mock-heroic is not simply the reverse of burlesque. The eighteenth-century concept of imagination recognized that unlike ideas could become associated in one's mind, just as they were in mock-heroic verse. As David Fairer explains, 'with its creative delight in finding new angles on experience, [mock-heroic] tended to work more unpredictably, and raised questions of value by entangling great and small at the level of the 'idea'

(image) in the mind.’²²⁸ In the case of two poems on domesticity, ‘The Housewife; or, the Muse Learning to Ride the Great Horse Heroic’ and ‘To Economy: The Housewife’s Prayer on the Morning Preceding a Fête,’ Moody uses mockery to call into question the burgeoning cult of domesticity while wryly sympathizing with the housewife’s concerns.

Housewifely Concerns

Economising was likely a real concern in Moody’s life, as she and Christopher Moody tried to earn their living through writing and farming; Wellington reports that the couple’s ‘married life was plagued at times by lack of cash and even of transportation’ and that Christopher Moody complained to the publisher Ralph Griffiths that he ‘condemn[ed] [his] folly in having turned aside from academic groves to dig for felicity in a dung hill.’²²⁹ Nevertheless, Elizabeth Moody’s poem about a housewife’s frugality is hardly autobiographical. In ‘The Housewife’s Prayer on the Morning Preceding a Fete; To Economy,’ Moody presents a woman who has taken advice about saving to an extreme degree. Beginning with an invocation to the goddess Economy, Moody establishes a mock-heroic tone: ‘Goddess ador’d! who gain’d my early love, / And form’d my mind thy precepts to improve’ (lines 1-2). Her goddess has taught the speaker that ‘waste is an atrocious sin’ (line 5) and told her to ‘cull from dust the scattered pin’ (line 6), because saving a pin a day will save her a groat every year (line 8) – a small victory that establishes the mock-heroic nature of the poem’s content. The housewife’s oppression by her own saving measures is made clear through Moody’s hyperbole. She refers to Economy’s ‘penurious rule’ the ‘atrocious sin’ of waste, the goddess’ ‘parsimonious grace,’ and the housewife’s ‘sacred hoard’ of food. The extreme nature of

²²⁸ David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, p. 51.

²²⁹ Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody*, p. 13.

the housewife's prayer demonstrates her dilemma: she is scant with others, but stingy with herself. Moody is satirising women's tendency to self-denial and self-neglect, as her speaker demonstrates her adoration of her goddess through deprivation.

Let the blue current stagnate in my veins,
And age come on with all his rheums and pains:
Nor hood, nor bonnet will I deign to wear,
Nor ought [sic] that Nature will consent to spare;
In these privations still adoring thee,
All saving Power! divine Economy! (lines 19-24)

The speaker has become a martyr, suffering physical pain to show her adoration for Economy. Meanwhile, preparations for the village fête reveal social tensions. On a day when generosity and hospitality are celebrated by the great family of the village, the middle-class housewife is praying that her servants ('that wasteful horde the vassal race' [26]) will not be too liberal in serving tea and coffee, asking Economy to 'defend' (line 35) the refreshments and 'guard each candle's end' (line 36). Unlike the generosity such as that depicted in a country-house poem, or even the decaying grandeur of Leapor's 'Crumble-Hall,' the world of Moody's lower-middle-class housewife is stingy and small. Moody is not simply mocking middle-class concerns, however. By demonstrating the housewife's pain due to her allegiance to economy, the poet is calling attention to several forces at once: to tension between the middling class and their servants, to the financial and social pressures on middle-class women, and to the difficulty of following the precepts of the new ideals of domesticity and womanhood.

It is interesting to note here a possible reference to George Crabbe. Crabbe's complaint about epic conventions in *The Village* (1783) argues that the time for poetic heroicisation of labour is over, and that 'what forms the real picture of the poor, / Demands a song—the Muse can give no more' (lines 5-6).²³⁰ Crabbe wishes to depict the

²³⁰ Gerrard and Fairer, p. 471. All subsequent quotations from *The Village* are from this edition.

real experience of the rural poor and middling classes, but he emphasizes that the elevation of poetry has no place in their lives:

... I paint the cot,
As truth will paint it, and as bards will not:
Nor you, ye poor, of lettered scorn complain,
To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;
O'ercome by labour and bowed down by time,
Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme? (lines 53-58)

Not only is poetry lost on the poor who are 'o'ercome by labour,' but Crabbe sees it as dishonest, asking 'From truth and nature shall we widely stray, / Where Virgil, not where Fancy leads the way?' (lines 19-20). Crabbe himself struggled financially as a young man in London, pursued by creditors until he begged for help from Edmund Burke – but such an experience is a very different one from that of a rural labourer. The 'economy' of his couplets has been equated with financial frugality, a notion that is reinforced by his focus on the effect of industrialization on villages and their inhabitants.²³¹ It is possible that Moody's poems on domestic labour, especially 'To Economy,' are responding to his dismissal of the epic by suggesting a different strategy: the mock-elevation of the work described and a depiction of real economic pain through humorous exaggeration (itself a kind of excess, pleasingly contradicting the call to economy).

'The Housewife'

In the longer poem 'The Housewife; or, the Muse Learning to Ride the Great Horse Heroic,' Moody expands her portrayal of domestic labour in the portrait of a proud but isolated housewife. 'The Housewife' is written in Miltonic blank verse and begins with the invocation, not of a muse, but of a human mediator between the poet and her art, a male critic:

O thou that with deciding voice oft sways

²³¹ For more on Crabbe's 'literary economy,' see Colin Winborn, *The Literary Economy of Jane Austen and George Crabbe* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2004).

The doubtful wand'ring of th' advent'rous Muse
 And oft directs her wav'ring feet, where best
 To tread! ...Accept this verse! And should the Muse
 All insufficient to so new a theme
 Fail in her song—If not thy smile, at least
 Thy patience give! (lines 1-4, 7-10)

The poem is subtitled 'Address'd to Lysander,' and Wellington surmises that Lysander is a name for Christopher Moody, an editor and critic in his own right.²³² Another possibility is that Lysander was Ralph Griffiths, the editor of the *Monthly Review*, with whom both Moodys maintained a warm and regular correspondence, and to whom she addressed the poem 'The Distempered Muse.'²³³ In either case, Moody begins with a female poet asking a male critic for permission to attempt a heroic poem. Already, then, 'The Housewife' is questioning traditional roles – that of the poet, the muse, and the critic – as well as a traditional form – that of the invocation.

Johns-Putra sees Moody as treading a careful line between honouring and mocking the housewife: 'At several points, an ostensibly heroicising gesture is not so easy to distinguish from one of mockery.'²³⁴ As mentioned above, Moody may have made this poem deliberately ambiguous, allowing some critics to see what they wished to in this poem: a woman celebrating her rightful place in the home. Moody takes on a hesitant attitude for the start of the poem: its opening lines climb up into high language only to be interrupted by dashes and requests for patience from her dedicatee and her audience and pleas for help from her muse: 'Thus, with her economic ensigns deck'd— Say, Muse! / If thou wilt not aid so mean a song?' (lines 48-49). Unlike Pope in 'Fragment of Brutus, an Epic,' who emphasised the epic poet's separation from 'meaner Care or meaner Song,' Moody embraces the trivial nature of her song. At the same time,

²³² Wellington, p. 174.

²³³ Moody encloses 'The Distempered Muse' in a letter to Griffiths; see Bodleian MS Add. C.89, fols. 250-62, Letters of Christopher Lake Moody and Elizabeth Moody to Ralph Griffiths.

²³⁴ Adeline Johns-Putra, 'Satire and Domesticity in Late Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry: Minding the Gap,' *Journal for Eighteenth Century Studies* Vol. 33 No. 1 (2010), 67-87, p. 81.

her inverted syntax invokes Milton's *Paradise Lost*, while the dashes and interruptions undercut such high language. Moody was an experienced and confident writer; these hesitations are a conceit, and the fact that she breaks off just as she is describing the housewife's 'economic ensign' (here, the keys to her household) is significant (and perhaps alludes to the fragmentary nature of epics like 'Brutus'). Moody's reference to a 'mean song' sets her off as doing something different from Milton, who declared his muse would soar 'with no middle flight' (line 14). Yet Milton also intended his epic to carry out 'things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime' (line 16), which Moody's domestic mock-epic certainly is. Even when she is claiming that her topic is appropriate for epic, recalling Eve playing host to Raphael in Book V of *Paradise Lost* and the Greek warriors cooking in Book IX of *The Iliad*, the obscurity of her examples actually calls attention to the lack of epics on domesticity, and the lack of value which society placed on a housewife's labour.

Much as in *The Rape of the Lock*, the reader is introduced to the housewife as she begins her day. Instead of waking late from a delightful dream surrounded by Sylphs, as Belinda does, the housewife (whose name we never learn) wakes early while her servants take the Belinda role. Sleep 'wraps the snoring maids in gossip dreams of sweet / Hearts, shows, and fairs' (lines 25-26), while elsewhere upper-class ladies dream:

Sleep on ye idle fair ye time
 Destroyers! Who live to dress, and flaunt,
 And flirt, and waste your silly lives 'midst scenes
 Of dissipation! This useful maid to deeds
 Of more importance gives her day. (lines 32-35)

Both upper and lower classes dream of social occasions, while the housewife, with middle-class labour before her, wakes alone, and clings to pride in her 'deeds / of more importance.' The line breaks that interrupt 'sweet-hearts,' 'time-destroyers,' and 'deeds of ... importance' emphasize the gap in which this housewife lives. The gap is between

high and low – between the upper and lower classes, between idleness and punishingly hard labour – just as is the middling-class housewife's daily labour.

Deploying a georgic mode, the poem turns to the housewife's daily tasks: feeding chickens, churning butter, and planning meals for Christmas. As is traditional for a georgic, the poem describes each task in some detail, using heroic terms to illustrate the work's importance. As a critic, Moody was of course aware of the history of the eighteenth-century georgic. Yet her poem draws on the authority of epics (*Paradise Lost* and *The Iliad*) rather than of georgics, and shows the housewife as both creator and destroyer. Her choice to call her poem 'heroic' rather than 'georgic' indicates that she is creating something that resides between the two forms.

The housewife's first task is to feed her poultry: a nurturing act well suited to traditional notions of femininity. Moody presents her as a brutal figure, however, and at the same time uses elevated language to mock that brutality. Wryly observing that, if not fed, the flock would die—'which she, I trust, a sore mischance would deem' (lines 70-71)—Moody describes the housewife speeding to 'the Poultry Court' (lines 72-73) far different from a royal court. The chickens and turkey with 'maws protruberant' (line 74) are 'pris'ners / kept for Luxury's repast' (lines 67-68) which are 'nourish'd / by violence and cruel art' (lines 73-74) and which '[loathe] the hand which ministers to life' (lines 77-78). Fattening the animals to be killed for food, the housewife is 'calm Spectat'ress / Of the woes she makes' (lines 78-79), force-feeding them and choosing those who will die ('signs the warrant / that shall end their pains' [lines 84-85]). Far from a traditional woman labouring to feed her family, the housewife is a torturer of animals, and the author of their death. This scene, which combines horror and comedy, is a pointed rebuttal of the traditional image of gentle womanhood. Constantia Grierson's poem 'To Miss Laetitia Van Lewen' (later Laetitia Pilkington) contrasts rural housewifery with

Dublin social life in a plea for her friend to return to Dublin. She begins by claiming that birds will swim and whales fly when Van Lewen can enjoy herself in the country,

And with some serious Matron gravely talk
Of Possets, Poultrices, and Waters still'd,
And monstrous Casks with Mead and Cider fill'd;
How many Hives of Bees she has in Store ...
... feed the chickens from your bounteous Hand:
Of each one's Top-knot tell, and hatching pry,
Like Tully waiting for an Augury. (lines 6-9, 12-14)

The references to home remedies and to home brewing recall Egerton's complaint about her pen being used for recipes and housewifery, while the bees represent an allusion to *The Georgics* (an entire book of which is devoted to bee-keeping). The reference to Van Lewen as watching her chickens as closely as 'Tully,' Marcus Tullius Cicero, did his augury, suggests great knowledge used for little gain. Grierson describes Van Lewen dining 'with a great Crowd, choice Meat, and little Wit' (line 16), offering a classic contrast between the witty and educated society in town and the coarser offerings of country life. Moody's poem, on the other hand, merges the two worlds: the heroic housewife is educated but also brutal, and – much as Moody's rural farming conflicted with her bookish background – the housewife's world is in conflict with itself.

Next, and without a stanza break to distinguish the two sections, the housewife is in the dairy, churning butter in a delicate passage that uses imagery of milk and reproduction to emphasize the housewife's femininity (and recall the earlier *Paradise Lost* allusion):

[with] unweary'd toil she churns, till
To a firm consistence it is wrought...
...the tiny pats she prints,
And in a china vase, fill'd with clear water
From pellucid spring, her workmanship deposits.
(lines 88-93)

Suddenly, the housewife is a creator, not a killer, and her work is described with the sincere admiration one might expect from a georgic – yet just a few lines before she was

strangling mock-epic ‘feather’d / Monsters’ whose open mouths recalled *The Odyssey*’s Scylla and Charybdis. Yet the passage also recalls John Gay’s burlesque ‘Friday; or The Dirge,’ in which Bumkinet mourns for Blouzelinda by recalling her work in the dairy: ‘Sometimes, like Wax, she rolls the Butter round, / Or with the wooden Lilly prints the Pound’ (lines 59-60). Again, the poem shifts between two registers, mimicking the way this housewife’s day modulates between brutality (the killing of the chickens) and gentle artistry (the butter).

At the end of ‘The Housewife,’ more is promised, but not delivered. The speaker claims the next canto will give more details of the housewife’s day, but the poem breaks off before that canto. ‘The housewife’s toils an ample theme supply’ (line 131) the narrator assures us, but then fails to demonstrate that ampleness. Given the many Miltonic allusions in this poem, it seems possible that Moody had in mind a rejoinder to Johnson’s criticism of *Paradise Lost* in *The Lives of the Poets*: that

Paradise Lost is one of the books which the reader admires and lays down, and forgets to take up again. None ever wished it longer than it is. Its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure. We read Milton for instruction, retire harassed and overburdened, and look elsewhere for recreation; we desert our master, and seek for companions.²³⁵

Moody seems to imply that she has found in domestic duties a subject for which her reader might wish her poem longer – but she further allies herself with Milton by ending her narrative when she does. Finishing with the false note ‘O days of Albion! Happier far I ween, / When Woman’s knowledge own’d its boundary *here!*’ (lines 133-134), the poem concludes with the demarcation of a boundary. Wellington rightly points out that ‘The Housewife’ ‘leaves the reader teetering on the equivocal, ironic note characteristic

²³⁵ Samuel Johnson and John Mullan (ed.), *The Lives of the Poets: A Selection* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 108.

of this housewife/poet's engagement with the contradictions of her state.'²³⁶ The mock-heroic passages here reinforce the dual nature of the subject matter, a subtle irony in that the form Moody is using usually violates the principle of form matching content.

As Johns-Putra's essay observes, the 'gap' or contrast between low and high, domesticity and heroic poetry, is particularly fruitful. Yet it also causes some problems of interpretation: an ironic poem about domesticity by a female writer may easily be confused with a sincere one. In Moody's case, this seems at times to be a deliberate strategy, allowing the poet to insert social commentary into poems that seemed, to some critics at least, to be celebrations of the domestic.²³⁷ As a married woman writer and critic who only married at age 40, Moody had both the education to understand the domestic debate and a quotidian relationship with domestic labour. Like Leapor's mock-pastorals, Moody's poems about housewifery resist easy categorisation: they present not only the comic struggle between intelligence and the domestic, but also a sympathetic sense of the multiple concerns her characters face. This is particularly evident when Moody uses the character 'Sappho,' a projection of the poet herself.

'Sappho Burns Her Books'

As a young woman, Moody was part of a coterie that included the writer George Hardinge, and several of her poems appear in Hardinge's *Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse* (1818). In two of these, she refers to herself as Sappho; Hardinge calls her Sappho (and himself Phaeon) in a series of verse exchanges. Moody uses the name in two more ambitious poems, 'Sappho Burns Her Books and Cultivates the Culinary Arts' and 'The Temptation; or, Satan in the Country.' In both, Sappho is an educated woman

²³⁶ Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody*, p. 46.

²³⁷ Johns-Putra, p. 68.

who nevertheless does foolish things. By turning her wit on herself, Moody complicates her commentary; rather than the removed and superior satirist, she presents herself as part of flawed humanity.

In 'Sappho, Tempted by the Prophecy, Burns Her Books and Cultivates the Culinary Arts,' Moody brings Pope, Achilles, and other great figures into the kitchen as part of the debate about a woman's proper place. The poem responds to 'Miss R.P.,' who in a previous poem told her that she would never find a husband unless she set aside her literary pursuits and learnt to cook. The situation recalls poems such as Elizabeth Thomas' 'On Sir J____ S____ saying in a Sarcastic Manner, My Books would make me Mad, An Ode,' in which domestic tasks and education are set up as mutually exclusive:

Unhappy Sex! how hard's our Fate,
By Customs Tyranny confin'd
To foolish Needle-work, and Chat,
Or such like Exercise as that,
But still deny'd th' Improvement of our Mind!
'Women!' Men cry, 'alas, poor Fools!
'What are they but domestick Tools? (lines 1-7)²³⁸

Thomas draws a familiar contrast between the books of the title and traditional 'women's work' such as needlework and visiting. The image of woman (in man's view) as nothing more than a 'domestic tool' is striking, leaving the reader in no doubt about the value Thomas places on education – and the stifling role of the domestic. Thomas' poem is didactic, making a strident claim for women's education; her speaker demands education and repudiates the domestic. Moody's poem, on the other hand, uses allusion and mock-heroic to suggest that the domestic and the literary are not exclusive. In another poem, Grundy points out, Thomas describes a man who 'looks forward to forcing his wife,

²³⁸ Roger Lonsdale, *Eighteenth Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 40. All subsequent references to Thomas' poetry are to Lonsdale.

when he has one, to burn her books.'²³⁹ It seems possible Moody had Thomas in mind when she wrote 'Sappho Burns Her Books and Cultivates the Culinary Arts.'

Like Thomas' poem, 'Sappho Burns Her Books' begins with social pressure on Sappho to give up her books and embrace domesticity, but ends by dragging the literary world into the domestic. Sappho first burns her books, an action reminiscent of Book I of *The Dunciad*, in which the goddess Dulness' chosen king (first Lewis Theobald; later Colley Cibber) decides to give up poetry and attempts to burn his books (the goddess extinguishes the sacrificial pyre). Moody allying Sappho with the king of the dunces may at first seem an indication of a wry self-effacement, but it is Sappho's book-burning and abandonment of poetry is foolish – not Sappho's poetry itself. Unlike Theobald/Cibber's volumes, Sappho's books have been read: in the first ten lines of her poem, she alludes to Italian poets Giovanni Battista Guarini, Dante Alighieri, Francesco Petrarch, Torquato Tasso, and Ludovico Ariosto as beloved friends, and the books as 'companions of my favourite hours' (line 1). She continues:

I saw you on the pile expire,
Weeping I saw the invading fire;
There fixed remained my aching sight,
Till the last ray of parting light
The last pale flame consumed away,
And all dissolved your relics lay. (lines 11-16)²⁴⁰

While Pope's anti-hero is interrupted by the goddess Dulness, Sappho still has to invoke her goddess. The poem shifts into an appeal to the Goddess of the Culinary Arts. Sappho begs to be made into a housewife:

Goddess of Culinary Art,
Now take possession of my heart!
Teach me more winning arts to try,
To salt the ham, to mix the pie. (lines 17-20)

²³⁹ Grundy, 'The Poet as Poetess,' p. 258.

²⁴⁰ Lonsdale, *Eighteenth Century Women's Poetry*, p. 406. All subsequent references to this poem are to Lonsdale.

Sappho asks the goddess to steal her affection from literature and direct her attention toward cooking. Yet when she envisions her ultimate goal, it is not in a purely domestic sphere; instead, the literary world has come to populate Sappho's kitchen. Moody shifts the terms of the debate between creating literature and cooking food: when Sappho has turned completely to the domestic, she says, other literary figures join her:

When sweetest numbers she'll despise,
 When Pope shall sing beneath *minc'd pies*
 And Eloise in her tin shall mourn,
 Disastrous fate and love forlorn;
 Achilles too, that godlike man,
 Shall bluster in the *patty-pan*;
 And many a once-lov'd Grecian chief,
 Shall guard from flames the roasting beef. (lines 41-48)

The final two lines refer to the Greek warriors roasting beef in *The Iliad*, but Moody's play with great men goes further here, putting Alexander Pope into a mince pie and trapping his tragic heroine Eloisa in a kitchen tin. The allusion to Eloisa is particularly apt; she was imprisoned for a forbidden love, as Sappho is imprisoned in the kitchen for her love of writing. As Eloisa tried to replace her love of Abelard with love for God, Sappho tries to substitute love of the domestic for her love of learning. Ultimately, Moody tells us, Sappho's efforts will fail. She cannot grow to love cooking as she does writing, and cooking will not gain her a husband:

When girt in towels she is seen,
 With cuffs to keep her elbows clean:
 Then Sorceress she'll call on thee!
 Accomplish thou thy fair decree!
 If like your sisters of the heath,
 Whose mystic sound betray'd Macbeth;
 Fallacious charms your arts dispense,
 To cheat her with ambiguous sense;
 Severest torments may you prove!
Severest ---disappointed love. (lines 51-60)

Like Macbeth's witches, the goddess of culinary arts is a deceiver; and Sappho has been fooled by 'ambiguous sense.' Her torment is that of 'disappointed love' – both in not finding the love promised by Miss R.P., and in not being satisfied by the domestic realm.

The effect of this end to the poem is two-fold: Moody demonstrates that simply burning books will not make an intelligent woman into a housewife, and she allies herself with both classical heroes and Pope as they join Sappho in the kitchen. Telling a female poet to stop reading and writing, Moody implies, is as ridiculous as expecting Pope and Achilles to embrace a solely domestic life. Moody's mock-heroic here underscores her larger critique of the domestic role in 'Sappho Burns Her Books;' in 'The Temptation; or Satan in the Country,' it enables her to bring questions of commerce and religious tolerance to bear on a country card-party.

The Temptation

In 'The Temptation; or, Satan in the Country,' Satan tempts Moody's alter ego Sappho to pass a bad shilling in the course of a card game. Moody introduces the poem thus: 'The trifling Incident of a Lady having paid a Card Debt, very undesignedly, with a bad Shilling, gave rise to this Poem.'²⁴¹ She indicates at the outset that she is elevating the 'trifling,' the circulation of a bad shilling, to the epic: a struggle with Satan himself. Again, she is working with the mock-heroic. At the outset, the poem alludes to *Paradise Lost* with its subject matter of Satan tempting a woman; but Sappho is seduced, not into eating an apple or even sexual indiscretion, but into passing a false coin. Moody wrote this poem at a fragile time for the British economy: the American Revolution had brought trade with the colonies to an end, and as the war raged on, the national debt

²⁴¹ Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody*, p. 160. All further references to this poem are to Wellington.

mounted. As Paul Langford notes, war took a toll on the country as well as the city: 'High land taxes as well as multiplying excises in wartime ensured that landowners suffered along with ordinary consumers,' and after a catastrophic harvest year in 1779 'it was widely believed that the landed interest suffered even more than others.'²⁴² Moody's setting her poem in the country calls attention to the effects of commercial trouble on the country as well as the city; her focus on a bad shilling emphasizes the tenuous nature of currency, probably still a public concern since the recoinage of 1773-76.²⁴³ Placing a shilling at the centre of the poem both recalls 'The Splendid Shilling' and introduces Moody's use of the mock-heroic: 'The Temptation' chronicles an epic struggle centred around a worthless coin.

Satan's explanation of his powers also emphasizes the mock-heroic juxtaposition of small and large, trivial and important, and the way that attention turns one into the other:

Satan reply'd---Each infant crime,
If left to me matures with time.
I make each plant of evil shoot,
Unnumber'd suckers from its root;
And oft in cottages I find
In embryo many a demon's mind,
Which foster'd by my genial care;
Mischiefs in ev'ry form doth bear. (lines 66-72)

Satan, then, has the power to transcend triviality: inspiring even a small crime satisfies him, because that crime will lead to greater sin. Moody thus implicates Sappho, not just in the small transgression of passing a bad shilling, but in larger crimes to come. She also raises the stakes on the pastoral: instead of a city gentleman visiting the country, as in traditional pastorals (as well as responses such as Mary Leapor's 'Mira's Picture'), it is Satan himself. Meanwhile, the world of the poem is not the idyllic one of traditional

²⁴² Paul Langford, *A Polite and Commercial People: England, 1727-1783*, (Oxford: Clarendon / Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 633.

²⁴³ Langford, p. 569.

pastoral; it includes the civil unrest that disturbed the country while Moody was writing. Satan has left London, 'Of its stale follies weary grown / Since riot, discord, conflagration / Have giv'n place to dissipation' (lines 77-79). A footnote from the poet indicates that 'The Temptation' was written 'soon after the Riots in London, in the year 1781.' This is presumably a reference to the Gordon Riots in 1780, in which MP George Gordon's peaceful protest against the Catholic Relief Act of 1778 grew into a week of anti-Catholic mayhem in which the Bank of England was attacked and Newgate Prison burned.²⁴⁴ The riots, Moody says, were the work of Satan – but now that they are over he has decided to take on a 'nobler conquest' (line 10) in the country – specifically, Twickenham, where Alexander Pope built his villa and to which Moody also claimed allegiance. Yet the sins of the country remain. Satan's local friend describes the country's sinners as 'paltry criminals' (line 54) committing 'venial sins ... the harmless perjuries of love ... the gossip's entertaining lie ... little pilferings at Quadrille' (lines 55, 56, 60, 63). It is this last that the poem will describe, with Sappho as Satan's target:

Who boasts superior honest fame:
 Condemns mean practices of play,
 Nor hoards the fish she ought to pay;
 Observant of each sacred rule. (lines 117-120)

The passage continues with a claim for Sappho's humility and pleasure in the simple life. But her word choice undercuts this description: Sappho 'boasts' honesty and her own 'superior' fame, revealing the sin of pride in her own morality. Later, Satan will play on this pride to tempt her to pass the shilling.

When he arrives at the card-game, Satan lurks invisibly in the room, like the Sylphs in *The Rape of the Lock*. Under his influence, the room collects evil: innocents have lusty thoughts and honest women start to lie. The lies take on a life of their own as

²⁴⁴ Langford, p. 551.

other honest women 'those lies collect to tell again' (line 153). This commerce in lies will soon be echoed by Satan's temptation to Sappho. He hovers over her as Satan (disguised as a toad) did over the sleeping Eve in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, (and as, later, the Sylphs hover over Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock*). Satan whispers something that makes Sappho blush. But Satan is not flirting with her; he is encouraging her to put her bad shilling into the pot. Moody offers Sappho as an Eve figure, passing the shilling to someone else (who may repeat her sin by passing the counterfeit coin on again). Indeed, one of Satan's arguments depends upon the idea that Sappho's transgression will be repeated:

... Claire no injury will sustain;
Th'imposter may return again,
Through the same channel win its way,
And fluctuate on the tide of play. (lines 190-193)

Since the shilling will be passed along like the gossips' lies in the previous section, Satan suggests that its harm will be dispersed among the players, ultimately rendering the false coin benign. If her victim repeats her sin, Satan tells Sappho, the coin will continue travelling among the players according to who wins. Moreover, she will be teaching the winner (who will receive the bad shilling) a lesson:

Besides, the action you intend
Must needs promote a moral end.
The love of play from avarice springs,
A thirst for wealth its ardor brings;
Profit like this might cure the *passion*,
Or moderate its growing fashion. (lines 195-200)

Satan is playing on Sappho's pride, here, suggesting that she could be a moral force for good by punishing those who love to win. Sappho is caught by Satan's false logic because she does not use her reason to evaluate his argument: 'Thus with false reason, false pretence, / He fascinates her erring sense' (lines 201-202). Sappho, then, is an example of coming to grief by poor use of the intellect, and of the viral nature of

ignorance (though the images of gossip and coins). Yet the fact that Sappho is Moody herself – the way that Moody places herself in her poems as a flawed and comic figure – adds a certain sympathy to the tale, as well as reminding the reader that, although she may have misused her intellect in the act of passing the shilling, she has also used it well in reflecting on the incident and the lessons to be learned from it. Moody's presentation of herself as a woman who makes mistakes allows her to transcend female folly and to create a character who is fully-formed, flawed yet ultimately moral.

As soon as it leaves the gaming-table, of course, the shilling will be used for 'real' commerce, and the harm that flits from player to player without injury will land on someone when the coin's falseness is discovered. Here, Moody makes a larger point about commerce. The damage of lies, too, will increase as the gossip Satan's presence inspired spreads; likewise, the risk associated with the shilling spreads to everyone who touches it. When Satan plays on Sappho's pride by encouraging her to deliver a moral lesson to the card-players, he does so in the language of speculation: '*Profit* like this might cure the *passion*, / Or moderate its growing fashion' (lines 198-199; emphasis is Moody's). Hence a poem that purports to be about a weak moment during a country card-game is set against a background of riots in London and a tenuous economy. In 'The Temptation,' Moody's mock-heroic elevates the discourse of the country, claiming for rural society an interest in larger events, and for herself the right to comment on issues greater than the question of whether to use a bad shilling to pay a gaming debt. Moody's confidence in writing about public concerns and public figures is typified in her writing about Joseph Priestley, the Dissenting minister, educator and scientist who also inspired poems by Anna Letitia Barbauld and others.

Dissenting Connections

Elizabeth Moody was christened in the Church of England. Yet she married a Dissenting minister and participated in Dissenting literary circles with her husband and *Monthly Review* editor Ralph Griffiths. Mary Waters points out that *The Monthly Review* offered a forum in which Moody and Barbauld were able to launch careers as literary critics within a framework of ‘familial collaboration’ that Waters posits grew out of the circles of middle-class Rational Dissent in which both writers moved: ‘partly because of their status as a separate culture, one deeply grounded in sociability and domesticity, Dissenters relied on collaboration and familial enterprise in their economic pursuits.’²⁴⁵ It would be too much to say that Moody’s (and Barbauld’s) mock-heroic writings on domesticity were a direct result of their Dissenting roots, but it is interesting to note that Joseph Priestley wrote about the form and that both were probably aware of this essay.

In 1777, Priestley published *Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, a collection of lectures on rhetoric and aesthetics. ‘Lecture XXV: Of Burlesque, Parody, the Mock-Heroic, Humour, and Irony’ posits that mock-heroic is the basis of most humour. Priestley defines humour as ‘every thing that is diverting, under the appearance of gravity’ and says that humour and irony must ‘both be allowed to be of the nature of the mock-heroic,’ although used in conversation rather than verse.²⁴⁶ Far from dismissing it as a Restoration device in decline, Priestley sees mock-heroic as a powerful rhetorical tool. Like parody and burlesque (or ‘ridicule’), to Priestley mock-heroic has the capacity to denigrate ideas and authors that ought to be taken seriously, but also to elevate its ordinary subject:

This transition [from low topic to high style] ... lays the mind open to the same species of pleasure (arising from contrast) with the pleasures of ridicule; with this difference

²⁴⁵ Mary Waters, *British Women Writers and the Profession of Literary Criticism, 1789-1832*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 139, 12.

²⁴⁶ Joseph Priestley, *Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (London, 1777), p. 218.

in effect, that, in this case, the low object being that to which the mind hath been attentive, and consequently that to which it will refer all the related ideas that arise in the scene in which it is introduced, will have an air of grandeur and importance given to it, by being exhibited in the same light with the sublime object. It is true that, as in the case of ridicule, the sublime object is liable to be degraded by the same means; but not being kept so long in sight, the effect is more transient.²⁴⁷

To Priestley, mock-heroic is burlesque's better half, elevating its subject matter through comparison with a 'sublime object' and sparing that sublime object most of the negative connotations with which burlesque and parody would burden it. To confuse mock-heroic with the burlesque, then, is 'a great offence against propriety.'²⁴⁸ Priestley's very serious consideration of humorous forms was only one among many lectures in the book, and his publication only one among the more than 150 books, pamphlets, and papers in journals he had published by the end of his life.²⁴⁹ Yet it seems likely that Moody and Barbauld had read the lecture. Moody wrote two poems to Priestley that demonstrate her familiarity with his work; moreover, the mock-heroic tone of her writing suggests that she understood the impact of the form.

Like Barbauld, Moody wrote poems addressing Joseph Priestley. Unlike Barbauld, there is no evidence that Moody knew Priestley personally. Yet her work shares so much with Barbauld's that the more prominent poet must at least have been an important figure in the development of her career. Moody's poem 'To Dr. Priestley; on His Publication Entitled A Disquisition Relating to Matter and Spirit' is dated 1791 in *Poetic Trifles*, and responds to a 1777 work which shocked many of Priestley's followers, in which he claimed that the soul was immaterial and therefore could not be understood by man, and which led to his being denounced as an atheist. 'To Dr.

²⁴⁷ Priestley, *Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, pp. 215-216.

²⁴⁸ Priestley, *Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, p. 220.

²⁴⁹ Robert E. Schofield, 'Priestley, Joseph (1733-1804)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edn, Sept 2013.

Priestley' might be considered as ridicule in that she writes of his serious philosophical work in lively octosyllabics, but ultimately it is a defense of Priestley: his thoughts and teachings, she argues, are so transcendent that they cannot have been created by mere matter, and therefore he must have a soul.

Then pr'ythee, Doctor, cease contending,
In metaphysics never ending;
For know---in spite of thy controul,
Thy readers say---thou hast a soul. (lines 6-10)

The poem seems simple, but Moody is engaging in a complicated theological debate about the nature of the soul, as well as defending Priestley in a year (1791) when his home and church were burned to the ground, along with those of many of his parishioners, in the Priestley Riots in Birmingham. Much like Barbauld in 'To Mr. S.T. Coleridge,' Moody warns her subject against too much philosophy. In Barbauld's poem, the older poet likewise figures metaphysical inquiry as only a part of intellectual inquiry, not a place for a poet to 'rest':

Youth beloved
Of Science---of the Muse beloved,---not here,
Not in the maze of metaphysic lore,
Build thou thy place of resting! (lines 32-35)

Barbauld's poem is more ambitious, but the underlying arguments of the two poems are similar: claiming for their addressees a spiritual life beyond that which the men claim for themselves.²⁵⁰ Is it possible that Moody's 'To Dr. Priestley' influenced 'To Mr. Coleridge'? Given the scope of Barbauld's work and reputation by the end of the century, and their mutual connections in Dissenting circles, it's inconceivable that Moody would not have been influenced by Barbauld. But might Barbauld have read

²⁵⁰ Barbauld wrote a poem directly to Priestley the following year; 'To Dr. Priestley. Dec. 29, 1792,' refers to the ongoing controversy surrounding Priestley, who had by then left Birmingham for London, but continued to condemn the riots and the government's failure to protect its citizens. Barbauld notes that many of Priestley's fellow clergymen failed to defend him, and posits that eventually his country will regret its treatment of him.

Moody's poem before publication, and expanded on it in her poem to Coleridge?

Barbauld's poem was published, unsigned, in *The Monthly Magazine* in April 1799, after Moody's *Poetic Trifles* (1798), but a manuscript copy is dated 1797, the same date that appears on the poem in Barbauld's posthumous *Collected Works* (1825).²⁵¹ Moody's poem, dated 1791 in *Poetic Trifles*, almost certainly came first. Although there is no definitive evidence that the two poets met, Moody predated Barbauld at *The Monthly Review*,²⁵² and it is possible that they met through their mutual friend Ralph Griffiths.

Barbauld paid a price for her public career, and particularly for the overt political commentary of her Juvenalian satire *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. Her reputation was reduced to that of an educator and writer of books for children until the end of the twentieth century, when her work was re-assessed by contemporary scholars. With the literary climate still so ambivalent about women, it is understandable that Moody ensconced her commentary in the trappings of light verse. Yet her second poem to Priestley, 'The Rose, for Dr. Priestley' again takes on larger questions, this time of men and women, science and poetry.

Priestley was known, not just for theological debate, but also for serious scientific study; indeed, he is credited with the discovery of oxygen.²⁵³ In 'The Rose; To Dr. Priestley,' Moody uses a rose from Priestley's experiments with oxygen to discuss the dilemma of women with power. The rose responds to Priestley's discovery that, in Moody's words, 'a Rose kept under a glass jar had in a short time so infected the air as to render it unfit for respiration.'²⁵⁴ The rose defends herself using allusions to Homer,

²⁵¹ Anna Letitia Barbauld; William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (eds), *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* (Athens, Ga.: The University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 296.

²⁵² William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 98.

²⁵³ Robert E. Schofield, 'Priestley, Joseph (1733–1804)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Sept 2013.

²⁵⁴ Wellington, *The Poetry and Prose of Elizabeth Moody*, p. 145. All subsequent references to this poem are to Wellington.

Milton, Montagu, and Thomas Gray. Moody reminds the reader that, in *Paradise Lost*, ‘my blooming race th’immortal bard has sung / that first in groves of Paradise we grew’ (lines 5-6) with mock-Miltonic inversion underscoring her allusion. The subject-verb inversion continues in the rose’s reminder about one of Homer’s best-known epic similes, from *The Odyssey*: ‘The radiant morn with rosy fingers see’ (line 12) as well as the rose’s reference to herself as ‘an exile I from this luxuriant shore’ (line 31). Moody’s combination of Homeric and Miltonic elements intensifies the mock-heroic effect, and in the next line she makes reference to Thomas Gray’s ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,’ as the rose envisions her fate: ‘On barren mountains may my odours waste’ (line 33). Just as in Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s eclogue ‘Saturday: The Small Pox: Flavia,’ Flavia mourns the loss of her complexion (and her social power) to smallpox, the rose mourns that Priestley’s discovery has robbed her of attention and admiration:

No more of Summer’s chosen bowers the pride ...
 No more on Beauty’s snowy breast reside! ...
 No more shall Luxury to give me birth
 Raise the warm pile excluding winter’s cold (lines 33, 35,
 41-42).²⁵⁵

Like ‘Defence of Wit,’ this poem refigures poems such as John Gay’s ‘The Toilette’ and Thomas Parnell’s ‘Elegy to an Old Beauty’ that depict a woman mourning her loss of power (in the guise of youthful beauty). Yet in this poem the rose gains a different kind of power: her depletion of oxygen places her in the company of dangerous plants:

With Night-shade, Hellebore and Aconite;
 Whose noxious juice contains the livid death?
 Who lurk in deserts far from mortal sight;
 Nor blend with Flora’s sweets their tainted breath?
 (lines 25-28).

²⁵⁵ Montagu’s eclogue repeats “no more” at the end of most stanzas: (line 14), ‘Now Beautie’s [sic] fled, and Presents are no more’ (line 27), ‘Now Beauty’s fled, and Lovers are no more’ (line 40), ‘Beauty is fled, and Dress is now no more’ (line 54), ‘My Beauty fled, and Empire now no more’ (line 64), etc. Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity*, pp. 202-203.

While the rose is offended by this comparison, it offers her a power that Leapor's 'Dorinda' and others lack, as does the new life she envisions by the end of the poem. Like the labourers buried in Gray's churchyard, the rose will live 'remote from science in the unletter'd plain / Where no philosopher our fame assails' (lines 49-50), and will 'grateful pleasure still impart' through her fragrance. This retreat from science, and learning in general, will offer the rose a sort of new Eden, 'Where unreproach'd still bloom the vernal train' (line 51). This vision is a happy one for the rose, but it underscores the conflict Moody sees between learning and feminine beauty. If the rose wishes to be admired, she must retreat from the literate world; if she wishes instead to choose the power Priestley's discovery offers her, she must give up the appreciation she gained from her beauty. A woman with power, then, must hide from those who know about her power, or be reviled as unfeminine. It is notable that Moody sets up this tension between learning and affection, despite the fact that she had found a partner who supported her literary endeavours: Moody is writing not only about her personal experience, but more generally about women's place in her world. Moody's writing on domesticity is some of her finest mock-heroic work; the juxtaposition between education and a woman's position in the household offers excellent opportunities for satire. In her work, mock-heroic became not merely a form or an occasional discourse, but a frequent rhetorical device, enabling the poet to write about a range of social and political issues while demonstrating her education and her poetic accomplishments. The fact that Moody's work with the form went all but unrecognized by critics during her lifetime makes further examination of women's use of mock-heroic all the more important.

Chapter Five

Anna Letitia Barbauld

The question of Anna Letitia Barbauld's place in literary history is at times contested: William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft note that she 'can claim to be a founder of British Romanticism,' while Susan Rosenbaum observes that she 'has been seen as an anachronistic throwback to eighteenth-century neoclassical writers.'²⁵⁶ In the rush to classify this complicated poet, scholars may be forced to ignore one aspect or another of Barbauld's work.²⁵⁷ Unlike William Cowper -- whose writing is variously seen as conversational, occasional, religious, sublime, and mock-heroic -- until recently Barbauld was approached in a one-dimensional light. While much of her work's richness and complexity has been studied by recent critics, not enough attention has been paid to her early mock-heroic experimentation, which informs her complex approach to a range of topics, including women's labour and writing. Indeed, the mock-heroic attitude, and its ability to contain or even resolve seeming contradictions, offers the opportunity to further set both Barbauld and her writing in new contexts.

Until relatively recently, Barbauld was best known as a writer of hymns and books for children and about children's education; with the publication of scholarship by William McCarthy and others about her poetry, critical understanding of her importance has been restored. She declined the opportunity to start a school for girls and wrote some poems, such as 'The Rights of Women,' that might be seen as anti-feminist. Her poetry deals with ideas of the sublime, and she was an inspiration to both William Wordsworth

²⁵⁶ Anna Letitia Barbauld, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, (Peterborough, Ont.; Ormskirk: Broadview Press, 2002), p. 11; Susan Rosenbaum, "'A Thing Unknown, without a Name': Anna Laetitia Barbauld and the Illegible Signature," *Studies in Romanticism* Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall, 2001), 369-399, p. 372.

²⁵⁷ For a further discussion of the various ways Barbauld has been categorized, especially as a feminist or an anti-feminist, see Rosenbaum, pp. 369-373.

and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, among others.²⁵⁸ Yet she also writes stridently, and with great humour, about some of the complexities of women's lives addressed by other authors in this dissertation: in particular, the gap between expectations and reality. Barbauld inspired both William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who once travelled forty miles to meet her – until he later turned against her and famously spent years attacking her privately, publicly, and in print.²⁵⁹ Throughout her career, she wrote poems that should be read as mock-heroic in form or tone – or both. In order to understand Barbauld's work and the work of women whom she inspired, it is crucial to pay attention to the irony in her writing, and the mock-heroic strains in her poetry.

Although she and her work are both well known to scholars at this point, no sustained study has been made of the mock-heroic strain in Barbauld's work. Known as the redoubtable 'Mrs. Barbauld' – a highly-educated teacher, writer of hymns and poems for children, literary critic, and editor of the letters of Samuel Richardson – Barbauld does not at first seem to belong with the other writers in this dissertation. She is neither as lively as Leapor nor as earthy as Jones; nor, though they share some biographical details, as strident as Moody. Yet she, too, wrote mock-heroic poems. The fact that this emblem of what might be termed 'woman's proper sphere' – a writer of books for children, books about educating children, and devotional texts – also used mock-heroic to approach domestic matters is good reason to consider women's use of the form: Barbauld's work proves that even a woman whose poems were sincere and sentimental approached her work with the eye of an ironist, with an understanding of the tensions between education and domesticity, between poetry and daily life.

²⁵⁸ William McCarthy, 'Barbauld [née Aikin], Anna Letitia [Anna Laetitia] (1743-1825),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [Accessed January 2019; online version updated May 2016]

²⁵⁹ William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), pp. ix, xiv-xv, 186.

The daughter of John Aikin, a Dissenting minister who taught at Warrington Academy, Barbauld learned Latin, French, and Italian from her father, as well as some Greek.²⁶⁰ As we will see, she was intimately familiar with classical literature. Barbauld was well-placed, then, to practice mock-heroic. As is clear both from her poetry and from the work of critics such as Mary Waters, Barbauld gained confidence from the collaborative environment of the academy where she grew up and the group of Dissenting scholars in which she moved as an adult. The coterie nature of her writing to others in her circle, and especially poems written for Joseph Priestley and his wife, seems to have led naturally to mock-heroic occasional poems. These are both funny and classically inspired, and often use the double nature of mock-heroic to present several facets of a complicated debate. An examination of these early poems, which establishes Barbauld's debt to mock-heroic and her wry sense of humour, offers new understandings of some of Barbauld's better-known poems, such as 'Washing-Day' and 'The Rights of Woman.'

Common References: Mock-Heroic at Warrington Academy

Born in 1743, Anna Letitia Aikin grew up among intellectuals, in the Dissenting academies where her father taught.²⁶¹ In 1758, the Rev. Aikin helped to found the Warrington Academy, where he taught classics until ill health forced his retirement in 1778.²⁶² Warrington was a highly intellectual school, sometimes called 'the Athens of the North' and 'may be considered the cradle of Unitarianism ... [and] formed during the

²⁶⁰ Turner, William, 'Mrs. Barbauld,' *The Newcastle Magazine* Vol. 4 Issue 4 (1825): pp. 183-6. Via ProQuest.

²⁶¹ Anna Letitia Aikin married Rochemont Barbauld in May 1774. I will refer to the poet as 'Barbauld' throughout this chapter, except when discussing specific biographical events that occurred before her marriage. Barbauld's middle name is sometimes spelled 'Laetitia,' but in this dissertation I follow the example of her biographer, William McCarthy, in spelling it 'Letitia.' William McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment* (Baltimore, Md: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

²⁶² 'John Aikin Sr (1713-1780),' in *Dissenting Academies Online: Database and Encyclopedia*, <http://dissacad.english.qmul.ac.uk/>, person ID 952.

twenty-nine years of its existence the centre of the liberal politics and the literary taste of the county of Lancashire,' according to Arthur Aikin Broadribb (the grandson of John Aikin Sr.) in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.²⁶³ The school is now considered to have been the best of Dissenting academies, and Richard Terry compares its staff and its rigor favorably with the Oxbridge universities, noting that the intellectual output of tutors at Warrington 'represents a convergence of intellectual talents in the humanities unmatched other than by the universities of the Scottish Enlightenment.'²⁶⁴ An account of the school in *The Monthly Repository* (vol. 8: 1813) by former pupil William Turner recalls Dr. Aikin's Saturday tutorials:

After the exercises were examined, he would generally turn to some of the finest passages of the English poets, Milton, Pope, Thomson, Young and Akenside; and, having first himself read a considerable portion, with singular propriety of tone and emphasis, he heard each of the students read in order, and freely, but good-humouredly, commented on their manner of reading, pointed out their defects, and the proper mode of remedying them. –This lecture was often the most satisfactory and improving of any in the whole week.²⁶⁵

It is easy to deduce the source of Barbauld's education and the ease with which she alludes to a wide variety of texts; but it is also easy to imagine the dismay she felt at being excluded from the academy where she grew up. McCarthy describes her as '[spending] her entire life thus far as a spectator of boys' and young men's opportunities, her nose pressed to the window ... she must have seen many young men in Warrington who were patently her intellectual inferiors but who nevertheless were offered, merely because they were male, the "luxury of thought."²⁶⁶ She expresses this frustration,

²⁶³ Richard Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past, 1660-1781* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 191; Leslie Stephen (ed.), *Dictionary of National Biography: Vol. I: Abbadie-Anne* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1885), p. 185.

²⁶⁴ Terry, *Poetry and the Making of the English Literary Past*, p. 191.

²⁶⁵ William Turner, (writing as V.F.) (1813), 'Historical Account of the Warrington Academy' in *Monthly Repository of Theology and General Literature, 1806-1826*, 8(87), 161-172, p. 169.

²⁶⁶ McCarthy, *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Voice of the Enlightenment*, pp. 86-87.

McCarthy surmises, through a variety of stances in her early poetry. Reading some of these poems with an understanding of the way that mock-heroic allows for contradiction offers some insight into the way the mock-heroic (both the form and the discourse) helped Barbauld explore the constraints of her life.

Although she could not attend the Academy, young Anna Aikin was very much a part of the Warrington community, as evinced by the many occasional poems she wrote to and about members of the academy – most notably, Joseph Priestley and his wife. She uses mock-heroic, like Leapor, to describe a community of support; unlike Leapor's community, hers is very real. Barbauld's early mock-heroic work is highly intertextual, full of classical references as well as nods to Shakespeare, Milton, John Philips, and Alexander Pope. These poems are a testament to the creativity that a well-read community may inspire. In 'The Groans of the Tankard,' Barbauld clearly writes for friends familiar with both her literary antecedents and the atmosphere of the academy and Dissenting communities in general. The poem describes the lament by a tankard at the school that it now holds water instead of alcohol: one day, during the midday meal, the tankard suddenly comes to life. Describing its previous life as a container for alcohol at various feasts and other gatherings, it laments that it is now 'fated to serve the Puritanick race.'²⁶⁷

Barbauld has been known for a gentle piety and commitment to the Dissenting community; yet McCarthy points out that "although she associated with Unitarians and was claimed by them, it is doubtful that she shared all their beliefs. Her churchgoing habits were eclectic, her religious attitude was liberal, and she valued devotional spirit over doctrine."²⁶⁸ In this poem she lightly mocks both the seriousness of the Unitarians

²⁶⁷ *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, pp. 61, 63.

²⁶⁸ McCarthy, 'Barbauld [née Aikin], Anna Letitia [Anna Laetitia] (1743-1825),' in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

of Warrington and those who might be dismayed at such seriousness. The references in the poem are a complex network of allusions to classical literature; the Bible; Shakespeare; and, of course, Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock*. This backdrop not only establishes that the young Barbauld is highly educated, but draws upon complicated ideas to make a claim of importance and relevance for the followers of Rational Dissent, and for Barbauld herself. William McCarthy has discussed Barbauld's use of this poem to lament the fact that, as a woman, she is excluded from the academy – just as the tankard is excluded from its past life as a vessel for ale in non-Dissenting circles. There is no doubt that one aspect of this poem is that lament – a non-ironic reading of the main text of the poem – and that another aspect is the mockery of those who would say that the tankard has reason to lament – an ironic reading of its complaint. What makes the poem interesting is Barbauld's play with both states of mind, and the more nuanced reading that comes out of their interplay. Keeping in mind the merging of low and high in mock-heroic can help to clarify this reading.

The epigraph 'Dulci Digne mero!' – or 'worthy of sweet wine' – introduces the subject matter and its complications. The line is from Horace's Ode 3.13, which praises a spring (while the tankard yearns for wine). This is followed by an invocation to the muse:

Of strange events I sing, and portents dire,
The wond'rous themes a reverent ear require;
Tho' strange the tale, the faithful Muse believe,
And what she says with pious awe receive. (lines 1-4)

The repetition of the word 'strange' and the mock-Milonic 'portents dire' prepare the reader for a mock-heroic poem, while Barbauld's use of 'reverent,' 'faithful,' and 'pious' signal a poem about religion. It is interesting to note the placement of the latter terms, near the end of the opening lines, and contrast them with the words in the first part of each line (emphasis mine):

Of <i>strange</i> events		I sing, and <i>portents</i> dire,
The <i>wond'rous</i> themes		a <i>reverent</i> ear require;
Tho' <i>strange</i> the tale,		the <i>faithful</i> Muse believe,
And <i>what she says</i>		with <i>pious awe</i> receive.

(lines 1-4)

The words after the midpoint of the invocation are devotional, while some of the phrases in which they appear are Miltonically inverted. This suggests not only a religious theme but the inversion of expectations. Certainly, the traditional poetic treatment of religion by a Dissenting female poet is inverted here. Yet the inversion extends to a reference from the words before the midpoint of the lines: 'strange ... wond'rous ... strange ... what she says.' Barbauld evokes Othello's speech about Desdemona here, in which he describes wooing the innocent maiden with stories about his life: 'She swore, I'faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange, / 'Twas pitiful, 'twas wond'rous pitiful' (*Othello*, I.3, lines 160-1).²⁶⁹ The sad irony of Shakespeare's original passage – that a wife who would later be falsely accused of infidelity is described as 'swearing in faith' – carries over into Barbauld's poem, in which a 'faithful Muse' is about to tell a fanciful story about a talking cup, and listeners are asked to hear it with 'pious awe.' One reading of this reference is straightforward: the maiden Anna Aikin references another innocent young woman, Desdemona, and in doing so establishes both personal integrity and literary authority. Yet Barbauld's inversions, and the contrast between the words around the midpoint of the lines, complicate the reference. The phrase 'what she says' near the end of the invocation does not only refer to the faithful muse, but also to Barbauld herself, who takes on Othello's role, telling stories to the listener to woo them. Barbauld is no passive, angelic Desdemona, weeping at a man's stories: she is the storyteller herself.

The tale of the poem is whimsical but simple: while at lunch one day, students

²⁶⁹ William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, 2nd ed., ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

hear the lament of a tankard ‘replenish’d to the brink / With the cool beverage blue-eyed Naiads drink’ (lines 17-18), which regrets that it no longer holds alcohol. Barbauld sets the scene with tightly contrasting images:

Tw’as at the solemn, silent, noon-tide hour,
When hunger rages with despotic power,
When the lean student quits his Hebrew roots
For the gross nourishment of English fruits,
And throws unfinish’d airy systems by
For solid pudding and substantial pye. (lines 5-10)

The contrast between ‘lean student’ and ‘gross nourishment,’ ‘airy systems’ and ‘solid pudding’ cements the idea that this poem’s contradictions are intentional. Barbauld signals the tankard’s mock-importance early, with the description of its mouth as ‘deep, capacious, vast, of ample size’ (line 16) and ‘its yawning mouth [disclosing] the deep profound’ (line 21). Like the baron’s altar of French romances in *The Rape of the Lock* (II, lines 35-46) and the new king of the dunces’ altar of books in Book I of *The Dunciad*, the enormity of the tankard, and the tankard’s contents (the ‘deep profound’) both beg for deflation – which comes when the tankard complains about holding water rather than alcohol on the academy’s table. Barbauld’s poem contains other references to Pope’s mock-epic, and responses to it, including a passage in which the tankard reflects on the ‘proper place’ for beverages such as coffee and tea:

Let China’s earth, enrich’d with colour’d stains,
Pencil’d with gold, and streak’d with azure veins,
The grateful flavour of the Indian leaf,
Or Mocho’s sunburnt berry glad receive. (lines 47-50)

This passage seems to reference *The Rape of the Lock*: ‘From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide, / While China’s earth receives the smoking Tyde’ (III, lines 109-110). As Ritchie Robertson observed about *The Rape of the Lock*, references to the distant origins of certain commodities represent a support for ‘international trade [as] an important means of civilization’ that strengthened ‘links between far-flung countries and [made]

war less attractive.²⁷⁰ Unlike the tea in Pope's mock-epic, the tankard emphasizes its place in Great Britain. The description of the tankard's different homes owes something to the 'it narratives' of the eighteenth century, which described the journeys of inanimate but circulating objects such as coins. John Philips' *The Splendid Shilling* inspired the first of these, Addison's *History of a Shilling*. Here, the tankard references the origins of both tea and coffee, but clings to a nationalistic identity with the emphasis on its being 'stamped with Britain's lofty crest' (line 60). As the tankard mourns having been put in 'a Presbyterian's power / Fated to serve the Puritanick race' (lines 62-63), Barbauld's mock-heroic circles back on itself in a meaningful way. Instead of Dissenters being isolated, away from the mainstream of British society, the narrow-minded tankard, celebrating Britishness to the exclusion of all others, is trapped in the service of the intellectual academy, clinging to an older version of the nation as its only claim to importance.

As a woman and a Dissenter, Barbauld was doubly excluded from the mainstream, and in 'The Groans of the Tankard' she uses the tankard's song to ally herself with Alexander Pope. The tankard laments its exclusion from mainstream tables as one who had been accustomed to inclusion. Grieving over its lost importance, the vessel dreams of being transported 'to some more genial scene / Where on soft cushions lolls the gouty Dean' (lines 69-70), or 'some spacious mansion, Gothic, old, / Where Comus sprightly train their vigils hold' (lines 75-76). This first refers to a description of courtly religious services in Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*: 'To rest, the soft Cushion and soft Dean invite / Who never mentions Hell to ears polite' (lines 149-150).²⁷¹ This reference associates the tankard with the Court and the aristocrats whom Pope scorns in

²⁷⁰ Ritchie Robertson, *Mock-Epic Poetry from Pope to Heine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 56.

²⁷¹ Fairer and Gerrard, p. 146.

the *Epistle to Burlington* – and therefore allies Barbauld and her Dissenting community with Pope. Meanwhile, by combining the description of Pope's Anglican minister with that of revelry in the Gothic mansion, Barbauld implicitly criticizes the Anglican church and its followers.

Ultimately, Barbauld's poem – which on the surface seems occasional and light – makes not just a political point but also a gendered one. The concept of vast emptiness presented by the tankard's size is echoed in the idea of 'hunger' – an idea that is fundamentally about lack – having 'despotic power' (line 5) and bolstered by the mention of 'hungry poets' like Barbauld herself (line 11). The conceit of the poem, of course, seems to draw upon the Biblical idea of woman as the weaker vessel – and the possibility of power that can be contained in such emptiness. The final lines of the poem may be seen as a claim for lasting impact, with 'an ancient Sybil' (line 81) striking the tankard to silence it, but the sound the strike makes ringing in the air:

Chill'd at her touch its mouth it slowly clos'd,
And in long silence all its griefs repos'd :
Yet still low murmurs creep along the ground,
And the air vibrates with the silver sound. (lines 85-88)

The sound of the silencing of the tankard (and the contradiction inherent in the sound of a silencing) stays in the air long after it closes its mouth: another example of the import that may be contained in what is lacking. The 'deep profound' which Barbauld describes the tankard holding at the beginning of the poem returns at the end, with the tankard's fantasy of how it would be used at the revels:

There oft exhausted, and replenish'd oft,
Oh! let me still supply th' eternal draught;
Till care within the deep abyss be drown'd,
And thought grows giddy at the vast profound. (lines 77-80)

The final line references *The Dunciad*'s description of Colley Cibber trying to write:

'Then gnaw'd his pen, then dash'd it on the ground / Sinking from thought to thought, a

vast profound!’ (I, lines 117-118). The tankard, then, is figured as wishing for the emptiness that Cibber’s head already contains – hence is itself a fool. The mock-Milonic phrases claim for Barbauld’s tankard a sublime level of importance – an almost infinite amount of space – but also contain echoes of Philips’ ‘The Splendid Shilling,’ in which a hole in an impoverished student’s trousers becomes a ‘vast abyss’ in which ships founder. Barbauld’s poem, which begins with a hint of Desdemona and a reminder of the dangers of being a woman, ends with the appearance of an aged female oracle – the literal voice of a god – and her assertion of dominance over the tankard (and the nationalist British establishment which it represents).

McCarthy notes that the tankard of this poem had a counterpart in life, and the poem’s story a beginning in the Aikin family table. Former student Turner recalls that a tankard filled with water always stood on the sideboard during dinner, and that ‘a gentleman dining with the Dr. observed on the degradation to which this noble vessel was subjected, after having been accustomed to pass round the festal board as the vehicle of so much more generous liquors. The hint was taken and happily improved.’²⁷² First, the fact that this poem and the mock-heroic ‘A Fragment of an Epic Poem’ and ‘The Furniture of Dr. Priestley’s Study’ (both discussed below) were popular enough that information about them was included in a remembrance of Barbauld after her death is notable: the poems by Barbauld that are anthologized and studied today are typically the serious works ‘To Mr. S.T. Coleridge;’ ‘The Rights of Woman;’ and ‘The Mouse’s Petition,’ along with perhaps the mock-heroic yet sentimental ‘Washing-Day.’ During her lifetime, however, Barbauld seems to have had a much more lively reputation and impact on her audience. That that audience included a supportive community at

²⁷² William Turner, ‘Mrs. Barbauld,’ *The Newcastle Magazine*, vol. 5, issue 5 (May 1825) (Newcastle: W.A. Mitchell, 1825), 229-232, p. 232.

Warrington is demonstrated not just by the story of Dr. Aikin's tankard and the poem to which it gave rise, but also by many poems written to Joseph Priestley, the eminent scholar and minister.

Anna Letitia Aikin was a decade younger than Joseph Priestley, but she writes confidently to him, and to his wife; the three enjoyed a close friendship.²⁷³ As well as the relatively late 'To Dr. Priestley, Dec 1792,' the young Anna Aikin addressed occasional poems to the couple: 'To Mrs. P---- with some Drawings of Birds and Insects' ends on a note of friendship, while an untitled poem that McCarthy and Kraft call 'A Character of Joseph Priestley' praises the minister as 'Champion of Truth!' (line 1) who would 'wake the virtue of a careless age' (line 12).²⁷⁴ Among these poems of affection, however, are works which lay claim to a larger significance: which set forth opinions, in particular, on the typical literary approach to women.

'An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study' is an obvious response to Jonathan Swift's 1727 poem 'The Furniture of a Woman's Mind' (see Introduction).²⁷⁵ Swift's poem calls attention to the contradictions of the performance of womanhood:

Whole hours can with a coxcomb sit,
And take his nonsense all for wit;
Her learning mounts to read a song,
But half the words pronouncing wrong;
Has every repartee in store
She spoke ten thousand times before. (lines 7-12)²⁷⁶

Swift's picture of a woman forced to flatter a man's 'nonsense' into 'wit' and to memorize repartee, and who, probably self-educated, mispronounces words she likely learned on paper rather than from hearing them is both denigrating and pitiable. As is

²⁷³ McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, pp. 70-71.

²⁷⁴ Barbauld, *Poems*, p. 37. All subsequent quotations from Barbauld's work are from this volume.

²⁷⁵ McCarthy and Kraft reference only Swift's poem 'A True and Faithful Inventory of the Goods belonging to Dr. Swift ... upon Lending his House to the Bishop of Meath' (1726).

²⁷⁶ Jonathan Swift, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*. Vol. 2. ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 415. All subsequent references to this poem are from this edition.

often the case with Swift, it is difficult to tell whether the poet means to criticize the woman in question or the society which places such confounding strictures on her.

Laetitia Pilkington's memoir testifies to Swift's affection for educated women, but also his enjoyment of cruelly teasing and denigrating them.²⁷⁷ Whatever he intends in this poem, Swift does call attention to the limitations which society placed on women, as well as the limitations of mind they revealed while in society. The woman's education is largely effective for passing along gossip and winning card games:

Can, at her Morning Tea, run o'er
The Scandal of the Day before.
Improving hourly in her Skill,
To cheat and wrangle at Quadrille. (lines 30-33)

Her knowledge is confined to that of the price of lace, the best colour silk to set off each complexion, and 'where with Art to place a patch' (line 39). If the 'lady' ventures into political discussion, she contradicts herself:

Her Arguments directly tend
Against the Side she would defend:
Will prove herself a Tory plain,
From Principles the Whigs maintain. (lines 58-61)

Ultimately, Swift's poem exemplifies the barrier between a woman and public life. He concludes with praise for a male monarch ('So, holla, boys, God save the King!' [71]). Swift points out that a woman's education is only valuable through its effect on men – for example, her opinions of the 'Scarlet Coat' (line 9), and a 'Parson's Gown' (line 22), and her interactions with the 'Coxcomb,' (line 14) and 'her Husband' (line 44). Discussions in her 'female clubs' are confined to fashion, while her speech elsewhere reveals her ignorance. The final reference to 'Mrs. Harding,' the female printer, a presumably better educated woman (and probably not 'a lady' in Swift's terms), may

²⁷⁷ Norma Clarke, *Queen of the Wits: A Life of Laetitia Pilkington* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 154-155.

complicate the picture Swift is presenting, but the constricting expectations of the social expectations he depicts remain.

By way of contrast, Barbauld's poem places an eminent, educated man in the position of the 'lady,' although it is Joseph Priestley's study, not his mind, whose contents are catalogued in her poem, he remains object rather than subject. The contradictions that begin Barbauld's poem emphasize the difference between Priestley's intellectual achievements, which are numerous, with his material success, which has been scant: the study contains 'A map of every country known, / With not a foot of land his own' (lines 1-2). In a tidy mock-heroic reduction, Barbauld miniaturizes the male monarch praised at the end of Swift's poem with a paper-doll-like string of British kings in Priestley's study:

A group of all the British kings,
Fair emblem! on a packthread swings.
The Fathers, ranged in goodly row,
A decent, venerable show,
Writ a great while ago, they tell us,
And many an inch o'ertop their fellows. (lines 7-12)

A row of books by the Apostolic Fathers hangs above the kings: a tidy symbol of the relative importance of religion and monarchy to Barbauld, Priestley and other Dissenting scholars. Meanwhile, Priestley's (and Barbauld's) classical antecedents are reduced to 'a Juvenal to hunt for mottos / And Ovid's tales of nymphs and grottos' (lines 13-14). The line about Ovid does recall Swift's reference to 'An Ovid, and an old Concordance' (line 14) in 'A True and Faithful Inventory of the Goods Belonging to Dr. Swift'.²⁷⁸ Yet, just as Barbauld's lines about classical texts are more descriptive than those in Swift's poem, her poem is more complicated. Although Barbauld presents it as an 'inventory,' a simple

²⁷⁸ Swift and Williams (ed.), p. 1044.

list, her allusions introduce complicated ideas and challenge the reader to see Priestley, Dissent, and the writer herself in a different way.

In the next section, Barbauld describes the tools of Priestley's scientific experiments, but connects them back to literary composition. Priestley's 'rare thermometer' (line 25) is used, not to measure heat for scientific experiments, but to help him work out

The just degrees of heat, to raise
Sermons, or politics, or plays.
Papers and books, a strange mixed olio,
From shilling touch to pompous folio;
Answer, remark, reply, rejoinder,
Fresh from the mint, all stamped and coined here.
(lines 27-32)

Barbauld's poem probably predates Priestley's *Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777); McCarthy and Kraft place it in summer 1771. Yet her wry suggestion of Priestley carefully heating his prose to just the right temperature recollects the delicate balance he urges in 'Lecture XXV: Of Burlesque, Parody, the Mock-Heroic, Humour, and Irony.' It seems likely that Priestley discussed his ideas about the gradations of humour and the idea of humour that remains within the bounds of 'propriety.' As McCarthy and Kraft have pointed out, the final line of this section recalls another poem by Swift, 'On Poetry: A Rhapsody,' which describes a poem 'in print / As fresh as Farthings from the Mint' (lines 113-114).²⁷⁹ Swift's poem posits that no one is 'so disqualify'd by fate / To rise in church, or law, or state' (lines 39-40) as poets. Yet, of course, Priestley (as a Dissenter), Barbauld (as a woman), and Swift himself (as an Irishman) all experience some degree of outsider status and exclusion from 'rising.'

²⁷⁹ *The Poems of Jonathan Swift, Vol. 2*, 2nd ed., ed. by Harold Williams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958).

Barbauld's allusion thus links her with Priestley and Swift as another outside poet. Swift tells poets that they

... have nothing to produce
 For private life, or public use?
 Court, city, country, want you not;
 You cannot bribe, betray, or plot.
 For poets law makes no provision;
 The wealthy have you in derision;
 Of state affairs you cannot smatter;
 Are awkward, when you try to flatter. (lines 45-52)

With this allusion, and the earlier one to Swift's 'The Furniture of a Woman's Mind,' Barbauld tidily sets up a parallel between Priestley and women. For Swift, Priestley has no place in either private life or 'public use' because he is a writer – but he is also deprived of similar positions due to his Dissenting faith. Whereas the woman described in Swift's 'Furniture' poem cannot navigate courtly circles due to her poor education and comically bad understanding of party politics, Priestley cannot navigate it due to too much education ('Of state affairs you cannot smatter, / Are awkward, when you try to flatter'). Just as Swift describes a finished composition as 'in its modish dress / Correctly fitted for the press,' (lines 105-106), Barbauld describes Priestley's writing as children who need to be clothed: 'New books, like new-born infants, stand, / Waiting the printer's clothing hand' (lines 41-42). This connection among Priestley, women, and writers might be seen as denigrating Priestley – but, in fact, Barbauld's use of mock-heroic descriptions subverts the norm, switching the positions of relative value.

Finally, Priestley's own ideas are described as a collection of small items, some of which will grow into works of greatness:

Forgotten rimes, and college themes,
 Worm-eaten plans, and embryo schemes;---
 A mass of heterogeneous matter,
 A chaos dark, nor land nor water. (lines 37-40)

Much like heaven and earth at the beginning of *Genesis* ('the earth was without form, and void, and darkness upon the face of the deep')²⁸⁰, Priestley's study has no boundaries between polar opposites: it is 'a chaos dark, nor land nor water.' The dominant point of this passage appears to be that – just as God spoke words to separate heaven and earth, light and dark, night and day – Priestley's words will reveal the true nature of the world. This is another allusion to Pope's character Bays in *The Dunciad*, the lines just after those on a 'vast profound' which Barbauld references in 'The Groans of the Tankard' (above). Cibber swears, chews his pen and tries to write, surrounded by earlier attempts:

Sinking from thought to thought, a vast profound,
Plunged for his sense, but found no bottom there,
Yet wrote and floundered on, in mere despair.
Round him much embryo, much abortion lay,
Much future ode, and abdicated play.
(I, lines 118-122).²⁸¹

This reference, and one in another poem to Priestley (discussed below), complicates Barbauld's picture of her mentor and lifelong friend. She surely did not mean to suggest that Priestley was the Cibber to her Pope; yet she uses the allusion to tease the older man. It is possible that Barbauld and Priestley had discussed the poem, and that her use of Pope's words is a nod to that conversation. Certainly, the images in Barbauld's poem are more positive than those in Pope's. Later, some of Priestley's ideas become an army, 'like Cadmus' half-formed men ... all, like controversial writing, were born with teeth, and sprung up fighting' (lines 45, 53-54). Again, the low spring up toward greatness – and the 'controversial writing' mentioned in the line is of course Priestley's.

This poem takes place when Priestley's study is still in chaos: by connecting opposites in a location that is 'nor land nor water,' Barbauld creates the space in which mock-heroic flourishes: one where small ideas, 'embryo schemes,' stand to become great

²⁸⁰ *Genesis* 1:2 in *King James Bible Online* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996), accessed January 2019.

²⁸¹ Fairer and Gerrard, p. 172.

books, while great monarchs are reduced to dolls on a string. Like Jones' discussion of the miniaturization of great battles onto coins, Barbauld's scrutiny of Priestley's working space – so similar to Strephon's scrutiny of Celia's toilette in Swift's 'The Lady's Dressing-Room' – gives rise to a discussion of the relative values of small and great, complicating the reader's understanding of education, writing, and literary antecedents such as Swift and the classics.

Much as she does in the later 'Washing-Day,' Barbauld ends her poem with a self-effacing note about her own writing, suggesting that it is best fit to be burned:

'But what is this,' I hear you cry,
'Which saucily provokes my eye?' ---
A thing unknown, without a name,
Born of the air and doomed to flame. (lines 55-58)

As an occasional poem, 'An Inventory of the Furniture in Dr. Priestley's Study' might have been treated by its addressee as a 'small thing,' tossed into the fire after being read. Yet the fact that it survives belies Barbauld's modesty; both must have valued the poem, for it to have survived its original, occasional use. The reference to air and flame recurs in the image of the hot air balloon at the end of 'Washing-Day,' (to be discussed in more detail later in this chapter), while the unusual and scientific word 'embryo' will reappear as 'embryo statesmen,' a reference in 'The Invitation' to students of the Warrington Academy; as 'embryo God' and 'embryo systems' in Barbauld's 'A Summer Evening's Meditation,' and as 'embryo nations' in 'The Caterpillar,' which describes sympathy for a tiny creature. This word, associated as it is with the utterly feminine process of creating new life, is for Barbauld an assertion of the importance of the smallest being or idea against the much greater, and oftener valued, forces of the world.

Similarly, the poem 'A Fragment of an Epic Poem, occasioned by the Loss of a Game of Chess to Dr. Priestley, in consequence of an unseasonable Drowsiness,' sees Barbauld placing herself in lively opposition to Priestley as the 'hostile maid' who nearly

bests him at chess.²⁸² Although left out of collections of her poetry published during Barbauld's lifetime, it was both published and praised in print elsewhere; according to McCarthy and Kraft, 'the poem was well known to [her] contemporaries, and highly relished by them.'²⁸³ It was praised by William Woodfall in *The Monthly Review*, for which Barbauld herself wrote; published in *The New Foundling Hospital for Wit* (1784); and mentioned in an obituary of Priestley in 1804. Priestley himself wrote to Barbauld that he 'regretted the loss of his copy in the riot and begged [her] for another.'²⁸⁴ Again, it is clear that Barbauld's wit, as well as her seriousness, was valued by her contemporaries.

The minister received the verses from Aikin the day after beating her at an evening game of chess. In the poem, she claims that Priestley gained an unfair advantage from the god Morpheus, who made her drowsy so that Priestley could win the game. Writing in heroic couplets, Barbauld delivers a mock-heroic description of her loss. The opening lines of the poem compare their match to a classical battle: Barbauld's 'firm phalanx' (line 3) is pressing her advantage, and she will not give up 'the honours of the long-disputed field' (line 2).²⁸⁵ Priestley turns to the God of Sleep, reminding him that, as a minister and perhaps as a teacher, he has 'spread thy empire ev'n on holy ground' (line 18), putting people to sleep with his sermons and lectures. This represents yet another allusion to *The Dunciad*, in which the audience falls asleep as 'verse, or prose, infuse the drowzy God,' i.e. Morpheus (II: line 364).²⁸⁶ Yet the character of Priestley in the poem says that putting his audience to sleep is a way of worshipping Morpheus,

²⁸² McCarthy and Kraft date this poem in the late 1760s or 1771. Barbauld, *Poems*, p. 237.

²⁸³ Barbauld, *Poems*, p. 237.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Barbauld, *Poems*, p. 28.

²⁸⁶ Pope and Butt (ed.), p. 398. All subsequent quotations of *The Dunciad* are from this edition.

whereas the dunces in Pope's work presumably wish attention (not sleep) for their work.

Priestley promises to write a very long book to pay Morpheus for his help:

My grateful hands to thee shall consecrate
An ample folio, of stupendous weight;
Words of such opiate virtue shall compose
The soporific, mild, lethean dose;
No moral eyelid shall resist the charm. (lines 24-28)

Even more directly than the tankard did, the 'ample folio, of stupendous weight' (line 25) recalls the enormous books of Pope's mock-heroic works: the altar of twelve French romances from *The Rape of the Lock* as well as the *Dunciad*'s altar made of 'volumes of amplest size' with 'a folio Commonplace' at the base and crowned by 'a twisted Birth-Day ode' (I, lines 155, 159, 162). Like Pope's books, this one seems to invite what Claude Rawson describes as 'deflation.'²⁸⁷ Much like the Baron's half-answered prayer (and the rest 'dispers'd in empty air' [II, 46]) in Pope's poem, the deflation of Priestley's book is represented by words without an audience: his readers will fall asleep while reading, he promises.²⁸⁸ This inversion of the values of *The Dunciad* – sleep is a positive in Barbauld's poem, giving Priestley the edge over his young opponent, while it is a negative in *The Dunciad* – shows Barbauld playing ironically with the relative values of good and bad, high and low, and to a certain extent redeeming the values traditionally neglected in verse.

The battle in 'A Fragment of an Epic Poem' evokes *The Rape of the Lock* as well: both involve a maiden's defeat, and the 'wild disorder' (line 41) in which Barbauld's chess pieces lie after Morpheus waves his wand echoes the 'wild disorder' (III, line 79) of the cards during the Ombre confrontation between Belinda and the Baron. The methods of attack are related, by inversion: while Priestley uses sleep to defeat Barbauld,

²⁸⁷ See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of Rawson's idea of mock-heroic enormity inviting deflation.

²⁸⁸ Gerrard and Fairer, p. 131.

Pope's Baron is enlivened by coffee (a stimulant). The poems share references to the story of Odysseus and the Bag of Aeolus, a Pandora-like episode that keeps the Greek hero from returning home. Colin Jaeger has suggested sexual tension in the poem, citing Priestley's knight cherishing 'ardent hopes' (line 44) and his bands 'o'erspread / With a new flush of more enliven'd red' (lines 44-45). This seems unlikely in the light of the quasi-parental relationship both Priestley and his wife enjoyed with Barbauld; any poem on a conflict between a man and a young woman might give rise to such criticism.²⁸⁹ More important to the argument of this chapter is this poem's demonstration that the young Anna Aikin had a lively wit and did not simply work within the tradition of mock-heroic, but actively responded to it.

Subtle differences between Pope's and Barbauld's poems reveal the young poet's confidence: not only does she claim that Priestley could only have defeated her at chess through supernatural aid, but at the end of the poem she calls for a rematch. Whereas Belinda ends Pope's poem ruined and a prey to spleen, Barbauld finishes the episode as Belinda began hers: waking from a beautiful dream (line 60) and seeing the day with 'fresh hopes' (line 61). Moreover, Barbauld titles her poem to set it within classical tradition: calling it a 'fragment of an epic poem' suggests, not merely that the lines are part of a much longer poem, but also that the fragment has been in some way discovered (as fragments of classical texts are by scholars) and that her poem is part of a larger history and tradition.

Of course, the idea of fragmentation, of being fragmented, recalls the idea of the insubstantial and unimportant which is crucial to mock-heroic. Similarly, the occasional nature of this poem emphasizes the fragility of that which is temporary. These ideas are

²⁸⁹ For a discussion of the relationship between Anna Aikin and the Priestleys, see McCarthy, *Voice of the Enlightenment*, p. 70.

fundamentally at odds with the notion of the poem as a part of something much greater and more lasting – a fragment that has survived the onslaught of time, and that connects itself to the tradition of classical epic. In many poems, Barbauld's classical allusions and play with epic expectations serve to establish her right to a place in the British literary tradition. At the same time, her poems about small beings and small things give those items the attention they need to be elevated into importance – and the mock-heroic plays a crucial role in this transformation.

Paying Attention: Elevating the Low

One of Barbauld's better-known poems takes the voice of a small creature: in 'The Mouse's Petition,' she ventriloquizes a mouse in a trap who is meant to be used in one of Joseph Priestley's scientific experiments the following day. The mouse speaks in terms that might have been used in revolutionary demands for liberty, or anti-slavery discourse:

If e'er thy breast with freedom glowed,
And spurned a tyrant's chain,
Let not thy strong oppressive force
A free-born mouse detain! (lines 9-12)

The mouse speaks confidently of its Lockean claim to life and liberty, and (in a note that may recall the death of the suitors in *The Odyssey*) asks that Priestley not stain his 'hospitable hearth' with 'guiltless blood' (line 13). Barbauld was surprised to learn that the poem had been read by some critics as scolding Priestley for his experiments; the *Critical Review* commended her 'humanity for endeavouring to extricate the little wretch from misery,' and added an expression of the reviewer's 'abhorrence of the cruelty practised by experimental philosophers, who seem to think the brute creation void of

sensibility, or created only for them to torment.²⁹⁰ To correct this view of the poem,

Barbauld added a note to the third edition of *Poems*:

The Author is concerned to find, that what was intended as the petition of mercy against justice, has been construed as the plea of humanity against cruelty. She is certain that cruelty could never be apprehended from the Gentleman to whom this is addressed; and the poor animal would have suffered more as the victim of domestic economy, than of philosophical curiosity.²⁹¹

Barbauld saw the mouse's death as a necessity: 'domestic economy' demanded that mice be eliminated from the household, and the scientific experiment for which the mouse was destined would be, she says, a kinder death than that it might typically have expected. She emphasises that the conflict she sees is between mercy and justice, the conflicting impulses brought together in *Micah* 6:8 ('What doeth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?') -- not between humanity and the animal world.²⁹² Yet the poem is also one of animal sympathy, offering the mouse a voice and elevating it to importance. The complicated and at times competing tenets of science and religion are not resolved in this poem, but they are allowed to coexist. That this is possible seems due, at least in part, to the gap opened up by mock-heroic discourse and the sympathy which it represented.

This is not a strictly mock-heroic poem in form, yet the mock-heroic discourse which Terry discusses comes into play here: the mouse's concerns are presented as being as important as, indeed on par with, the human demands for liberty to which his speech alludes. The mouse both claims the rights of creatures much larger than it is, and depends on its size to elicit freedom, reminding Priestley that he should not triumph over

²⁹⁰ 'Review of *Poems*' in *Critical Review* 35 (1773), 192-95, p. 193. Quoted in *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, p. 245.

²⁹¹ Barbauld, Mrs. (Anna Letitia) (London: Printed for Joseph Johnson, 1773), *Poems: The Third Edition, Corrected*, p. 37. Quoted in *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, p. 245.

²⁹² Micah 6:8 in *King James Bible Online* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1996), accessed January 2019.

‘a prize so little worth.’ The creature, then, at the same time is aggrandized and remains small. The poem begins with a motto from *The Aeneid*, Book 6, Aeneas’ father’s orders to his son: to ‘spare the humbled, and to tame in war the proud!’²⁹³ This reference to the conflict between power and humility might be seen as a description of the mock-heroic impulse. Barbauld is grappling with the tension between mankind’s scientific power and our powerlessness in the face of God: a conundrum for those, like Barbauld and Priestley, who had both scientific curiosity and religious faith. As we will see, mock-heroic discourse offered space in which to discuss such complex ideas.

Richard Terry’s work on William Cowper, another poet with a deep Christian faith, offers terms helpful in discussing Barbauld’s work. Cowper was an intensely religious man who keenly felt his insignificance before God. For Cowper, Terry suggests, mock-heroic offered a sense of consolation:

Cowper’s poems repeatedly dwell upon ironies of scale ... in ways that consciously court the possibility of triviality ... Cowper seems to have required a kind of poetry that would incorporate a strong sense of disproportion but which would also celebrate the possibility of grace, of an unaccountable condescension of high to low, that would have the effect of raising up the lowly thing to a position of greater estimation. In this respect, his mock-heroic is ... ascensional.²⁹⁴

Cowper’s mock-heroic gave even the smallest of God’s creatures attention, and thus reminded the poet that God attended to him among all the rest. Barbauld’s poems about small, ignored, fragmented, or otherwise ‘low’ beings and topics certainly seem to center around the question of importance and attention. Looking at one of Barbauld’s better-known poems demonstrates the way that her use of mock-heroic enables her to explore the possibilities posed by her intellect and her creativity.

²⁹³ *The Aeneid* 6:853; cited in *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, p. 245.

²⁹⁴ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, pp. 5-6.

As we have seen, insubstantial, fragile, empty, or otherwise ‘low’ things or people recur in Barbauld’s work, and often find power despite, or even as a consequence of, their ‘low’ nature. In ‘The Caterpillar,’ Barbauld describes the sympathy she feels for one caterpillar after having destroyed many in the course of gardening. She likens her pity for the creature to that of a hero for a single survivor of battle: ‘He is grown human, and capricious Pity / Which would not stir for thousands, melts for one’ (lines 39-40). It is crucial to note the way that sentiment affects Barbauld’s mock-heroic; writing at the end of the century, she explores emotions in a very different way than previous authors did. Although Montagu, for example, wrote of her characters with real sympathy (for example, in ‘Saturday: The Smallpox’), the sentiment with which Barbauld’s poetry is infused demonstrates not just her personal ethos but also the growing importance of sincerity and emotion at the end of the century. In ‘The Caterpillar,’ the importance of one small being is elevated when given the attention of the hero (or the poet): this is a typical example of Margaret Koehler’s concept of mock-heroic:

In the sense that it focuses sharply on a previously disregarded backdrop, mock-heroic engages vitally with the phenomenon of attention. New and unexpected subject matter receives poetic attention, and, consequently, readers of mock-heroic confront new demands on their own attention.²⁹⁵

Of course, the idea of poetic attention elevating a subject applies not only to the caterpillar of this particular poem, but to Barbauld’s subject matter in other mock-heroics – and, crucially, to her poetry on women’s lives and domestic labour.

‘Petition of a Schoolboy to His Father,’ a little-known mock-georgic probably written when Barbauld and her husband were running Palgrave Academy, engages with questions of domesticity from the eyes of a child responding to a parent’s refusal to send

²⁹⁵ Margaret Koehler, ‘The Filter of Attention and the Indissoluble Attractors in Eighteenth Century Mock-Heroic Poetry,’ *Modern Philology*, Vol. 108 issue 1 (2010), 65-88, p. 66.

a cake to him at school. Written in rhyming tetrameter, the poem seems influenced by poems written by Mary Barber in the voice of her son Constantine. While Barber's poems put much of the poet's rebellious spirit into her son's voice, Barbauld's poem takes such a conceit one step further. What begins as a humorous response from son to father digresses into a mock-georgic description of the baking of a cake to be sent to school, somewhat reminiscent of Elizabeth Moody's description of the Christmas cake being baked in 'The Housewife.' The schoolboy demands his father's attention to 'a composition / Which Phoebus' self to me reveal'd / Last night, while sleep my eyelids seal'd' (lines 21-23). The vision given by a god in a dream gives this poem a classical air; the next lines, which describe washing hands before cooking as 'from the Naiad's sacred spring / The cleansing wave with reverence bring' (lines 24-25) recall poems about domestic ritual like Mary Leapor's 'The Sacrifice' and signal the mock-georgic which is to come. Barbauld's classical references are thick in this poem: Ceres pours flour from her horn, and the cows fill a pail of milk:

Which, tortured in the whirling churn,
Shall soon to waxen butter turn,--
Butter, more sweet than morning dew,
Butter, which Homer never knew! (lines 33-36)

This idea of surpassing classical antecedents recurs in the poem, as Betty the cook beating eggs turns into an extended epic simile about waves striking a ship and her sailors, and then the ship itself speeds to 'distant shores' (line 51) for more ingredients, 'For many a distant realm must join, / Ere we fulfill the vast design' (lines 52-53). Sugar comes from 'islands of the Western main,' (line 54), and orange rind 'from Hesperia's groves' (line 56), a fruit 'not fairer' than the 'golden bough / Given to the pious Trojan's vow' (lines 59-60), or the branch which Aeneas received in order to travel to the underworld safely. Cinnamon is bark from 'the spicy trees / Enbosom'd deep in Indian seas' (lines 64-65). The ingredients are a 'tribute' from 'every clime' (line 71), a

merging of cultures that reminds the reader of the great reach of the British empire and her international trade routes – much as Barbauld does on a smaller scale in the earlier poem ‘The Groans of the Tankard.’ This inflation of a schoolboy’s request for cake into global import begs for mock-heroic deflation, which Barbauld provides two lines later with a younger sister tasting the cake batter: ‘Sure sister Sally will not linger / To mix them with her snowy finger’ (lines 73-74). Yet the spell is not entirely broken: the importance of the domestic, which Barbauld has been both mocking and establishing, remains in the schoolboy’s promise to a household goddess the secrets of whose recipe he guards:

Fair priestess of the mystic rite,
Kept close from man’s unhallow’d sight,
Fear not my verse should here disclose,
What words the sacred charm compose ...
Your cakes are good, with joy I take them,
Nor ask the secret how you make them. (lines 75-78, 81-82)

All of the power of the cake the schoolboy desires – including the way that it exceeds classical precedent and its global reach – is guarded by a domestic woman, who is herself hidden from ‘man’s unhallow’d sight.’ The power in this double secrecy is decidedly feminine, and the men of the poem must simply accept the cakes they make without any attempt to gain domestic power for themselves. Like Barber’s poems, the ‘Schoolboy’s Petition’ works through a ‘double-voiced form’ (in Christopher Fanning’s phrase).²⁹⁶ First the frame of the letter and then the schoolboy’s description of his dream hide Barbauld’s own voice. Fanning has argued that, when Mary Barber uses such nested voices, she gives up her authority and her status as a ‘dependent poet’ – one who published by subscription and relied on the patronage of Jonathan Swift – is heightened. Yet Barbauld’s situation is different, and so is the effect of this poem. The richness of

²⁹⁶ Fanning, ‘The Voices of the Dependent Poet: the Case of Mary Barber,’ p. 81.

classical allusion in the poem, and the assurance of the mock-heroic, gives the schoolboy, the cook, and Barbauld herself greater authorial power. Ultimately, the poem asserts the importance of the domestic in creativity, with the schoolboy reminding his father that 'poetic sparks require / The aid of culinary fire' (lines 5-6). In elevating the voice of the schoolboy, Barbauld asserts a broader truth for herself: that embracing the domestic enables her to transcend it, and to demonstrate her creativity.

Ascensional Mock-Heroic

The more complicated treatment of the subject of 'An Inscription for an Ice-House' demonstrates the opportunity that mock-heroic's 'attention' offers Barbauld to establish importance for women's work. The ice-house inscription (this conceit itself a reminder that poetry may be 'used' as well as written, that it may be inscribed on a wall to contextualize a location) describes Winter's entrapment in the ice-house.

In other poems, Barbauld uses the figure of Winter as an old man, possibly cruel and certainly to be resisted: in 'Lines placed over a Chimney-Piece' he is addressed as 'surly Winter' and told to stay away from the hearth and, more generally, the home: 'Howl along the naked plain, / There exert thy joyless reign' (lines 3-4). Ultimately, Barbauld says, 'Love and Joy, and friendly Mirth' (line 13) will bless the house, and 'thaw the winter in the soul' (line 16). In 'To Mr. Barbauld, November 14, 1778' the poet calls on her husband to smile despite their difficulties. 'A thousand pretty ways we'll find,' she says in lines reminiscent of Christopher Marlowe's classic pastoral 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love,' 'to mock old Winter's starving reign' (lines 9-10). She describes dressing Winter with flowers and binding his head with 'fantastic garlands' (line 16) in a delightful inversion of the classic pastoral in which a young shepherdess would be wooed with flowers. In 'Inscription for an Ice-House,' 'stern

Winter' (line 8) sits imprisoned in the ice-house, keeping fruit and milk cold during summer's reign. The poet invites the reader (or the visitor to the ice-house) to look at him:

Stranger, approach! Within this iron door
Thrice locked and bolted, this rude arch beneath
That vaults with ponderous stone the cell; confined
By Man, the great magician, who controuls [sic]
Fire, earth, and air, and genii of the storm,
And bends the most remote and opposite things
To do him service and perform his will. (lines 1-7)

Barbauld's opening, with blank verse and inverted descriptions, is mock-Miltonic in tone, and the subject of the opening lines – Winter – is not mentioned until line 8.

Barbauld mentions mankind's power to 'bend the most remote and opposite things' (in this case, Winter's cold and summer's fruits) to serve him – just as she is bending Miltonic form and domestic description to her poetic will. In another inversion of pastoral, Winter does not wither the plants with which it comes into contact, but instead creates an eternal summer:

The rugged power, fair Pleasure's minister,
Exerts his art to deck the genial board;
Congeals the melting peach, the nectarine smooth,
Burnished and glowing from the sunny wall ...
Cools with his icy breath our flowing cups;
Or gives to the fresh dairy's nectared bowls
A quicker zest. (lines 20-23, 26-28)

Instead of serving his own season, Winter is 'fair Pleasure's minister' and set to work to 'deck the genial board' with summer fruit. Of course, it is not Winter that is the small thing elevated here: it is the ice-house and the domestic chore it performs. Barbauld shows Winter, a great power, performing a small domestic task in his cooling of the contents of the ice-house. Winter is a prisoner, counting the time until summer ends, and 'mindful of his hour / To rush in whirlwinds forth, and rule the year,' (lines 30-31). Here, Winter's great power is miniaturized, while man – more particularly, the woman of the

house – uses it. The feminine nature of Winter’s ruler is cemented by Barbauld’s likening Winter to Samson, who after losing his hair sat spinning with women ‘midst laughing girls submiss, and patient twirled / The slender spindle in his sinewy grasp’ (lines 18-19). Winter’s submission is emasculating, like that of Samson, who lost his hair and his strength to a woman. Yet this image is complicated by the reader’s knowledge that Barbauld herself, as a woman, is likely subjugated just as Winter is – forced to spin, to prepare food, to ‘deck the genial board’ as a housewife. It is easy to conclude that Barbauld, like the force of nature she describes, chafed at household chores and ‘sullen [plied her] task’ at times. The fact that Barbauld wrote books for children and to help in the education of children at home has contributed to an idea that she embraced the idea of female domesticity that flourished at the end of the eighteenth century, but it seems likely that her experience of the domestic was, like other female poets examined in this dissertation, ambivalent at best.

‘Washing-Day’ describes laundry day in a great house, detailing the chaos that overtakes the household when ‘week, smooth sliding after week’ (line 11) brings washing-day back to the calendar. As Bordo notes, ‘It is crucial ... to recognize that this poem is composed almost entirely of allusions to the writings of Milton, Shakespeare, Pope, Burke, Swift, and Coleridge, to name but a few...these allusions are complex and often polyvalent.’²⁹⁷ Barbauld deploys this complex array of allusions not only to establish her own education but also to suggest that domestic concerns such as washing-day and women’s ideas such as her own *might* deserve to be elevated to the same level as the work and ideas of the authors she references. Barbauld begins with the news that the muses themselves have been domesticated:

The Muses are turned gossips; they have lost
The buskin’d step, and clear high-sounding phrase,

²⁹⁷ Bordo, p. 189.

Language of gods. Come, then, domestic Muse,
 In slip-shod measure loosely prattling on ...
 Come, Muse, and sing the dreaded *Washing-Day*.
 (lines 1-4, 8)

Barbauld is singing an epic, as Homer did, but instead of the heroes of the Trojan War or the trials of Odysseus she sings of the toils of a housewife. The term ‘slip-shod measure’ evokes Pope’s woman poet in *The Dunciad*, a ‘slip-shod sibyl’ (III, line 15). The image is of a young woman shod in slippers or, as Valerie Rumbold explains, ‘shoes down at heel or not properly fastened; hence slovenly in dress or, metaphorically, careless in writing.’²⁹⁸ As Margaret Anne Doody explains,

Possessed by the muse or Apollo though they claim to be, women as poets are untidy, slovenly, careless of housekeeping. They are, like Virgil’s harpies, truly dirty beings. (Try saying ‘slip-shod sibyl’ and you will find that tongue-twisting tempts other words to come through.) The shit-soiled sibyl, the woman poet, is a hackney, a prostitute. If she receives you in her boudoir, you find she is a strumpet, affected, grimly bedizened perhaps, but poverty-stricken. She is always in a state of undress, of unattractive undress, slapping loose about the house in her slippers, her rhyme and metre shuffling loosely along.²⁹⁹

The term ‘slipshod’ recurs in a letter Barbauld wrote decades after this poem was published: in a compliment to William Sotheby on a book of poetry that he sent to her, she says ‘it is a gratification we have not been much accustomed to of late, to see elegant ideas clothed in elegant & harmonious verse, & I am very glad when I see a contrast to the slovenly slipshod stile which has been so much the fashion of late.’³⁰⁰ Here, she (likely consciously) applies the term, not to women, but to all contemporary poets, in some sense removing Pope’s linkage of the word with shoddy women poets.

²⁹⁸ Alexander Pope and Valerie Rumbold (ed.), *The Dunciad in Four Books* (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 221n15.

²⁹⁹ Margaret Anne Doody. ‘Poxy Doxies.’ Review of *Slip-Shod Sibyls: Recognition, Rejection and the Woman Poet*, by Germaine Greer. *London Review of Books* 17 no. 24 (1995): 14-15, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v17/n24/margaret-anne-doody/poxy-doxies>.

³⁰⁰ Anna Letitia Barbauld to William Sotheby, Huntington Library mss SY2. Letter is dated May 7 with no year; library surmises 1825.

Barbauld appears to carry this recovery further in 'Washing-Day,' as her 'slipshod' (line 4) 'domestic Muse' (line 3) produces a tightly controlled poem full of classical allusion. Holes in the master's stockings may 'gape wide as Erebus' (line 38); the friend who comes for dinner is claiming 'the hospitable rites' (line 48); and, in the morning, the 'red-arm'd washers' (reminiscent of Homer's 'rosy-fingered dawn'), wake the household. Allusion and memory are at the heart of this poem: the current washing-day reminds the speaker of similar days in her childhood; those memories, too, included contemplation. This compression of time seems to anticipate Wordsworth's ideas about memory in 'Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey,' and Coleridge's in 'Frost at Midnight' (as we have seen, both poets were familiar with Barbauld's work). Amid the activity of washing-day, the young Anna Letitia would 'sit me down, and ponder much / Why washings were' (lines 78-79). The motto of the poem, '... and their voice, / turning again towards childish treble, pipes / and whistles in its sound,' is part of the melancholy Jaques' 'Seven Ages of Man' monologue from Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, with two key pronouns changed. Shakespeare describes the sixth stage of man, in which man has

... spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound.³⁰¹

At the outset, then, Barbauld signals that this is a poem about time and aging, and the way childhood and old age resemble one another. The pronoun changes indicate that she is not drawing a line between male and female, *per se*; her poem will range over the entire household and all ages, from rushed maids and the harried housewife to the grandmother who spoiled young Anna, letting her steal the pins from her stocking (line

³⁰¹ William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, from Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (eds.) *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (2nd ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), II, vii, 159-63. All other quotations from Shakespeare are from this edition.

70), an echo of the sixth stage's 'spectacles on nose' and 'youthful hose.' Meanwhile, Anna's mother is the heroine of a georgic passage:

At intervals my mother's voice was heard,
Urging dispatch; briskly the work went on,
All hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring,
To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait.
(lines 74-77)

The monosyllables of Barbauld's labour verbs ('wash,' 'rinse,' 'wring,' 'starch,' 'clap,' 'plait,' and more) serve as a kind of metronome setting the pace of the day, as the maids repeat the motions of washing, drying, and folding over and over. The poem returns, then, to the contemplative world of the little girl and her grandmother, blowing bubbles through a pipe. The syntax smooths out as the poem enters this last, peaceful scene; the repeated vowels in the 'hollow bowl' (line 79) of the pipe and the 'floating bubbles' (line 81) it emits suggest air in both the bowl and the bubbles rising on the breeze. The pipe, of course, also evokes the voice of the sixth stage of the motto (and, perhaps, that of the grandmother), which 'pipes and whistles.' The memory of the bubbles pulls Barbauld back to the present day, reminding her of the Montgolfier balloon flight, a scientific feat in which man flew for the first time. In the final lines of the poem, the balloon, bubbles, childhood, and Barbauld's writing itself all merge:

... little dreaming then
To see, Montgolfier, thy silken ball
Ride buoyant thro' the clouds—so near approach
The sports of children and the toils of men.
Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,
And verse is one of them—this most of all. (lines 82-86)

The balloon passage has been analysed in great detail elsewhere, and its meaning hotly debated. In her article 'Anna Letitia Barbauld's "Washing-Day" and the Montgolfier Balloon,' Elizabeth Kraft offers an excellent synopsis of the different viewpoints.³⁰²

³⁰² Elizabeth Kraft, 'Anna Letitia Barbauld's "Washing-Day" and the Montgolfier Balloon,' *Literature and History* 4.2 (1995): 25-41, now at <http://www.usask.ca/english/barbauld/criticism/kraft95.html>.

Most of these analyses have focused on binaries: men and women, young and old, scientists and housewives. Is Barbauld comparing ‘men’s work’ (ballooning) to children’s games (blowing bubbles), to poetry (writing verse), to women’s work (washing)? Kraft rightly points out that approaching the poem through such binaries is too simplistic. The poem’s end may be clarified, however, by a return to the underpinnings of the mock-heroic form, and the way it was being used by the end of the century. As we have seen, mock-heroic by the end of the century became a way to call attention to the contrast between high and low, but also to offer a connection between the two and in some sense a resolution between them. Barbauld’s poetry, like Cowper’s, seems to call attention to the variety of experience and resolve it all beneath the gaze of a loving God. ‘Washing-Day’ does not bring up the theological questions of Cowper’s poetry, but the question of the balloon, the bubbles, the washings, and the poem itself is resolved by the use of mock-heroic. Each activity is given attention in the poem; under the affectionate gaze of Barbauld’s narrator, aging and childish at the same time, all of these activities are important.

The merging of time, age, and even gender roles in Barbauld’s poem is well-served by the use of mock-heroic; far from privileging one over the other, Barbauld’s poem finds value in each of them, as the form of the poem serves as a great leveler. It is this great ‘leveling’ capacity that made mock-heroic such a powerful tool in the hands of women writers of the eighteenth century, and it persisted in this new form at the end of the eighteenth century precisely because it held such power.

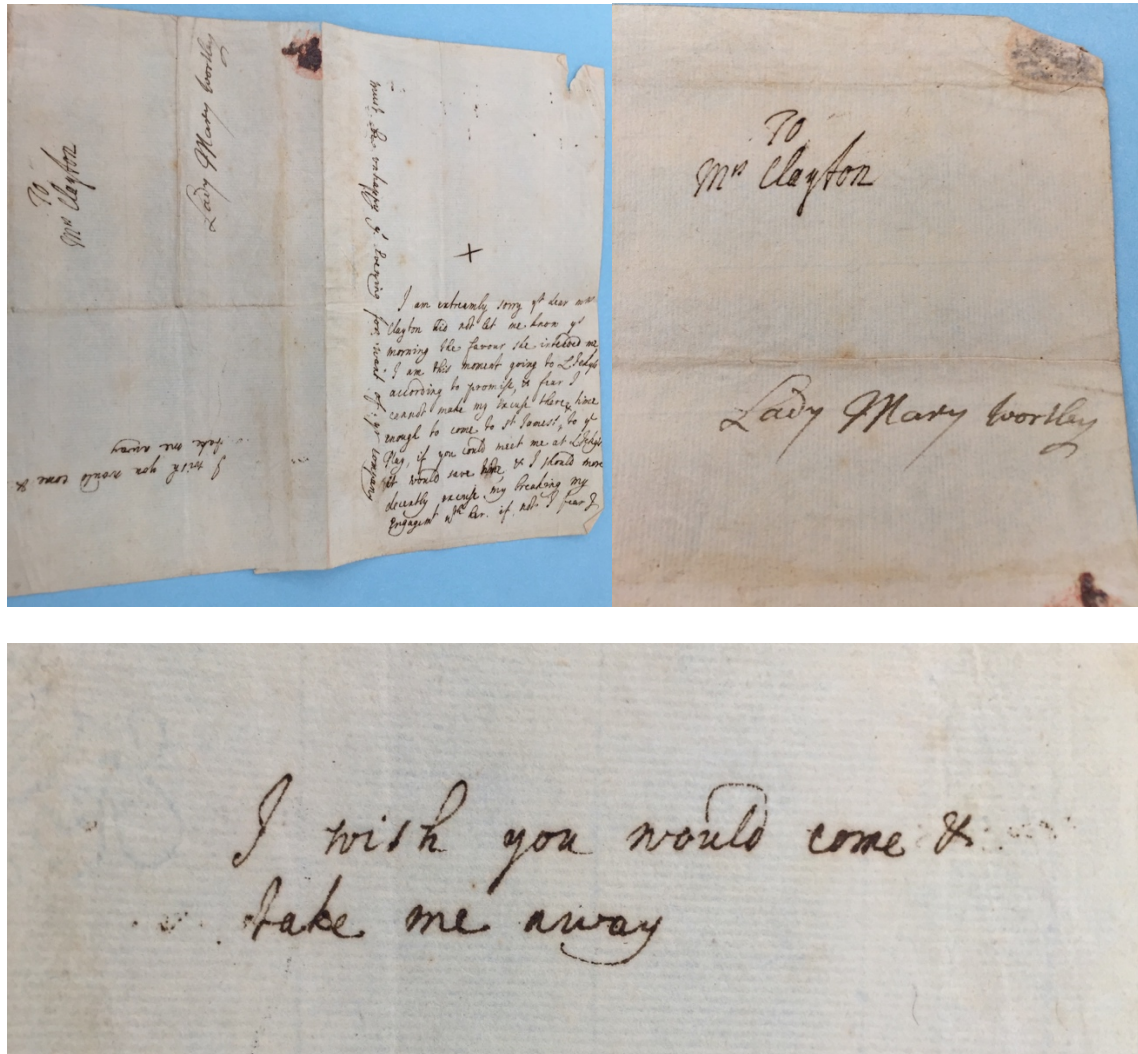
Much of Anna Letitia Barbauld’s most important work is what might be called sincere. Yet a decidedly mock-heroic strain runs through many of her poems, and she uses mock-heroic moments to call attention to the importance of beings and ideas traditionally classed as ‘low’ or lesser – women; Dissenters; animals; and children. She

reminds her readers of God's love for even the smallest creatures, and for those in the lowest of situations. Attention to her work with mock-heroic offers new insight into her work, and into the value of mock-heroic in the development of women writers. It also demonstrates, satisfyingly, that (like her grandmother, celebrated in 'On the Death of Mrs. Jennings') 'she show'd that piety and age could smile' (line 12).³⁰³

³⁰³ *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft (Athens, Ga. and London: University of Georgia Press, 1994), p. 34.

Conclusions

In a letter to Charlotte [Dyves] Clayton around 1720, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu sends her regrets to an apparent invitation, and subtly suggests a scheme to break her prior engagement in order to attend a play at St. James' with Clayton instead.



Figs. 3 - 5. Letter from Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Charlotte [Dyves] Clayton, c1720. Photographed with permission from the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif.

She hints:

...if you could meet me at L. Jekys it would save time, & I should more decently excuse my breaking my engagement with her. If not, I fear I must be unhappy [this] evening for want of yr company.³⁰⁴

³⁰⁴ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu to Charlotte (Dyves) Clayton: Huntington Library mssHM 39874. Library marks the letter c1720, London.

The creases in the paper make it clear the page was folded three times before being addressed and hand-delivered; after the second fold, Wortley Montagu has written, ‘I wish you would come & take me away’ (see Figs. 2-4, above).³⁰⁵ This layering of meaning – the polite hint at a way around the social convention that prohibits the breaking of a prior engagement for something one would prefer to do, and the reverse side which expresses the more direct desire – might be seen as a proxy for the public mask Wortley Montagu’s social position required she wear. Indeed, it might be said that all women at the time negotiated a complex and at times conflicting array of social expectations and domestic roles. Yet the ingeniously folded letter may also illustrate the way in which some women found ways through such matters, and the way the poets in this thesis used the domestic mock-heroic to express their true opinion of their situations, folded under a layer of formalism and what might sometimes appear to be convention.

As we have seen, an examination of women’s mock-heroic poems about domestic matters – marriage, housewifery, and other quotidian topics – offers insight into the way that intelligent women approached the growing cult of domesticity and its sometimes anti-intellectual position in the eighteenth century. Although women’s access to education during this time was variable, it is clear from these four women poets’ use of intertextual allusion that it was available – and this allusion has been ignored in the past, possibly based on the assumption that women were less well educated and hence less capable of allusion than their male counterparts. The risk of being accused of plagiarism was higher, too, for women, which makes the use of mock-heroic allusion more impressive for its riskiness.

This examination also provides a more detailed view of the development of the mock-heroic. Each poet in this study uses mock-heroic in her own particular way,

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

influenced by her social concerns and her education, and it is important to any study of the mock-heroic to see the way that it offers an opportunity for innovation as well as allusion and response. As this thesis has shown, the way in which female poets used mock-heroic is as varied as the backgrounds of the poets considered. While Mary Wortley Montagu added sympathy and personal connection to what might otherwise have been two-dimensional depictions of men and women at Court, Mary Jones' courtly connections, tempered by her personal experience in Oxford and as a middling-class spinster, lead to her writing bold and at times bawdy poems about her life. Elizabeth Moody's experience as first a manuscript poet in a coterie and then a published, anonymous reviewer give her mock-heroic verse a public writer's assurance and irony. Mary Leapor's own sympathy and personal connection to the countryside lead to contesting the way in which rural life had been depicted by the Scriblerians, while Anna Letitia Barbauld's sense of personal faith and sympathy for her fellow creatures helps her develop a gentle mock-heroic—yet both Leapor and Barbauld use heavy textual allusion to establish their right to contesting the work of their male counterparts. It is clear from even this small survey that the opportunity offered by mock-heroic to women poets led to the development of several unique and important poetic voices in the eighteenth century.

Consequences of Women's Mock-Heroic

Mock-heroic poetry by women, including but not limited to that examined in this thesis, opens new avenues of poetic understanding and innovation for all poets in the eighteenth century. Most prominently, mock-heroic allows women to articulate the ambivalence and complexity of their feelings regarding the domestic. Perhaps because of their complicated place in society in general, women poets appear to have been able to inject

sympathy and nuance into mock-heroic in a way that male poets did not. Yet this is only one aspect of the way women's mock-heroic poetry participates in the development of eighteenth-century poetry. Mary Jones' bawdy poems reveal a woman unembarrassed by her physicality, as in 'Holt Waters,' but whose range of work demonstrates that she is not simply a scatological poet but capable of satires that have deeply political connections (as in 'Order of Convocation') and of poetry that calls attention to the strictures social expectations put upon both men and women, as in 'Epistle from Fern-Hill.' Jones' work represents an innovation on Jonathan Swift's examination of his and his characters' relationship to their bodies and bodily functions, and to the social niceties that surround them. Elizabeth Moody's poetry reminds her readers of the links between epic and domesticity, such as that in the *Iliad* and *Paradise Lost*, and invites them to consider their discomfort with the conjunction of the two. Mary Leapor's poems lay claim to classical antecedents for her mock-pastorals, offering another (though overlooked) voice in the pastoral debate of Pope and Philips.

Mock-Heroic's Development

The authors in this study were the clearest examples before me of writers engaging with mock-heroic in a meaningfully new way to discuss domestic concerns. However, many other women wrote mock-heroics about domesticity that deserve study. Some present motherhood and children as another domestic topic to mock; some write bawdy poems that must have been influenced by Swift; and some, at the end of the century, use the domestic mock-heroic to satirise political matters.

Mary Barber's (c.1685-c.1755) work has been brought to critical attention by recent anthologizing and scholarship, particularly Christopher Fanning's article 'Voices of the Dependent Poet,' which examines the many different voices in which she writes.

Although these voices demonstrate impressive poetic control and technical ability, Barber has typically been treated as a minor member of Swift's circle. This is certainly in part due to the unflattering portrait of her in Laetitia Pilkington's memoirs, but also probably because so many of her poems are written about domestic life and particularly about children. Yet Barber borrows the voice of her son in many poems and uses that stance to criticize society in general. She also takes a decidedly mocking tone toward herself in her poems about her children. As Margaret Ann Doody explains, 'Barber takes her position as mother as an opportunity to exercise satiric criticism rather than sweetly maternal sentiments. The poems grow out of the assertiveness of Barber's position as mother, and an almost pugnacious insistence on her real social status as the wife of a Cit.'³⁰⁶ The tension between Barber's position as maternal 'authority' and her situation as a 'dependent poet' who needed subscriptions to print her poetry, together with her elevation of the 'small matter' of children and childhood in mock-heroic terms, indicate that her work should be considered part of the domestic mock-heroic strain.

Mary Savage's (1718-1788) collection *Poems on Various Subjects* (1777) contains several poems which might be considered mock-heroic.³⁰⁷ She frequently writes in Swiftian octosyllabic couplets, and her poetry alludes to the work of both Pope and Swift. Her allegorical characters such as 'Oeconomy' and 'Miss Fashion' voice the concerns of the domestic woman. Among her better-known poems is a mock-heroic called 'The Disaster,' lamenting the death (at the hands of her cat) of two sparrows she had tamed. In a preface, she describes having dreamed of training them to carry her through the air in a chariot, an image both elevating and miniaturizing – but then descends into colloquialism in the first few lines of the poem, 'A dire disaster—hang the

³⁰⁶ Margaret Ann Doody, 'Swift Among the Women,' *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 18 (Pope, Swift, and Their Circle Special Number, 1988), 68-92, p. 73.

³⁰⁷ Mary Savage, *Poems on Various Subjects and Occasions*, 2 vols, (London: Printed for C. Parker, 1777).

cat' (line 3) before returning to an elevated description of her imaginary chariot --- and then back to the quotidian when she is distracted by a fly:

A buzzing fly sports round my head
And straight the airy castle fled.

My son with arm of mighty force
Soon stopped the fly's progressive course:
The trembling insect fast he held,
With joy elate his bosom swell'd. (lines 11-16)³⁰⁸

Her son's destruction of the fly brings the register up to heroic again: a complicated poem of the domestic, the small, and the way that imagination transforms them. The references to Swift and Pope as well as Savage's octosyllabics and the domestic affairs at the heart of her work demonstrate that mock-heroic remained a viable mode for female writers after the middle of the century.

Frances O'Neill (before 1770 – after 1803), who moved from Ireland to London in search of a writing career, claimed that she was able to live for a time off of the work of, alternately, her pen and her needle: her book *Poetical Essays, Being a Collection of Satirical Poems, Songs and Acrostics* (1802) begins with several mock-heroic poems describing two servants (an Irishman and a Scotchwoman) in a great London house. It is interesting to note that O'Neill chooses to include the word 'satirical' in her title, and that she calls attention to her satirical mission in her introduction, which begins 'This Satire, which is now submitted to the Press, at the ardent request of the Authoresses intimate friends, is not unworthy of Public Notice.'³⁰⁹ As the author of the entry in the *Orlando Project* points out, her writing is lively, even surprising: in a poem addressed to

³⁰⁸ Savage, *Poems on Various Subjects and Occasions*, v. 2, p. 80.

³⁰⁹ Frances O'Neill, *Poetical Essays; Being A Collection of Satirical Poems, Songs and Acrostics* (London: 1802), p. [3].

Peter Pindar (the poet John Wolcot), ‘she produces what begins like a compliment and slides into outrageous, rousing, even scatological attack.’³¹⁰

Another Irish poet who responded to Peter Pindar was Henrietta Battier (1751-?), who published her work under the pseudonym ‘Polly Pindar, sister to Peter Pindar.’ Her poems include *The Mousiad* (1787); *The Lemon. A Poem in answer to a scandalous libel, entitled The Orange* (1797); and *An Address on ... the Projected Union* (1799), all written in response to Irish loyalist rhetoric. Later, Elizabeth Cobbold (1765-1824), a socialite who was known for her parties on St. Valentine’s Day and her artistry in cut paper, wrote *The Mince-Pye: A Heroic Epistle Humbly Addressed to the Sovereign Dainty of a British Feast, by Carolina Patty Pasty*. A satire on the poem ‘The Sovereign’ by C.S. Pybus, this 100-page poem obviously takes its initial idea from Pybus’ last name, but Cobbold uses the association to bring questions of nationalism and women’s place in politics into her satire. Such turning outward at the end of the century is interesting to consider as different possibilities for mock-heroic’s later use come to light.

Mock-heroic also makes its way into the novel over the course of the eighteenth century. As has already been noted, Terry posits that the use of mock-heroic changes over the course of the eighteenth century:

Most previous criticism has tended to see mock-heroic as a genre, a distinct category of work, not as a fugitive ‘effect’ flickering to life in a variety of contexts. Yet this is one of the directions in which mock-heroic evolves in the eighteenth century: indeed, it is a mark of its full absorption in the literary culture of its day.³¹¹

These mock-heroic digressions were not confined to poetry: Terry offers examples of different works in which the question of high and low is debated, including Samuel

³¹⁰ ‘Frances O’Neill’ in *Orlando: Women’s Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present*, ed. by Brown, Susan, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy <<http://orlando.cambridge.org/>> [accessed August 2017]

³¹¹ Terry, *Mock-Heroic from Butler to Cowper*, p. 26.

Richardson's novel *Pamela*, while Henry Power's *Epic into Novel* (which traces the responses to classical literature in Henry Fielding's novels and the way that the epic affected the novel's development) begins with a discussion of Fielding's *Tom Jones* as a mock-epic. While these instances might be seen as examples of mock-heroic becoming more diffuse, Terry rightly identifies them as proof of the importance of mock-heroic, not just in poetry, but in a larger change in discourse over the course of the century.

This change may have been driven in part by women's use of mock-heroic. Women's mock-heroic poetry and prose tends to be shorter than works such as *The Rape of the Lock* or *The Dunciad*, and it is often titled as if occasional. It seems reasonable to conclude that women's use of mock-heroic at mid-century contributed to the mode's persistence into the second half of the century, and its effect on the novel, a form often associated with women.

It is particularly interesting to note the way that mock-heroic and the novel intersect: Henry Fielding considered the novel a 'comic epic-poem in prose,' and some critics have described George Crabbe as a would-be novelist because of the 'case history' biographical sketch poems he wrote late in life. The intersections between novel and poetry are being considered by critics such as Henry Power, Kate Parker, and Courtney Weiss Smith; mock-heroic, with its self-aware irony, seems to have much in common with the novel.³¹²

Based on a growing body of work examining its influence, mock-heroic seems to play an important part in shaping the literary culture of the late eighteenth century and the early decades of the nineteenth. Even Jane Austen's famous miniaturizing of her novels as 'the little bit (two Inches wide) of Ivory on which I work with so fine a Brush,

³¹² See Power, *Epic Into Novel*, and Kate Parker and Courtney Weiss Smith (eds.), *Eighteenth-Century Poetry and the Rise of the Novel Reconsidered* (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press, 2014).

as produces little effect after much labour' is a kind of mock-heroic, shrinking an entire village, its occupants, and all of the action which Austen's novels describe.³¹³ Austen's affection for William Cowper is well-known; Henry Austen's 'Biographical Notice of the Author' (1818) published with *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion* says that Cowper was Jane Austen's favorite 'moral writer...in verse,' and Austen's characters quote from his poems in *Sense and Sensibility*, *Emma*, and *Mansfield Park*.³¹⁴ Cowper's masterpiece *The Task* (1785) contains mock-heroic passages, and he wrote shorter mock-heroic poems late in the eighteenth century. It would be fruitful to consider the ways in which Cowper's poetry makes its way into Austen's novels, and whether a mock-heroic tone is there as well.

Certainly, mock-heroic persisted over the course of the century, despite a change in tone. The way that Elizabeth Moody and Anna Letitia Barbauld are able to combine sympathy and sentimentality with mock-heroic work speaks to the form's elasticity as well as its persistence. Yet the realistic emotionality of these poems, so appropriate to the pre-Romantic period, does not dismiss mock-heroic's satiric roots: Moody and Barbauld are writing critiques at least as forceful as those offered by Montagu, Leapor, and Jones. The fact that their subject matter was in some ways different is testament to their different situations both personally and culturally; the appeal of the mock-heroic to an aristocrat like Wortley Montagu, a young labourer like Leapor, and an older teacher and critic like Barbauld demonstrates that it is indeed an important form and mode of the century.

Ultimately, women's mock-heroic writing on domesticity represents an important influence on our understanding of the eighteenth century and women's place in it. The

³¹³ Deirdre Le Faye (ed.), *Jane Austen's Letters*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 337.

³¹⁴ Henry Austen, 'Biographical Notice of the Author' in Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Janet Todd and Antje Blank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 330.

poems discussed in this thesis reflect, not only the contributions of individual poets to the development of mock-heroic and other, related forms, but also convey information about women's education and their relationship with classical poetry, as well as insight into women's changing attitudes to domesticity during the time period when the idea of individual subjectivity was becoming more prominent.

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