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Patronage and Poetic Identity in Eighteenth-Century Laboring-Class Poetry: Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little

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PATRONAGE AND POETIC IDENTITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY LABORING-CLASS
POETRY: MARY LEAPOR, ANN YEARSLEY, AND JANET LITTLE

by

Kelly Joanne Hunnings

BA: 2011, East Carolina University

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of the Arts.

Department of English
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THESIS APPROVAL

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Approved by:

Dr. Anne Chandler, Chair

Dr. Scott McEathron

Dr. George Boulukos

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TITLE: PATRONAGE AND POETIC IDENTITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
LABORING-CLASS POETRY: MARY LEAPOR, ANN YEARSLEY, AND JANET LITTLE

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Anne Chandler

The purpose of this project is to shed light on three female laboring-class poets who have gone largely overlooked by scholars of eighteenth-century studies, Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little. This paper argues that when discussed together these poets exemplify the shift from Augustan models of intellectualism to proto-Romantic thought. Issues of literary patronage and trend are highlighted in this thesis as the laboring-class poetic tradition enjoyed a long vogue in the eighteenth-century. Chapter One offers a look in the literary marketplace of the period and what scholars have said about the subject of laboring-class writing so far. Chapters Two, Three, and Four focus on the poetry of Leapor, Yearsley, and Little, with particular attention to tribute poems with the goal of highlighting the role of laboring-class writers from Augustan poetry to proto-Romantic poetry.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research project to my family, friends and Netflix, without which I am nothing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Issues surrounding literary patronage and the laboring class poetic tradition have been of recent interest to scholars of eighteenth-century studies. The unique relationship that existed between the patron and poet is one that has undergone much scrutiny, as contemporary critics of laboring class poetry are often eager to understand the often-fragile dynamic of the patron-poet relationship (Keegan 4). Indeed, this tradition of power imbalance pervades the verse of nearly every laboring class poet of the eighteenth century, and Tim Burke observes in his discussion of natural genius in the literary tradition that the popularity of laboring class poets in the eighteenth century “signals in part a complicated nostalgia for a less organized, more organic society perceived to have been lost” (217). Fashionable circles of eighteenth-century England were enamored by poetry that was somewhat a departure from the Augustan tradition as laid in place by prominent writers such as Alexander Pope, John Dryden, and Samuel Johnson.¹ Laboring-class or “unlettered” poets were assisted and financially supported by a literary patron, and the poetry produced from many laboring class poets of the mid-to late-eighteenth century reflects the dynamic of that relationship (Christmas 40-1). Moreover, the literary tradition’s conventions and tropes are largely based on the tensions that existed between the patron and poet. My study will pay particular attention to three poets’ relationships with their patrons, and will explore how those relationships affected their poetic identities.

I first became aware of the patron-poet relationship upon reading Mary Leapor’s heavily discussed “Crumble Hall.” This mock-country manor poem highlights the demands placed upon

¹ For the purposes of this project I will use Wordsworth’s *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800) as a marker of Romanticism and the decades prior as indicators of the change to contemporary thought, as Margaret Anne Doody outlines in the introduction of her book *The Daring Muse*.

Leapor as a writer and a domestic servant. After reading “Crumble Hall” I became curious about how this relationship between performing a domestic job and maintaining literary aspirations was reflected in the poetry of other laboring class writers and, moreover, how the poets’ relationship with their patrons impacts our understanding of them. Although “Crumble Hall” has been discussed by many critics of eighteenth-century studies, I found that scholars nearly always noted the expressions of gratitude in “Crumble Hall,” but overlooked similarly placed expressions of ambition. This seems to apply to not only “Crumble Hall,” but to the study of laboring-class poetry as a whole. Indeed, expressions of ambition for fame or literary recognition in laboring class writing were often punctuated by similarly placed expressions of gratitude for patrons. In this thesis I hope to draw attention to areas within the verse of several female laboring class writers who display hopes of being widely read and published.

These ambitions are found in nearly every female laboring class poet’s work, as female laboring class writers of the period often have several pieces of writing that comment on their station and position as a domestic servant or laborer. Such statements are often represented through tribute poems, epistles, or grand expressions of gratitude for patrons or prominent, influential literary figures. This vehicle of tribute poetry is afforded special attention in this thesis, as these poems often include nuances of ambition and eagerness for change, while simultaneously being punctuated by expressions of gratitude. Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little serve as useful models for this poetic tradition, as each represents a significant shift in the literary tradition, each poet expressing more ambition within her poetry than the last. Each of these poets is given their own chapter in this thesis so as to offer a thorough examination of the shifts from the Augustan-inspired work of Leapor, to Yearsley’s proto-Romantic foundation

of individualized and introspective thought, to Little's defiant and individualistic attitude to the previously admired models of writing.

Despite the recent interest in the laboring-class poetic tradition of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many critics and scholars of the period often insist that these women were contented in their positions as domestic servants or laborers. It seems that because these women often conformed to the conventions of the laboring-class poetic tradition they are still in many ways considered grateful and compliant supplicants to their patrons. However, Leapor, Yearsley, and Little subtly assert their ambitions in their poetry and because of this critics often question their motives for writing. I wish to argue here that the writings of Leapor, Yearsley, and Little reveal women who are attentive to literary trends, the literary marketplace, and contemporary thought, as these poets write with vigor, determination, and defiance. Contrary to critical consensus, Leapor, Yearsley, and Little are eager to draw distinctions between themselves and their poetic personas, and in doing so display an eagerness to obtain wide readership and literary prominence. The critique that I offer in this thesis expresses several Marxist concerns, but concentrates primarily upon issues of personal identity in eighteenth-century laboring-class poetry and culture. These approaches are combined in an effort to enhance our contemporary sense of the poets' historical and literary significance. Throughout my study of these three poets, what I found most exciting is the disregard for status and material wealth that emerges as a motif or recurring metaphor throughout their poetry.

Authorial concerns are expressed in Leapor, Yearsley, and Little's poetry and the writings of other laboring class poets. From what is outlined here in this thesis, as well as the exhaustive efforts of those in the forefront of laboring-class poetic scholarship, it seems possible that earlier laboring class poets contributed to questions of poetic identity that pervaded the verse

of many Romantic-era poets. There are several laboring-class poets within the period that I will not address in this thesis, even though they might also serve as excellent models. I will briefly discuss three such writers now, chronologically, in the hopes that the reader may have a better understanding of the consistency of my claims.

The three examples that I will use serve to further accentuate the shift from eighteenth-century laboring-class writing to nineteenth-century laboring-class writing. Although many of the concerns remain the same, the poetry does reflect changes in contemporary thought and in the literary marketplace. Moreover, there are many commonalities between the laboring class writers: the use of poetic persona, the presence of the patron-poet relationship in their verse, and poetry that reflects a desire to be widely read and published. Two of the three additional writers that I will now briefly address are from the eighteenth century: Mary Collier—who gained fame in the 1730s—and Mary Scott, who was a contemporary of Yearsley. From the nineteenth century—and several decades after Little’s collection had been published—I will also discuss Mary Hutton, who was writing in the early 1830s. Each of these poets possesses a body of work that further indicates the relevancy of the shift from laboring class writers simply using Augustan models of writing to laboring class writers influencing the development of Romantic thought, as well as public attention toward the issues and concerns of those in the laboring class. I do not, however, spend the majority of my project on these writers as Leapor, Yearsley, and Little better exemplify intellectual aspiration and publishing concerns within their verse.

Although she wrote only a few years before Leapor, Mary Collier is often considered to be one of the original voices in eighteenth-century laboring-class poetry. Her poem “The Woman’s Labour: An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck” emerged in 1739 and brought with it much debate concerning her opinion of Stephen Duck’s “The Thresher’s Labour” (1730). Collier was

evidently infuriated by Duck's representation of female field workers as feckless and weak in his poem, and she sought to present women as capable and hardworking—essentially what she saw happening as a domestic servant every day. Collier's verse serves as a wonderful example of poetry that was produced just before Leapor's work. The two shared many similarities, particularly their astute observations about the inequalities that were experienced by women and domestic workers. It seems clear that Collier wanted such verse to be read widely and her ambitions to be a prominent writer are noted not only in her use of the popular heroic couplet, attention to Augustan models, but also her rigorous response to Duck. Donna Landry discusses Collier's well-documented relationship with Duck and her feminist concerns with his writing (101). Indeed, although Collier enjoyed much of Duck's writing—as Little did that of Burns—she did not approve of the treatment and use of women in his poetry (Ferguson 98). Moreover, by writing a poem directly criticizing one of the most popular laboring class poets of the period, Collier asserts a sense of her own intellectualism and ambitions.

Like Collier, Mary Scott's verse reveals her awareness of contemporary thought and trend, but her 522-line poem "The Female Advocate" (1774) does something that other prominent and well-known female writers of the period were also beginning to attempt: arguing for equality in women's education. The poem reveals Scott as well-read, rational, and knowledgeable about current issues in education reform. Moreover, the poem serves as a response to writer and clergyman John Duncombe's "The Femiad. A Poem" (1754) wherein he discusses female genius and writing. It is with her response that Scott is able to assert her intellectualism differently than other female laboring class writers of the period; indeed, she upholds other female writers as models of intellectualism, many of which were considered by Duncombe as possessing "a wanton muse" (Ferguson 85). Scott dismisses Duncombe and those

like him who challenge the integrity of female verse. Like Collier's outraged response to Duck's poem, Scott's is likewise provoked by a male writer who she considers to misrepresent women and her poem—not long before Yearsley's collection was published—also begins to exercise self-analysis and introspective about her role as a writer. Indeed, it is around this period that there begins to emerge an inclination for what we now recognize as Romantic thought. The focus—like Yearsley and Little—becomes more individualistic, while simultaneously offering a critique about the conditions that female laboring class writers endured.

Compounding this inclination towards more individualized self-perceptions, Mary Hutton also serves as an excellent model for post-Little, nineteenth-century laboring class writing. A more comprehensive examination of issues within eighteenth century laboring class poetry would include additional nineteenth century laboring class writers so as to better display the shift from early eighteenth century Augustan-influenced models of writing and the newfound attention to those in the laboring classes. Mary Timney discusses the decline of the female laboring-class poets in the nineteenth-century, but she does include many poets such as Hutton who were able to remain relevant despite the decline (127).² Hutton and Little, despite their differences in nationality, share many of the same attentions to the public sphere, and call for a change in the way that the laboring classes were treated. Yet, new anxieties emerged for nineteenth-century laboring class writers as industrialism changed the focus of the once purely agricultural villages. Further, the enclosure movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries exposed the problems of those in the laboring classes. Hutton discussed the conditions of evolving laboring classes.

² On Hutton's life and career, see for example Florence Boos's "Class and Victorian Poetics" (153).

This comparative set of authors shares many similarities with the writers outlined in this thesis; however, the three poets that I've chosen to concentrate upon—Leapor, Yearsley, and Little—are distinct because instead of concentrating upon work and domestic service, they reflect primarily upon the quality of intellectualism in published literature, the nature of thought in the eighteenth century, and what it means to aspire intellectually. Indeed, there are many intersecting issues addressed in Leapor, Yearsley, and Little's poetry, and these overlapping concerns—which often include gender, class, and a desire to be widely read and published—tend to offer the strongest insights into the perception of female laboring class poets during the eighteenth century. So much of female laboring class poetry of the period contends with preconceived notions of what it means to be a female author during the eighteenth century. Indeed, that Leapor, Yearsley, and Little wanted to be widely read and well known by the reading public is seemingly evident as all three either actively attempted or did publish throughout their lifetimes. Although laboring class authors frequently conformed to particular models or tropes in order to have their work published, they still possess the same ambitions as other writers to become well respected or to be positively recognized for their work.

Another factor that hindered female laboring class writers from being recognized as possessing literary ambitions is the concept of "natural genius," which informs the verse of several writers of the period. Tim Burke observes in his article "Ann Yearsley and the Distribution of Genius in Early Romantic Culture" that many laboring class writers were considered to have inherent or natural talent. Certainly within the prefatory letters and poems of each poet's collection there persists a notion that because these women were autodidacts they possessed talent that was accidental rather than the product of hard work and diligence. Burke's discussion rightfully points to the natural genius paradigm as contributing to "the cultural

silencing of the female voice” (223). For Leapor, Yearsley, and Little—all of whom have been described as possessing natural genius or talent—such a description usurps their capabilities and earned talent. Interestingly, throughout the course of their poetry—much of it outlined here in this thesis—these poets both conform and reject notions of the natural talent. It was a popular trend in published literature, and something their readers could be counted upon to understand, yet it misrepresented their talent and diligence.

Due to such representations of these writers by their patrons or critics, it is difficult to fully perceive their eagerness to publish. Indeed, one of the central problems that readers and critics of the laboring class poetic tradition may have when attempting to understand a poet’s identity through their work is the use of poetic persona. In the case of Leapor, Yearsley, and Little this use of persona—a common device within eighteenth century writing—often causes the poet’s opinions to be difficult to discern; for example, Leapor’s complaints about work or her status as laboring class are normally uttered through the poetic persona, Mira. All three of the poets likewise assign such a persona to their patrons which enables them to shield their expressions of ambition so as to not appear ungracious. Later Yearsley and Little’s personas serve less as a protective shield and more as trope within the literary tradition—as their personas more directly describe their laborious positions, Yearsley as “Lactilla” and Little as “The Scotch Milkmaid.”

Although their writing is separated by roughly fifty years, all three poets are bound by several crucial components within their poetry: the first, and perhaps foremost, is their class status. Each held a position as a domestic servant or laborer and required the support of a literary patron to help fuel what became known to many in a period as their “writing habit” (Griffin 93). The pressures of performing a laborious job are reflected in much of the poetry, as time and

energy were not always on the laboring class writer's side. For example, Leapor was terminated from her position as a domestic servant at Edgecote House, a topic that is overtly represented in "Crumble Hall." The poem indicates that despite being unable to perform all of the responsibilities of her job, Leapor still considers her poetry to be the dearest to her. Moreover, there are several expressions throughout Yearsley's and Little's poetry that likewise reflect that their relationships with writing are troubled. Despite this, the relationship between patron and writer is one that all three poets address explicitly in their own writing—both personal and public—and one that scholars have discussed repeatedly (Griffin 196). For example, in his discussion of literary patronage, Richard Greene claims: "on the one hand, [patronage] reflected economic injustices in society...on the other, it was an essential means of access to the reading public" (112). The reading public was much on Leapor's mind as she attempted to have her writing published, as her nearly constant allusions to Pope, Dryden, Swift, Johnson, and other prominent Augustan figures indicated that she was influenced by authors who were well-regarded and widely read. Similarly, Yearsley also conformed to traditional forms of intellectualism in order for her work to be read, but Little—although just as eager to be published—rejected the ideas of the Augustan writers and sought to emulate other prominent laboring-class writers, such as Robert Burns.

It is no secret that many laboring-class writers made compromises in their writing in order to have their work read by a wider audience, and that often these compromises were made for critical reception (Griffin 193). The presence of the critic in laboring-class writing indicates that the poet is willing to perform a type of martyrdom in order to display her prowess and capability as a writer. The grandiosity within the verse of Leapor, Yearsley, and Little's (even as Little often uses Scottish vernacular when writing grand statements) verse reflects a sense of

artistic egotism rather than of sincere supplication; indeed, these poets show their readers and patrons what they are capable of rhetorically. The archetype of the critic or disdainful muse pervades the verse of many laboring class writers of the eighteenth century, Leapor, Yearsley and Little included. That the critic is accorded a major role in laboring class poetry is clear, but the connection between the critic and its impact upon the patron-poet relationship is perhaps most evident in the prefatory letters or comments that often introduce a poet's collection.

As Mary Waldron observes, the connection between the critic and the patron in the laboring-class poet's mindset is often developed in prefatory material. Waldron makes the basic point that eighteenth-century poetry was at once considered popular and highbrow, opening the door to those of the laboring class (25). Leapor, Yearsley, and Little were critical of the limitations set in place because of their class status, and Waldron perceives that such criticisms and frustrations are often reflected in their work, although each poet uses a different approach. Waldron notes that the critics within Leapor, Yearsley, and Little's work are answered in prefatory letters, as these typically offer a sense of caution or explanation for any errors or problems with the rest of the collection (30). In nearly all works in which the professional critic appears, he assumes a spiteful and destructive personality, and although Waldron makes many interesting points about the role of the critic in laboring class poetry, she does not fully address the presence of the critic as a form of protection. Indeed, exposing the possible problems that the critic may have with the poet's work allows the poet to confront criticism and in doing so gain sympathy from the reader. This self-censorship is displayed most frequently when Leapor, Yearsley, and Little express frustration or an eagerness for change and then almost immediately suppress such desires by praising their patrons for allowing them to have the opportunity to write and escape the quotidian aspects of life; indeed, with nearly every complaint these writers follow

with a pronouncement of gratitude. This certainly makes the exchange between the poet and patron compelling, as the poet must censor her or himself in order to maintain a sense of security.

In what follows, then, I attempt to take a closer look at Leapor's ambitions to be published and how she allowed well-known Augustan writers and their verse to shape her own writing. Indeed, Leapor used Augustan models when writing, but her work shows the foundation for many of the conventions of the tradition, whereas Yearsley and Little expand, invert, and even at times ignore these. For Leapor, these models of writing were her way of asserting her intellectualism, and wit and social commentary also serve Leapor in exhibiting her intellectualism. Leapor shows her readers that she has read prominent authors and is able to participate as an equal in the discussion of these authors by satirizing them. In her discussion of the laboring class poetic tradition, Bridget Keegan finds that in laboring class poetry the poet's work is perhaps most altered by a sense of urgency to please the patron (4). Indeed, much laboring class poetry shifts between complaint and praise of the writer's patron—the complaints often expressed over their position as a laborer or domestic servant. In contrast, their praise for their patrons often centers upon having the opportunity for their poetry to be read by others. For many laboring class writers, the patron was the only means possible in having their writing published, but this desire to have their work read by others is complicated in that laboring class writers also had domestic professions to maintain (Keegan 3). Despite Leapor's desire to please her patron, her poetry also reflects her personal frustrations with her position as a domestic servant, and her ambitions to be accepted in the literary world.

Leapor maintained a positive working relationship with her patron Bridget Freemantle, and because of this she is often perceived as being contented in her position as a domestic servant. Despite this, she writes poems that express her eagerness to assert her intellectualism

and be a respected and published writer. In contrast to Leapor, critical discussion of Yearsley's poetry is surrounded by her tumultuous relationship with one of her patrons, Hannah More. The argument between the two began in 1785 just before the release of *Poems, On Several Occasions*, when she questioned More's motives and instructions as a patron. Moreover, Yearsley's poems are different in style and wider ranging than More's own verse; yet as Waldron notes in her study of Yearsley, More did want to be recognized as a patron and influence for Yearsley's work (Ferguson 81). More's understanding of the patron-poet relationship was largely based on earlier laboring class poets, such as that of Freemantle and Leapor. More, with the help of Yearsley's other patron Elizabeth Montagu, worked on gathering subscribers when Yearsley was informed that More and Montagu would control the monetary profits of the volume so as to keep "it out of the Husband's power to touch it" (Waldron282). Indeed, More and Montagu did not trust Yearsley's unemployed husband, but their seemingly genuine efforts to control the money for Yearsley's benefit also implies that they believed a laboring class woman to be incapable to handling her own financial affairs. The legal document that gave More and Montagu control of Yearsley's literary income did not provide ample security for her children, and their exchange did not leave the two with much of a relationship to salvage. After understanding Yearsley's unhappiness with the document and the financial circumstance, More writes a scathing letter:

Are you mad, Mrs. Yearsley? Or have you drank a glass too much? Who are your advisers? I am certain you have drank, or you would not talk to me in this manner.

(*Poems xvii*)³

³ Editors of Yearsley's second collection of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects*, placed many of her personal letters and correspondences in the document. I will cite the collection as such throughout the course of the project.

More's letter certainly reveals outrage, but also indicates her astonishment that Yearsley would not immediately express her feelings of gratitude for the opportunity. In contrast, Yearsley's response is courteous and direct:

Madam, you are very wrong to think I have drank. I am only anxious on my children's account. Circumstances may change, ten or twenty years hence, when perhaps I am no more; and I only wish for a copy of the deed, as a little memorandum for my children; nor do I think the requisition unreasonable.

(Poems xvii-xviii)

More's attitude toward the laboring class is exposed in her letter to Yearsley. Not only does More attack Yearsley's ability to understand financial matters, but she also accuses her of being incapable of making rational decisions. More's response indicates that she believes Yearsley should display a stronger sense of gratitude and appreciation for her assistance. The content, tone, and rhetorical choices of these two brief excerpts reveal that More and Yearsley do not share an equitable or balanced relationship, but are instead distinguished by class differences.

Chapter Three assesses many of the issues that surround the aforementioned relationship between Yearsley and More, but concentrates primarily upon the current critical presentation of More as a privileged, villainous member of the bourgeois literati versus the eighteenth-century perception of her as one who was a victim of Yearsley's ingratitude. Indeed, Chapter Three posits that the rift between the two is largely based on a lack of communication, one that arises when Yearsley expresses concern and ambition for the presentation of her writing. Further, that Yearsley feels comfortable expressing her concerns about the way that her writing is handled and published indicates a significant change from Leapor, who showed interest in simply being published with little reservation about how that should come about. By the 1780s, when Yearsley

was writing, the concern in terms of publishing was no longer simply “Will they or won’t they?” but instead the worries became increasingly monetary and contractual. Moreover, unlike Leapor or even Little, Yearsley attempts to assert her intellectualism by posing philosophical inquiries in many of her shorter, more introspective poems (Kord 232). Indeed, Chapter Three explores the ways in which Yearsley attempts to separate herself from the laboring class poetic tradition, which she does by inverting many of the tradition patron-poet roles in her verse. From her first collection of poetry *Poems, on Several Occasions* to her second *Poems on Various Subjects*, it is clear that Yearsley seeks to usurp the role of the patron in a way that Leapor is not willing to do in her poetry.

In contrast to the poetry of Leapor and Yearsley, that of Little exposes her as one who revels in her laboring class status, at least for publishing purposes. Little does not maintain the same relationship with her patron as Leapor or Yearsley, but instead she adopts the guidance and assistance of a fellow Scottish laboring class writer, Robert Burns. That her attention and gratitude to Burns mirrors that of a traditional patron-poet relationship demonstrates that by 1792, when Little published her collection of poetry, the laboring class poetic tradition was to be emulated and admired, rather than the Augustan authors from earlier in the period. Little’s actual financial patron, Frances Dunlop, was a member of the gentry and also served as a patron to Burns. Despite Dunlop’s financial assistance and guidance in the literary marketplace, Little wrote more poetry that expressed her gratitude to Burns as being a literary inspiration than she did Dunlop. Further, although Yearsley and Little’s work is only separated by five years, the two represent two conflicting questions about what it means to be laboring class: to embrace or to reject?

Moreover, the shift between Yearsley and Little's work is the most evident in the ways that Yearsley rejects her position as a laboring class writer and Little embraces it. Yearsley's verse reflects that she still considers knowledge of Augustan writers to be the most effective means of asserting her intellectualism whereas, in contrast, Little frequently uses Scottish vernacular in her poetry as a challenge to Johnson and other prominent Augustan literary figures. Little's poetry redefines previously perceived notions of intellectualism; more than Yearsley or Leapor, Little is willing to accept her status as a peasant poet and her verse indicates that she was aware of her marketability as both Scottish and laboring class.

Moira Ferguson supports the idea that Little exploits her status as a dependent poet primarily through her use of Scottish vernacular and appealing to the trends and conventions previously laid in place by earlier authors. Indeed, Little embraces her status as a laboring class poet, and although many of her poems indicate that she was also frustrated with her position as a laborer and the limitations set in place because of her class, her verse largely reflects that she is defiant against conventional ideas of intellectualism. Despite Ferguson's claim that Little's embrace of Scottish vernacular in her poetry is what allows her to challenge traditional, Augustan modes of writing (97) there are many instances within her writing that show a sense of defiance—most particularly her attack against Samuel Johnson and her nearly constant praise of Burns. Indeed, regardless of Ferguson's assertions concerning Little's defiant displays of intellectualism being based on her use of Scottish vernacular, Little's admiration for another laboring class writer is what chiefly exposes her opinions on conventional notions of intellectualism, as well as her ambitions to be widely read and published like Burns.

Despite the recent interest in eighteenth century laboring class writers, each of the critics that I have noted have not fully addressed Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Janet

Little's eagerness to publish and be widely read. These three poets have largely been described as complacent or contented in their positions as domestic servants and laborers, but their poetry indicates that they are ambitious and seek to be published with the ranks of other well-respected writers of the period, as these poets mark a distinct shift in the laboring class poetic tradition. My analysis of these poets explores how the relationships affected their poetic identities. Leapor enacts the early conventions of the literary tradition and over forty years later Yearsley and Little confront these and invert them. In this thesis I assess this inversion in the poetic tradition as an indicator of the change in eighteenth-century thought.

CHAPTER TWO

FRIENDSHIP AND GRATITUDE IN MARY LEAPOR'S POETRY

Over the past few decades Mary Leapor has begun to captivate readers of eighteenth-century poetry, as the unique relationship between patron and writer is one that she addresses explicitly in her own writing—both personal and public—and one that scholars have discussed heavily (Griffin 196). Although laboring-class poetry was popular within literary circles, many laboring-class writers endured criticism. Indeed, laboring class writers of the period perceived “the near-universal distaste with which their writing was received” and Leapor is one such writer (Kord 218). Though she published nothing before her death, Leapor experienced setbacks and rejections that indicated that it would not be easy to obtain public approval, and she was aware of the attention paid to earlier laboring class poets like Stephen Duck and Mary Collier. The notoriety of these earlier figures raised the stakes and set norms of expected behavior for other laboring class writers such as Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little.

For Leapor, as for others, these existing expectations—briefly outlined in the introduction of this thesis—placed a great burden on the personal relationships she formed with people who did offer her help in the literary world, most specifically her patron Bridget Freemantle. The dynamics of that relationship, I argue here, are not important just to the production of such poetry but also to the context, especially since, in Leapor's case, the poetry itself speaks not of pure submission but also of ambition. It is my goal here to uncover the nature and terms of that ambition more thoroughly than has been done before, with a particular emphasis on the ways that Leapor interpolates ambition and gratitude in her poetry.

Bridget Freemantle, Leapor's patron, buttresses the general impression that critics often hold of laboring-class poets in her letter “To the Reader” from Leapor's posthumously published

Poems Upon Several Occasions (1748). This letter has caused many of Leapor's critics and subscribers to suggest that her poetry highlights her dependence upon her patrons and Augustan influences, rather than her own ambitions as a writer (Griffin 195). In her letter Freemantle assured Leapor's readers that Leapor was "contented in the Station of Life in which Providence had placed her" (Greene & Messenger xli). Still, unlike many other poets and patrons of the period, such as Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, Leapor and her patron Freemantle maintained what critics understand to be a mutual respect and friendship for one another. This friendship suggests that Freemantle's comments about Leapor's "content[ment]" were meant for Leapor's readers as opposed to being an actual reflection of the author herself (Greene & Messenger xli). Indeed, eighteenth-century readers of laboring-class poetry expected to readpraise and gratitude for the patron or other distinguished literary figures, often in the form of tribute poetry, rather than resentment or social critique from the poet (Greene 46). Much like Freemantle's prefatory comments about Leapor's satisfaction with her lot, other patrons of the early-to-mid eighteenth century likewise included such remarks in an effort to portray their protégés as those who were simply plucked out of nature and given the opportunity to write (Burke 217). While this literary convention certainly indicates an imbalance between the patron and the poet, Leapor frequently displays moments of ambition in her poetry, often through satire and social commentary.

Much laboring-class poetry shifts between complaints about working life and praise for the patron, who enables the poetry to be read by others. Indeed, despite Leapor's desire to please her patron, her poetry also reflects her personal frustrations with her position as a domestic servant, and her ambitions to be accepted in the literary world. These personal frustrations are perhaps what caused Leapor's readers to speculate about her contentment as a domestic servant. Indeed, forever disguising her ambition, Leapor frequently uses her persona, Mira, in her poetry.

This adoption of a persona, a convention in early eighteenth-century writing, further allows for Leapor's sincerity and commitment to her writing to be called into question by today's critics, and this may in turn inhibit the modern reader from perceiving the complexity of her poetry.

When Leapor writes through Mira she is protected in the sense that she is able to hide behind an identity that is not wholly her own; that is, Leapor assigns different names for herself, her patrons and those she works with, and in doing so she raises questions about whether or not she, as Leapor, feels that which she describes Mira as having felt. The nearly constant references to her patrons in her poetry, and how her happiness is seemingly dependent upon their approval, is one of the greatest issues that Leapor's critics have in drawing a distinction between what thoughts are Leapor's and what thoughts simply belong to Mira. The subtlety of Leapor's writing is not always appreciated, as the understated difference between her thoughts and actions is often difficult to discern, particularly when one considers the presence of her persona in her poetry.

Still, Leapor's struggle for recognition becomes evident when one considers the patterns and repetitions in her poetry, in particular her tropes involving internal and external change. By beginning with this broader topic, and taking account of how she uses personae and renaming, the readers gets a clearer sense of the intersections of personal and political motivations in her poetry. This will mean tracing issues as seemingly disparate as Leapor's complaints about domestic servitude and her status as a laboring class poet, her affirmations of her friendship with her patrons, and her hopes of being a widely read writer. The repetitions found in Leapor's discussion of internal and external change are perhaps simplest to identify in the way she asserts her intellectual capabilities. These are primarily reflected through her use of satire, blatant displays of appreciation for her patron, and her use of humorous inversions or tensions when establishing the demarcation between her art and her domestic job. Leapor's poetry reveals her

as one who is engaged with the trends and conventions of early eighteenth-century laboring class poetry, and it is this engagement that highlights Leapor's rhetorical capabilities.

Leapor has particular and strategic ways of bringing the latent tensions of patronage into full view. For example, Leapor characterizes the patron-poet relationship in her poem, "The Way of the World" as mirroring a master-slave relationship. In the poem Leapor outlines not only the conditions that many within the laboring class were often subjected to, but also describes the relationship between the patron and the writer: "Sir, I'm your Servant, Madam, I'm your slave" (line 32). Leapor employs notable tensions and inversions within her writing, which indicates her astuteness regarding the nature of the master-slave relationship. The aforementioned line, for example, reflects a general feeling about the relationship between the writer and the patron rather than that Leapor's actual relationship with her own. In the poem she makes many poignant observations about the life of a working-class woman in eighteenth-century England, as she comically addresses the "Patron" who is described as being "the humble Slave for all Mankind" (line 40). Despite the dismally comic presentation of the "Patron" in the poem, Leapor seems to have held an overall pleasant relationship with both of her patrons, Freemantle and Susanna Jennens (Greene 19). This real-life cooperation is what causes Leapor's opinions about patronage to be so challenging to understand; if Leapor is compliant with those who shape her work—whether willfully or not—then she must be somehow parasitically attached to her patrons. This notion, albeit true in the sense that Leapor did reap certain benefits from maintaining a harmonious relationship with her patrons, persists in much contemporary criticism as a judgment on Leapor's ambitions as a writer; indeed, it is difficult for critics to agree upon how rebellious Leapor was, and how eager she was to distinguish herself as a writer.

Leapor also uses “The Way of the World” to discuss false flattery, which Ann Yearsley was accused of by her patrons and critics. Despite the prevalence of flattery in laboring class poetry, Leapor’s comments indicate her eagerness to appear genuine to her readers:

But the worst Flatterer that wears a Tongue,
 Is him whose Power aggravates the Wrong:
 To whose grand Levee Crowds of Suppliants run,
 And bow like Persians to the rising Sun:
 Where starv'd Dependents linger out their Days,
 Yet proud to share his Snuff-box and his Praise,
 Grow stiff with Standing and with Staring thin,
 To watch the Dimple on their Patron's Chin:
 Who with a Nod can make the Wretch believe,
 And smiles on Hunger which he'll ne'er relieve. (lines60-70)

In these lines she addresses false promises as she presents the power-imbalance and injustice that can often exist between the writer and the literary patron. Although Leapor is eager to show the authenticity of her feelings, she also presents a power-imbalance in the patron-poet relationship. Indeed, there is a sense of imbalance that exists between the patron and Mira, as Mira waits for the approval of the patron—watching the “Dimple” on their chin. It seems that the patron feels first and Mira second, her happiness being dependent upon the happiness of the patron.

Leapor’s integrity and sincerity is certainly a prominent issue in relation to her heavily discussed “Crumble-Hall,” wherein she presents Edgecote House—an estate where she served as a kitchen maid herself—from the perspective of a domestic servant (Keegan 182-3). The poem is rich in eighteenth-century allegory and pastoralism, and satirizes the country manor poem; yet

Leapor does offer something unique to this tradition as she positions herself as a laborer on the estate. In the poem Leapor flexes her intellectualism by expressing criticisms about the estate owners and her fellow laboring-class employees. Leapor exposes the events of the house both upstairs and downstairs, and writes of the emotional and physical toll that domestic work may have on a person, presumably herself: “Oppressed with headache, and eternal whims/ Sad Mira vows to quit the darling crime” (lines 4-5). In these lines Leapor shares that Mira wishes to write, or commit the “darling crime,” but she must also work arduously as a domestic servant before doing so (line 5). The phrase itself—“darling crime”—indicates a playfully artistic egotism, one that certainly displays Leapor’s passion and commitment to writing. Leapor’s poetry reflects that she is pleased by her intellectual capacity and her ability as a rhetorician.

Throughout “Crumble-Hall” there is a demarcation of Leapor’s art and her domestic position as pointed and analytical: Leapor’s position as a female domestic servant traditionally indicates that she should not be writing, yet she is willing commit such a “crime” regardless of the repercussions. Mira’s comment upon the estate itself seems to highlight the false pretension and ignorance that pervade both the environment of the servants and the estate owners. Further, the barrier between Leapor’s domestic responsibilities and her desire to write is only increased by her attention to Freemantle. If Mira’s writing—or her “darling crime”—is good or improved, then she will receive a “smile” or approval from Artemisia, which seems to be what she is most eager to receive (line 5). Such lines indicate a dependency which has ultimately allowed critics to question of Leapor’s literary ambitions.

The critique that “Crumble-Hall” offers should of course be examined in relation to Leapor’s most important model, Alexander Pope, and again the outcome is more complex than meets the eye. Whereas several critics argue that “Crumble Hall” serves only as an imitation of

Pope's writing, rather than Leapor's own social commentary⁴, Bridget Keegan observes that Leapor's fondness for Pope allows "Crumble-Hall" to operate as a social statement, one that "draws upon Pope's aesthetic and formal principles" (182). In an effort to mediate both arguments, I wish to examine how Pope's attitude to admired patrons or prominent literary figures vis-à-vis his appeals to change seem to have affected Leapor. Pope's "Epistle to Burlington" seems to serve as a possible model for "Crumble-Hall," as the poem focuses on architecture and tastelessness, yet it is hardly fair to describe the poem as pure imitation. While Leapor certainly uses the poem as a point of reference—the unread books in the library are similar to Timon's—her criticisms extend beyond issues of taste, but instead concentrate upon the idea of false intellectualism. Moreover, she criticizes the condition and treatment of the estate, but in an effort to satisfy the tension between her ambitions as a writer and her indebtedness to her patrons, she does little to criticize the oppressiveness of laboring class conditions and treatment in her poetry. Instead, Leapor offers a complaint about the labor that must be endured at by those of laboring class—primarily her own work—but also does little to push for political and social change. This is problematic for those critics who seek the polemical rather than the didactic in Leapor's poetry. Yet it seems that Leapor offers subtle criticisms when and where she can; that is, although she does often model her poetry after Pope's work she does seem to also criticize him—particularly in the ways that he discusses women and the female form (Rennhak 127). Although Leapor's work does reflect the influence of her literary patrons and idols, she offers notable contributions to the laboring-class poetic tradition, such as the ever-

⁴ Caryn Chaden discusses this notion that Leapor's work is primarily derivative of Augustan models in her essay "Mentored from the Page: Mary Leapor's Relationship with Alexander Pope"(31-7).

present trope of longing for change or expressing complaint or praise in regards to her work, writing, and patrons.

Leapor further distinguishes herself from Pope in the way that she reveals a sense of frustration with life outside of her relationship with her patrons. In “Crumble-Hall,” Leapor writes, “The sun returns, and Artemisia smiles” (8). In this instance Mira is sincerely grateful for not only the assistance that her patrons provide, but also for their company and friendship. “Crumble-Hall” indicates that Leapor seems to long for conversation and company that is not based primarily upon the shallow observations of those in her working environment. Although it is not clear whether Leapor particularly references her fellow employees or employers, it is certain that she feels discontent unless she is writing or in the company of her patron. Leapor’s frustration with domestic servitude is most evident upon a close examination of her tribute poems. The imagined dialogue set up in these poems indicates that there is more to the terms of these relationships than others have seen; indeed, there is both more critique and more friendly interchange. The social critique within Leapor’s poetry is not oppositional to her and Freemantle’s friendship; instead there persists a critical false dilemma about Leapor’s friendship with Freemantle and her eagerness to establish herself in the literary world.

Within Leapor’s collection of tribute poems there are certainly conventions that are upheld, but in these poems she is able to show her readers what she is capable of rhetorically and intellectually, which she often achieves through satire and comedy. Moreover, that Leapor’s tribute poems serve as more than examples of gratitude and devotion for her patrons is evidenced by the complaints and eagerness for change that she expresses while simultaneously paying tribute. Leapor masterfully balances her expressions of ambition by punctuating them with proclamations of reverence for both of her patrons, Jennens and Freemantle. This seems to have

caused much frustration for Leapor's current critics, most of whom "wanted to hers as an original voice, regarding the world from her unusual perspective" (Griffin 194). This is complicated in that a significant portion of Leapor's poems pay tribute to someone else. The tribute poems of Leapor's *Poems Upon Several Occasions* fall into two broad categories: poems that are dedicated or directed to Freemantle or Jennens and poems that were requested or solicited by friends or acquaintances of Leapor and her patrons. Poems within the former category are primarily directed to Freemantle; these include "An Epistle to a Lady," "To Artemisia. Dr. King's Invitation to Bellvill: Imitated," and "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame." Within these poems is a sense that Leapor is a friend or equal to Freemantle as all three of the poems highlight Leapor's admiration and gratitude for her patron while simultaneously exposing her own intelligence and wit. It is this intelligence that allows her to assert herself as an equal.

Such an assertion is also found in Leapor's "On Discontent. To Stella," where she expresses a sense of dissatisfaction in dividing her time between her art and her domestic responsibilities. It is this act of complaining that indicates Leapor's willingness to be open with her patrons and to say in her effect that her poetry cannot be solely defined by a sense of indebtedness. In the poem Leapor writes on her discontent with her domestic service through elevated, Neoclassical language:

Look not at Joys that dazzle from afar,
 Nor envy Glaro on his gilded Car;
 For all Degrees their Days of Anguish know,
 And the most happy have a taste of Woe:
 Then calmly take what Providence ordains,
 He swells the Load who murmurs and complains:

For all things vary: And who sits to day

Half-drown'd in Tears; to-morrow may be gay. (lines 44-50)

As the final lines of the poem, these exemplify Leapor's hope that soon she may experience more satisfaction than she is currently. This idea of change is a recurring motif in Leapor's poetry, one that is suggested not only by the content of the poem, but by the structure and imagery as well. For example, the Classical and Augustan allusions suggest that Leapor longs to be accepted within the ranks of well-published and prominent authors, and is eager to shed her laboring class identity. The line "Nor envy Glaro on his gilded Car" appeals to Augustan tradition, but it is also distinctly Leapor's own as she often includes images of gold—"gilded" and "dazzled"—in her verse. Leapor notes the importance of monetary value and worth in her writing. Indeed, the message of "On Disappointment" is to not desire that which one cannot obtain, instead Leapor encourages readers to wait patiently for happiness to come soon, as this will be the only combatant against disappointment.

Like Leapor's poems that pay tribute to her patrons, those that were solicited by friends and acquaintances, or even to allegorical figures, are often playful or satirical in nature. For example, Leapor's "To Grammaticus" serves as a comic apology to "Grammaticus"—or Grammar—for not paying proper attention to him. Alternatively, "Grammar" could represent a picky person, perhaps even another critic of her work. Leapor describes Mira's encounter with Grammar personified:

MIRA wou'd with Tears atone

For all the Mischief she has done;

Sincerely mourns (believe it true)

The sending of her Rhymes to you.

The Wound my Verses gave your Ear,
 Was undesign'd it will appear;
 Nor in the least the Fault of me,
 As by this Sorrow you may see. (lines 1-8)

These opening lines set in motion a light, satirical mock-tribute and apology to grammar personified. Again, Leapor describes her use of grammar in writing as “mischief” and in doing so further characterizes her relationship with writing as one that is illicit (line 2). Leapor has many tribute poems in her collection of poetry, many of which discuss the relationship with writing. Other such poems include “Song to Chloe, playing on her Spinet,” “The Sacrifice. An Epistle to Celia,” “The Setting Sun. To Silva,” “The Head-ach. To Aurelia,” and “To Lucinda.” Often the addressees of such poems are fictitious or allegorical, leaving the reader with little indication as to the true identity of the person in which the poem is directed. This is true within Leapor’s “To a Gentleman with a Manuscript Play,” wherein the gentleman is Colley Cibber (Greene and Messenger xxv); however, we also understand the “Gentleman” to represent the “wits and critics” of London (Griffin 200). Leapor’s readers and critics need not see such poems as a hindrance when assessing her frustrations with her station, as her ability to show gratitude alongside ambition is central to understanding her tribute poems. In some ways, “Crumble Hall” is atypical, an outlier; the fifteen tribute poems running through her collection reveal a different dynamic, one that exposes her heightened gratitude and a more poignant yearning for change. In these poems Leapor exerts her own opinion until she quickly includes expressions of ambition in order to display her gratitude, which often takes the form of reverence for her patrons. She expresses her gratitude freely and in abundance in these poems, but in doing so also displays more ambition and frustration.

Paradoxically, Leapor—in accordance with Augustan tradition—often uses a blend of mock-heroic irony and reverential self-abnegation to express what is at issue for her. In “The Visit” Leapor speaks directly to her patron, Freemantle: “O Artemisia! dear to me” (5). Such reverence seems to suggest that Leapor is less concerned—but not wholly unconcerned—about her wider audience and is more attentive in the opinion of her patrons. In “The Visit,” Mira confesses to once again having difficulty balancing the demands of her laborious job with her desires to be elsewhere, doing something very different. Again, Leapor’s readers understand that for Mira change—or even the idea of change—can somehow provide relief. This shares a relationship with the ways that the Leapor treats her patrons; that is, Mira refers to Artemisia as one who provides a sense of escape.

Another method in fleshing out Leapor’s moments of ambition, though, which might at first seem inimical, is to examine the attitude of abasement or supplication in her verse. In Leapor’s case, her exhaustion and dissatisfaction with her work is further expressed in the ways that she supplicates herself to her patron: “Receive within your friendly Door/ A Wretch that vows to rove no more” (9-10). In these lines it becomes clear that the relationship between Leapor and her patron is one that is defined by the power imbalance that exists between the pair. For example, Mira is degraded when she refers to herself as a “Wretch,” in order to display her gratitude and need for Artemisia (10). It is as though Leapor writes her persona as a suppliant in order to further bolster the generosity of her patron. Although such methods may at first seem to support the ego of the patron, it seems that Leapor’s artistic ego is likewise bolstered by her own rhetorical skill. Leapor understands the nature of the patron and writer relationship, which is simply that the patron must be satisfied in order to continue support (Greene 155). Moreover, by adopting the role of “Wretch,” Leapor is able to evoke sympathy from her reader. This sympathy

is crucial to understanding the ways that Leapor is able to use rhetoric in order to receive a specific reaction from her reader. Although Leapor's poetry seems to be largely free of sentiment, her writing does reflect a persistent need to degrade herself, and in doing so she is ironically able to elevate herself evenly with her patron. In "The Visit" Leapor writes, "In some Corner let me hide"; this positions Artemisia as one who offers Mira escape and sanctuary (line 11). This seems to further stress the degree to which the Leapor's poetry reflects her degradation and her patron's elevation. Mira even requests a non-specific corner—somewhere she can be near Artemisia, but not bother her patron with her presence—in order to escape from the monotony that pervades her everyday life. Despite the ways that Mira offers herself as one who is lacking and requires little attention, the poem also expresses the circumstances that often impact the working-class.

Leapor's ability to bolster her patrons is found within many of her poems, but "The Visit" and "The Disappointment" both provide insight into the ways that she was eager to be recognized, and not simply, as Freemantle wrote, "contented" (Greene & Messenger xli). The two poems illuminate two central issues, both of which point to the ways that the critics have often misinterpreted them: the first is that Leapor focuses upon her patron as a reader, which does not actually preclude a wish for a wider audience, and the second being that Leapor's constructive use of power-differential also does not prevent longing for more readership. Essentially, Leapor's willingness to appease her patrons, and in turn to write to them, does not indicate that she is indifferent to fame or wider-readership. Indeed, in "The Visit" she specifically apostrophizes to Freemantle:

O Artemisia! Dear to me,

As to the Lawyer golden Fee:

Whose Name dwells pleasant on my Tongue,

Receive within your Door

A Wretch that vows to rove no more. (lines 5-10)

Here, Mira is explicit in her positive and friendly feelings for Artemisia, as Artemisia's name is "pleasant on [her] tongue" (7). It seems that Mira counts Artemisia's home as a sanctuary or a place of escape, and indeed Leapor often writes of the sanctuary that is found with her patrons, the happiness and comfort that their company can provide, and the value of their opinion to her work. Despite this, it seems that Mira's praise for Artemisia is both genuine and strategic; that is, there is no reason to doubt Mira's—or Leapor's—friendship with her patrons, but to imagine that Leapor wrote only for the amusement of her patrons, with no desire to gain a wider readership, is a serious underestimation of her character.

In sum, "The Visit" is a complex poem, expressing both frustration and ambition. The poem presents Mira as one who is capable of surviving and overcoming obstacles, and yet who also needs sympathy from her readers, and is willing to get it through hyperbolic abasement. She is trapped, yet capable of imagining escape and refuge in Artemisia's company. She is self-conscious about her appearance, physically and perhaps as an artist—she is eager to "scape the penetrating Eye/ Of Students in Physiognomy" (lines 20-1)—yet this discomfort adds relish to the relationship with Artemisia, as the poem acts a problem-solving poem, systematically providing ways for Mira to avoid being caught by, or becoming victim to, those who seek to judge her.

"The Disappointment" compounds this effect, by more directly folding in Leapor's sense of intellectual superiority to her laboring-class peers. Leapor does not fully belong to the class of her patrons, but she has also read widely, particularly when one considers the level of education

generally available to women of the eighteenth-century; she is well aware that her learning distinguishes her from her peers (Bygrave 147). This is addressed in “The Disappointment,” wherein Leapor describes her wish to be somehow different from herself, perhaps more like Sophronia, the friend who is addressed in the poem. Leapor structures the poem in a similar fashion to “The Visit,” but instead of addressing her own problems first, Leapor outlines problems experienced by Sophronia. Again, what seems at the outset like a problem is turned on its head. “The Disappointment” is written directly to Sophronia and throughout the course of the poem, Mira offers advice to both herself and her readers, and in doing so she outlines several feminist concerns. Leapor discusses flirtation and finery Sophronia enacts and strives to possess: “Fans, lace, and Ribbands, in bright Order rise: / Methought these Limbs your silken Favours found” (lines 4-5). She dismisses such material goods, but also seems to crave them for herself; that is, when Sophronia suggests that the “gay Vestment” may be given to Mira, and when it is not Mira becomes suspicious of her (line 79). “The Disappointment” highlights a multitude of disappointments: personal belongings, appearance, and limited readership. This last point indicates Leapor’s eagerness for her work to be widely read. In this poem Leapor writes: “Such gold Dreams on Mira’s Temples shine; / Till stern Experience bid her Servant rise” (lines 12-13). In the context provided, “experience” seems to refer to the seemingly harsh realities of her life as a domestic servant (line 13). The “gold Dreams” indicate that Mira possesses literary aspirations, ones that would place her in the larger literary circle. Outside of the class concerns that are often expressed within Leapor’s poetry, she also conveys a need to distinguish herself as a woman. For Leapor, these expressions of ambition often operate as a feminist critique. Leapor is fairly explicit in her longing to be somehow different. This shares a relationship with the authorial concerns that Leapor expresses within both poems.

While expressing her frustrations in “The Disappointment,” Mira displays a sense of wistfulness for mainstream acceptance, and even desires to escape from the comments about her own physical appearance. Richard Greene observes this rejection of romantic love and idealized feminine beauty in his *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry*. Greene notes that Leapor often includes men who were either “mistaken” about a woman’s physical charms or those physical attributes fading (57). In “The Disappointment” Leapor writes of her encounter with Sophronia and her subsequent disappointment at being passed over for the extravagant clothing that Sophronia has:

When you, Sophronia, did my Sense beguile
 With your Half-promise, and consenting Smile;
 What Shadows swam before these dazzled Eyes!
 Fans, Lace, and Ribbands, in bright Order rise:
 Me thought these Limbs your silken Favours found,
 And thro’ straight Entries brush’d the rustling Gown;
 While the gay Vestment of delicious Hue
 Sung thro’ the Isle, and whistled in the Pew.
 Then, who its Wearer, by her Form shall tell:
 No longer *Mira*, but a shining Belle. (lines 1-10)

Indeed, Leapor’s lines, “Then, who its Wearer, by her Form shall tell: / No longer Mira, but a shining Belle” (lines 9-10) address her desire to be somehow different from herself. When Leapor writes that Mira is somehow not herself, but instead “a shining Belle,” she expresses her longing for change—to both be someone else, somewhere else (line 10). This is use of “shining” and “dazzle” is similar to that language used in Leapor’s other poems such as “gilded” in her

poem “On Discontent.” This emphasis upon gold and value points to the ways that Mira is perhaps eager for recognition, even when it is not of a literary nature. Leapor takes many opportunities to discuss the limitations that are placed on women and the laboring classes, but in the aforementioned line she also enjoys the irony of succumbing to the desire for material change; that is, Leapor offers advice to other women about the dangers of being uneducated and ill-prepared for the realities of a life without material and physical glamour—as outlined in her poem “Advice to Sophronia”—but Leapor seems to also desire glamour herself. Such expressions as Leapor’s “No longer Mira, but a shining Belle” indicate that Leapor is, very simply, a dreamer. She asserts her logical opinion in many of her poems and essays, but she also maintains fantasies of a different life; hence Leapor’s ambition to be somehow different or even better than herself is clear.

There is also an element of self-deprecating irony and comic resignation that is often easy for Leapor’s readers to miss, and important to the broader perspective Leapor attempts to show her readers that she possesses. For many of Leapor’s critics, it is clear that she shows reverence for her patrons, but these same critics also continue to be seemingly divided on precisely how ambitious Leapor is as a writer. There are several instances in Leapor’s poetry wherein she writes of Mira’s eagerness to be a recognized, both as an author and as a person. This desire for mainstream popularity is found in “The Visit” and “The Disappointment.” However, the final lines of “The Visit,” like so much of Leapor’s work, have a tone of irony or comic resignation. Leapor writes, “Like Sharks, they never mince their Meat; / Their dreadful Jaw the open throw, / And, if they catch you, down you go” (lines 35-7). These lines exemplify a certain playfulness within Leapor’s writing that is evident throughout the course of her poetry: she writes of

whimsical dreams and creates vivid imagery, but in doing so she causes the reader to have difficulty in discerning what she actually feels.

The aforementioned lines, perhaps because of their hyperbolic nature, attest to the way that Leapor's poems are able to straddle the line between seriousness and satire. Thus the severity of what Leapor actually feels often goes ignored or unnoticed. The liminality of Leapor's emotions is found in her letter to her patron, after Freemantle's mother's death in 1741 (Greene 189). Leapor responds to Freemantle's mother's illness:

I, who cannot boast of a Heart so susceptible and delicate as yours, have at least felt the Strength of Nature in the parting Pang; and can assure you from Experience, that (to a Soul capable of strong Ideas) the apprehension of this formidable Evil is more terrible than its real Approach; tho' I hope there is no immediate Danger. (321)

Even this letter reveals elements of praise for Leapor's patron, as Leapor places herself in a position of subservience in her flattery of Freemantle. Yet the subtext of this letter expresses that Leapor also has experiences wherein she feels genuine remorse and pain—particularly at the death of her mother, Anne Leapor. Moreover, because Leapor attempts to offer consolation for her friend and patron, it seems clear that she felt an enormous sense of grief because of her own loss (Greene 189). In many ways this exchange allows Leapor to become the authority, to offer condolences, and perhaps most significantly, act as a friend or equal to Freemantle. Such an exchange seems only to affirm that the two women held a strong friendship, in ways that the laboring class poetic tradition perhaps does not allow; that is, the letter exposes the sincerity of Leapor's affections, where her poetry seems to blur the lines between what is poetic convention and what is a sincere mark of friendship, respect, and gratitude.

Unlike in “The Visit,” Leapor does not directly address either one of her patrons in “The Disappointment,” but she does express dissatisfaction with her place in the world. Leapor’s happiness—which she suggests throughout her poetry is only found when she is writing—is contingent upon the kindness and generosity of others. Leapor must please her patrons with her writing so as to be sponsored, and she must also please her employers, whose work keeps her from that which she loves: writing. In many ways Leapor is eager to draw a distinction between what she is and what her society expects her to be. Despite understanding the ephemeral nature of physical praise, Mira does seem to yearn for the type of attention that Sophronia receives in “The Disappointment.” Here, Leapor’s frustration seems to further the idea that by seeking change she will, in some ways, find a sense of relief. Throughout the poem Leapor draws a polarizing distinction between who she is and what she longs to be. The poem ultimately explains that Mira, too, has ambitions to be recognized and praised, although she is determined to distinguish herself intellectually. Leapor’s attention to the issue of female agency within the eighteenth century is connected to her ambitions as a writer; that is, Leapor—or at the very least her persona, Mira—is limited by both her position as well as her gender.

Perhaps most notable in exposing the ambition and gratitude within Leapor’s poetry is her poem “An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame” which compounds what has been previously noted here about Leapor’s poetry. Indeed, the poem pays tribute while also allowing Leapor to display her rhetorical skills, as Leapor artfully balances her expression of ambition and desire with gratitude for her friend and patron, Freemantle. In the poem Mira is explicit in her desires for praise, but also strongly displays gratitude to her friend, Artemisia. Leapor begins her poem with broad, elevated language, and gradually the language within the poem becomes more specific. The sweeping introduction—Leapor speaks generally of “the Hero brave” and of how “Poets

tremble” (lines 26 and 36)—sets the scene for Mira’s problems, which seem to largely revolve around her anxiety over desiring praise.

The content of the poem reflects real concerns that many laboring class writers experienced first-hand, even those who published roughly forty-years after Leapor, such as Ann Yearsley and Janet Little. Indeed, in the poem Mira’s personal problems—her fatigue and lack of writing time—become the central concern, and she is eager draw a distinction between her own desires and those that she is expected to feel, but I posit that the subtext of the poem offers a critique of laboring-class conditions. Over the course of the poem Mira recounts to her friend, Artemisia, her dismissal from her position as a servant in Edgecote House. Leapor was dismissed from Edgecote House because she wrote when her employers expected to her to work (Greene 18-9). Many of Leapor’s poems address her frustration with domestic labor and her desire to write, but “An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame” combines these frustrations with Leapor’s feelings of gratitude for her patron. While explaining her termination from her post in the poem, Mira includes details about the way that she is anxious to write but also perform her duty at work:

Ev’n Mira’s Self, presuming on the Bays,
 Appears among the Candidates for Praise:
 Has watch’d Applause, as from the Lips it fell:
 With what Success?—Why, that the Muse shall tell.
 May Artemisia not refuse to hear! (lines 63-67)

These lines indicate that Mira anxiously waits for praise, particularly because time, for Mira, seems to be suspended as she waits for “Applause” or for approval (line 65). For Leapor Freemantle is the gateway to public readership, which seems particularly poignant when one

considers the following statement: “May Artemisia not refuse to hear!” (line 67). There is a sense of desperation within this line that causes the poem to extend beyond the question of whether or not Leapor is sincere in her gratitude; the real issue appears to be that Leapor longs for wider readership. That is, if Artemisia will not read Mira’s work, or Freemantle Leapor’s, then there is little or no hope for a wider audience to read her writing.

It seems that Leapor does not wish for her desire for wider readership to be overt. She asks: “...do the Slaves of Fame/ Deserve our Pity, or provoke our Blame?”(lines 1-2). This question is directed to Artemisia, and it accentuates that Leapor seeks to place a certain amount of distance between herself and her desires. This is represented by Leapor’s use of a persona, as previously stated, but also seems to further acknowledge her control as a writer. The ways in which Leapor is able to shield her complaints and criticisms behind a persona or even irony ultimately works to protect herself. At the end of the poem Mira asks: “Say, Artemisia, shall I speak, or no?,” which further suggests that Leapor requires the approval of her patron before she can express herself (line 180). Moreover, it seems that because Leapor addresses her termination from Edgecote House in “An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame” she struggles for recognition; that is, Leapor is conflicted by her responsibilities and her desires.

Like several of the poems mentioned previously, “An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame” also reveals how Leapor’s ambition is punctuated by a proclamation of gratitude. It seems that in this sense it is not only Leapor and other working-class poets who contribute to this working-class tradition of supplication, but also her patrons. Leapor’s cultivation of Augustan poetics and the art of satire certainly connect Leapor with the literary establishment, but this is only the medium for a body of work that analyzes class inequities and power-dynamics. It seems that the tensions found between ambition and gratitude point to the ways that Leapor longs for change. This

change, whether it is physical or emotional, is one that many critics seem to either ignore or largely misplace as solely an aspect of influence from her literary patrons or literary idols.

It is partly because we lack much biographical detail Leapor's short life that the nature of her poetic voice has been a matter for debate. We do know that Leapor's poems are littered with allusions to the Augustan writers that she admired, and are full of reverence for her patrons. This obvious sense of influence, as well as her patron, Bridget Freemantle's, letter to Leapor's readers, has allowed many critics to point to the ways that Leapor is simply dependent and content, and may even lack ambition (Griffin 195). However, what Leapor thinks and feels is expressed through the tensions between her ambition as a writer and her gratitude for her patrons. Moreover, it appears that Leapor's persona, Mira, is divided in terms of the way that she both conforms to Augustan models of writing and highlights the limitations placed on laboring-class writers. Additionally, because Leapor's friendly attitude towards her patrons differs from that of other laboring class poets, critics assume that Leapor does not feel angst or frustration in terms of her position as dependent (Griffin 194). It is as though critics long to see Leapor offer clear opinions, ones that reflect her personal feelings rather than praise for her patrons. I have argued here that the nature of the relationship between Leapor and her patrons was one that was brought on by friendship instead of contention, and that her readers should appreciate the subtle nuances that both pervade and seemingly define her poetry.

CHAPTER THREE

INGRATITUDE AND IMBALANCE IN ANN YEARSLEY'S POETRY

Ann Yearsley's and Hannah More's tumultuous relationship is one that has been thoroughly discussed by critics in recent years.⁵ According to Patricia Demers, during the latter part of their partnership contemporaries would scoff at the term "friendship" to describe what existed between the two (63). In many ways their relationship offers modern readers of laboring-class poetry the sensationalism and tension that is notably absent in the partnership of Mary Leapor and her patron Bridget Freemantle. Indeed, it is no secret that Yearsley and More were not friends with one another, as their working relationship lasted scarcely a year (Demers 63). Yet, despite the brevity of their working relationship much of the study on Yearsley is primarily surrounded by the details of her dispute with More. Their relationship did certainly impact Yearsley's writing, which is why it is outlined here, but the critique I offer will concentrate upon the shift in Yearsley's verse from an assimilation of conventions within the laboring class poetic tradition to a concentration upon more individualistic, introspective thinking; indeed, this shift becomes evident when we assess Yearsley's first collection of poetry, *Poems, on Several Occasions* (1785), in relation to her second, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1787).

Although it is clear throughout Yearsley's body of poetry and More's correspondence with her friends and confidants that there is a sense of imbalance between the two women, I find Yearsley's eagerness in her early poetry to belong to the laboring-class poetic tradition interesting in relation to her later eagerness to push against her laboring-class foundation. Critics' accounts of the Yearsley-More quarrel have portrayed Yearsley as simply a victim and More as an oppressive figure of the literati. In recent criticism, More has been accused of using

⁵ See specifically Anne Milne's *Lactilla Tends her Fav'rite Cow* and Mary Waldron's *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton*.

“bourgeois privilege” to partake in the destruction of Yearsley’s character (Demers 21). Today, Yearsley is frequently lionized by critics who observe her opinionated attitude towards literary patronage as a turning point for the laboring-class poetic tradition.⁶ This attitude contributes to our understanding of the complicated and contentious relationship that existed between the Yearsley and More. I wish to argue here that Yearsley’s resistance is not only interesting and worth studying because it sheds light on the patron-poet relationship, but also because it leads us to look more closely at the evolution of her ideas about poetry itself.

The tensions that existed between Yearsley and More are perhaps simplest to define in the way that More describes Yearsley’s talent. Yearsley’s first collection of poetry was compiled under the direction of More and another patron, Elizabeth Montagu, and it is clear that Yearsley’s public image as a grateful protégée was much in More’s mind. Indeed, Yearsley both indulges and resents her status as a milkmaid poet: on one hand she is influenced by prominent Augustan authors and Classical works, and on the other she adheres to many laboring-class conventions, such as the use of her persona, Lactilla, and her statements of gratitude for her patron. Interestingly, despite the controlling and persuasive persona that More has been assigned by contemporary critics, her poetry is not at all influenced by the poetry that More wrote herself (Demers 63). Much of Yearsley’s verse had already been written by the time More came into her life, and More encouraged the sense of “‘native woodnotes wild’ that would identify Yearsley as a child of nature” (Waldron 80). Much as Freemantle did with Leapor—but perhaps not so overtly—More encouraged the notion that Yearsley possessed talent that was inherent, uncorrupted, and natural rather than a product of intellect, diligence, and ambition.

⁶ See for example Mary Waldron’s chapter entitled “The Subscription, The Quarrel, and Its Aftermath” from *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton* (48-78).

More's push for "natural genius" in Yearsley's poetry seems to arise not from her personal or particular taste in poetry, but instead from of her investment in a literary trend. More was familiar with the literary market, and she was well established there in her own right.⁷ In 1784 she and Elizabeth Montagu became patrons to Yearsley (Miegon 31). The two "bluestocking" literary patrons had plenty of knowledge about the financial components of the literary world, but they also kept themselves removed from Yearsley's complaints and artistic concerns, which seems to have contributed to their rift (Miegon 32). More and Montagu worked diligently to procure subscribers, and they did this by selling Yearsley as one who possessed uncorrupted and natural talent.

This line of promotion is found in More's "Prefatory Letter," which sets the tone for poetry that indicates Yearlsey's desire to assert herself in the literary world and her resentment of being first labeled as a charity case. This shares a relationship with the way More presented Yearsley as being a natural talent. Indeed, at some point in their career many laboring-class writers, whether by a prefatory essayist, a reviewer or a patron, became known as possessing "natural" or "unlettered genius" (Kord 217). For example, like Freemantle, More also included a "Prefatory Letter" in Yearsley's first published book of poetry, *Poems, Upon Several Occasions*. More's prefatory note differs from Freemantle's in that More spends more time characterizing Yearsley as a "natural poet." In a passage from her letter she describes Yearsley's talent:

You will find her, like all unlettered Poets, abounding imagery, metaphor, and personification; her faults, in this respect, being rather those of superfluity than want. If her epithets are now and then bold and vehement, they are striking and original; and I should be sorry to see the wild vigor of her rustic muse polished

⁷ More's major works include "Slavery, A Poem" (1788) and "Bas-Bleu"(1786). For an overview see Anne Stott's *Hannah More: The First Victorian* (28 and 52).

into elegance, or laboured into correctness. Her ear is perfect; there is sometimes great felicity in the structure of the blank verse, and she often varies the pause with a happiness which looks like skill. She abounds in false concords and inaccuracies of all kinds; the grossest of which have been corrected. You will find her often diffuse from redundancy, and often obscure from brevity; but you will seldom find in her those inexpiable poetic sins, the false thought, the puerile conceit, the distorted image, and the incongruous metaphor. (*Poems* x)

It seems clear that Yearsley would not have liked her writing to be referred to as that which simply has the appearance of skill. The attention that More gives Yearsley's writing encourages the notion that More believes that Yearsley's talent is natural—"Her ear is perfect." Tim Burke posits that More viewed Yearsley first and foremost as a milkmaid, one who was not perhaps completely aware of her natural talents until More offered her assistance (216). The politics of class—and the miscommunication that existed between More and Yearsley because of this—seems to be at the root of Yearsley and More's conflict. In the very act of providing Yearsley with financial support as an act of charity, More is questioning the literary merit of the work that Yearsley produces. Yearsley's awareness of these class differences seems to have set into motion a sense of defiance and defensiveness regarding the legitimacy and value of her writing.

Yearsley addressed many of her poems in *Poems, on Several Occasions* to specific individuals, which typically serve as tributes or statements of gratitude. Indeed, like Leapor, she was able to reveal her hope for literary stardom while simultaneously paying tribute to a patron. Yearsley was able to accomplish this rhetorical feat by conforming to conventional models of laboring class writing while also asserting her intellectualism through Classical allusions. For example, in "Night. To Stella," Yearsley uses 223 lines to discuss how in the company of

Stella—her figuration of More—the poet tastes, for the first time, ‘the nameless sweets of wit’” (Kord 232). The poem is the first of Yearsley’s *Poems, on Several Occasions* and in it she positions the reader in a nearly dreamscape environment, wherein she situates the muses, other allegorical and Classically-inspired figures, her writing, and her patron:

At this lone hour, when Nature silent lies,
 And Cynthia, solemn, aids the rising scene,
 Whilst Hydra-headed Care one moment sleeps,
 And, listless, drops his galling chain to earth;
 O! let swift Fancy plume her ruffled wing,
 And seek the spot where sacred raptures rise;
 Where thy mild form, relax’d in guiltless sleep,
 Forgets to think, to feel; may dreams of bliss
 Lull thy soft sense, nor paint the scene of woe,
 I lately told; think not my spirit near,
 Light airy shade, that would elude thine eye,
 And shrink to nothing, conscious of thy worth. (lines 1-12)

These several introductory lines demonstrate the idealizing mode of Yearsley’s work, and throughout the poem, dedicated of course to More, she explains the generosity of her benefactor. As the first poem within her collection, “Night” serves as a statement of Yearsley’s appreciation and gratitude toward her patron and the opportunity to write. Despite the fact that More promoted Yearsley as one with “natural talent,” the poem adheres to Augustan convention more than her later work. Indeed, it is as if she uses the introduction to the poem to flex her capabilities as a writer. Moreover, in an effort to ingratiate herself with More, the poem describes

the harsh realities of Lactilla's world: "Ye busy World! What are your cobweb toils,/ Your sisyphian labours?" (4). These lines exemplify the hardships of Lactilla's world, and pay tribute to Stella by contrast. By conforming to Augustan models while also writing about the issues of the laboring class, Yearsley serves as a representative for the shift from Augustan models of intellectualism to those of proto-Romantic thought.

Many of More's friends and acquaintances believed that Yearsley was ungrateful for More's assistance, and often found that her forwardness and confidence was reflected in her poetry (Waldron 101). As a result, Yearsley attempted to assert her gratitude as much as possible. By including More in the opening poem, Yearsley attempts to further affirm her appreciation. More's attentiveness to Yearsley reflects more concern than control, although there seems to be a combination of the two: More's concern for Yearsley—and the popular conception that Yearsley was one who defiantly or even selfishly sought to maintain her artistic fortitude against those who would deny her adequate financial compensation and artistic freedom—was certainly highlighted by eighteenth-century readers of Yearsley, as well as More's friends. During the height of the More-Yearsley quarrel, More's friends joined forces against Yearsley. For example, Mrs. Frances Boscawen, a fellow member of The Bluestocking Society, referred to Yearsley as "that odious woman" and Mrs. Montagu observed that "bestowing a gift on such wretches gives them power over one" (Demers 72). Many of More's friends encouraged More to break ties with Yearsley; for example, Demers notes that More did serve as a strong ally for Yearsley when, at the beginning of their relationship, Yearsley was found in her third trimester with four children and an unemployed husband (65). Such a history allowed those who heard of Yearsley's circumstance and More's financial assistance, to place Yearsley in a permanent station of gratitude and subservience, and in doing so to elevate More as a charitable woman.

There are many poems in Yearsley's first collection of poetry that argue for her sincerity. For example, Yearsley answers critics in her poem "To Those Who Accuse the Author of Ingratitude," which serves as a direct address to those who question the "feelings of Lactilla's soul" (line 60). In terms of paying tribute, Yearsley operates similarly to other laboring class writers; however, she is eager to prove two seemingly conflicting notions: the first being that she is—despite popular opinion—actually grateful for assistance in the literary world, and, despite this, that she resents her degraded status (Waldron 213). Interestingly, in her address to those who she believes find her to lack gratitude, Yearsley adopts an aggressive tone. She is defensive and even at times arrogant toward those who question her. For example, Yearsley addresses her detractors as "ye incapacious souls," mentally trapped "within your narrow orbs" (line 60). Yearsley's use of second-person address and her hostile tone are remarkable here as devices that convey both defensiveness and resentment:

A wish to share the false, tho' public din,
 In which the popular, not virtuous, live;
 A fear of being singular, which claims
 A fortitude of mind you ne'er could boast;
 A love of base detraction, when the charm
 Sits on a flowing tongue, and willing moves
 Upon its darling topic (lines 34-40)

In these lines Yearsley distances herself from those who only understand the two extremes of hyperbolic flattery or "base detraction" and "the charm" of gossip. Many of these lines carry a negative context, as Yearsley writes of the desire to conform socially, and how such desires prevent people from focusing on anything else. Yearsley's repetition of particular attributes

emphasizes this desire, “A wish,” “A fear,” and “A love.” Yearsley’s later work indicates that she developed an interest in introspective thinking and philosophical inquiry, but at this point, as a developing talent, she is still eager to prove her integrity as a suppliant poet.

Throughout Yearsley’s writing—both published and personal—she expresses anger and resentment at her degraded status. In “To the Same, on her accusing the author of Flattery,” Yearsley responds to More’s—or Stella’s in this case—accusation that Yearsley is simply paying compliments due to convention rather than sincerity. Here she disclaims even a knowledge of convention:

No customs, manners, or soft arts I boast,
 On my rough soul your nicest rules are lost;
 Yet shall unpolish’d gratitude be mine,
 While Stella deigns to nurse the spark divine,
 A savage pleads—let e’en her errors move,
 And your forgiving spirit melt in love. (lines 9-14)

Yearsley abases herself within these lines in order to emphasize how generous and nurturing More is to her imagination and writing. Indeed, she goes on to write of her affection for More in hyperbolic, Neoclassical terms: “You I acknowledge, next to bounteous Heaven,/Like his, you influence cheers wher’er’tis given” (lines 19-20). Yearsley’s attempt to prove her genuine gratitude seems to only support the notion that she and More shared a strained and inequitable relationship; that is, in defending herself Yearsley continues to use grand statements and gestures, no matter how disingenuous they may seem.

Another indication of the tension between Yearsley and the More circle is found in her response to Horace Walpole’s popular the *Castle of Otranto* (1764). As Yearsley’s first recorded

endeavor⁸ in writing humor, one can imagine a sense of anxiety as well as eagerness that she may have felt when responding to the widely read and well-respected Walpole. Yearsley's poem, "To the Honourable H—e W—e, on reading the *Castle of Otranto*, December 1784" comprises seventeen heroic quatrains and is viewed by contemporary critics as being "highly competent in form and treatment of the subject" (Waldron 94). The poem comically addresses many of Yearsley's issues with plot and characters within the novel. Among other points, it upholds the good sense of the serving maid, Bianca, whom Walpole mistakenly treats as a farcical figure. In many ways Yearsley's poetic response to Walpole's novel serves as a means of entering into the literary conversation; that is, like Leapor and many other laboring class poets, Yearsley uses satire and wit as a way of asserting her identity as a writer and her intellectual poems. Walpole's response to Yearsley's poem is not addressed to Yearsley herself, but instead to More. In a letter to More, Walpole writes of his outrage and disappointment in regard to Yearsley's poem:

What! If I should go a step farther, dear Madam, and take the liberty of reproving you for putting into this poor woman's hands such a frantic thing as the *Castle of Otranto*? It was fit for nothing but the age in which it was written, an age in which much was known; that required only to be amused, nor cared whether its amusements were conformable to truth and the models of good sense; that could not be spoiled; was in no danger of being too credulous; and rather wanted to be brought back to imagination, than to be led astray by it—but you will have made a hurly-burly in this poor woman's head which it cannot develop and digest (qtd. in Waldron 94).

⁸ Although Moira Ferguson notes that there is humor and satire to be found in several of Yearsley's unpublished poems (75).

From this response, Mary Waldron observes that either “Walpole himself does not seem to have read the poem very carefully—or was lacking in a sense of humor” (95). Indeed, Walpole’s comments indicate that on a number of levels he found Yearsley both incapable and unfit as a reader of his work. Walpole describes Yearsley as being “poor” twice in the brief aforementioned note and it is clear that Walpole insults Yearsley’s ability to fully comprehend his writing. Despite Yearsley’s attempt to enter into a conversation with a well-respected writer, she is not accepted; moreover, that Walpole’s letter is to More and not Yearsley indicates how the public viewed their relationship, or at least expected their relationship to operate. Walpole’s response is first and foremost astonishment and surprise at More for allowing Yearsley to have access to the *Castle of Otranto* in the first place. This idea was shared by others who portrayed More as a misguided caretaker figure for Yearsley, one who assisted her in entering into a world to which she did not really belong. Indeed, as a friend to More, Walpole seems to have voiced the general feeling that surrounded the Yearsley-More relationship, as he described More as “not only the most beneficent, but the most benevolent of human Beings” (Demers 65).

This sense of imbalance between More and Yearsley is found mostly in Yearsley’s tribute poems, and perhaps most blatantly in “To Stella on a visit to Mrs. Montagu.” In the poem Yearsley situates herself as being lower or subservient to More, and describes Stella—or More—as being “unequal” (line 1). While there was always a hint or reminder of respect and friendship between Leapor and Freemantle in Leapor’s verse, Yearsley’s tribute poems issue gratitude nearly to the point of excess. Indeed, the gratitude that More’s friends believe Yearsley should feel because of More’s financial assistance is both resented and nurtured throughout Yearsley’s writing. This is evident in the following lines from the poem: “I neither ask, nor own th’immortal name/ of Friend...” (2-3). Even in these lines Yearsley observes that she and More are not

friends, and in the poem it is clear that Lactilla is eager to pay her respects, but in doing so will not meet Stella as an equal. Moreover, the poem is full of the suppliant phrases that set Stella as being superior:

But ah! shou'd either have a thought to spare,
Slight, trivial, neither worth a smile or tear,
Let it be mine—when glowing raptures rise,
And each aspiring seeks her native skies,
When fancy wakes the soul to extacy,
And the wrapt mind is fir'd with Deity. (lines 7-12)

While these lines certainly indicate a sense of imbalance in Yearsley and More's relationship, as noted with Leapor, it is often common for self-degradation to be a fixture in tribute poems.

However, Yearsley sets herself as a suppliant throughout the entire poem and again seems to be excessive in her enactment of the master-slave dialectic. Indeed, the terms on which laboring-class female poets are granted publication often depend, as their patrons often claim, upon their instant return to more "conventionally feminine roles"—particularly those that make them seem encouraging, subservient, and nurturing—and this harsh bargain is prominent in Yearsley's poetry (Burke 216). Yearsley acts almost as if she is a lover scorned, who is eager to have even the slightest, most trivial smile from More.

Yet we should not dismiss a countervailing move Yearsley sometimes makes, which is credit More with showing her the pathway to intellectual growth. "Night. To Stella" shows Yearsley (addressing herself as "you") working through a creative or moral crisis, with More's help:

You toil an age to grasp the shining dust,

Death trips your heels, you throw it to the wind:
 “Ah! Let your irons on the anvils cool,”
 And lift a while to STELLA’s moral strain;
 She’ll teach thy eye in mental maze to creep,
 Timid and trembling to explore the past;
 Alarm’d by her, the monitor within
 Shall aid thy search, and bring thyself to view. (lines 48-55)

The imagery in the first half of these lines presents death and darkness, but the images change at line 51 when Yearsley discusses Stella and her positive influence. This address differs from Yearsley’s traditional approach to gratitude, which tends to pertain to more local or physical concerns, whereas her praise here is global and intellectual. More herself actually becomes less important in this passage than Yearsley’s inner “eye” and “monitor,” which she expresses a sense of inner conflict in the poem which will ultimately help Yearsley to know herself.

Many of Yearsley’s poems serve primarily as tributes, but she offers her readers a few introspective poems of self-analysis, particularly in her second volume of poetry. Where Yearsley’s tribute poems certainly seem to reveal her attitude towards literary patronage, her feelings on the subject are perhaps most notable in her poem, “On Being Presented with a Silver Pen” from *Poems on Various Subjects*. This poem presents a harsh but honest portrait of the laboring class protégée’s relationship with the bourgeois patron. Throughout the poem, Yearsley observes the patron’s intent to relieve the poet’s financial problems with the profits from their poetry, and in doing so the patron and the poet will always maintain an inequitable relationship (Kord 233). Ultimately in the poem Yearsley admits that in the patron-poet relationship there is little opportunity for an equitable partnership; instead, by nature the relationship allows for a

power imbalance and condescension (Kord 233). Yearsley includes dialogue between unidentified members of the social elite, which offer the reader with a strong insight into her feelings surrounding issues of literary patronage and the popular opinion of laboring-class writers such as herself:

“‘Tis to relieve Distress—this is the sum,
 “But let your Prudence point out what’s to come.
 “Keep wretches humble, for when once reliev’d,
 “They oft-times prove our Charity deceiv’d:
 “Therefore be cautious, not their merits trust” (lines 71-4)

Although these lines of dialogue hold autobiographical significance for Yearsley’s relationship with More, they also set the tone for the much more self-actualized poetry in her second collection. Indeed, the honesty regarding class and identity politics found within the poem offer a new perspective on Yearsley’s work.

Beyond what current criticism has explained about the dynamic between Yearsley and More, there is a notable absence of research that outlines the shift in the laboring-class poetic tradition from gratitude, to ambition, and then to introspective freethinking. In Yearsley’s second collection of poetry she extends beyond the problems that are reflected in Leapor’s poetry forty years earlier. In fact, her poetry begins to invert the traditional patron-poet relationship by placing the poet in a position of power or even by ignoring many of the conventions within that relationship. This shift in the power dynamic is found in many of Yearsley’s *Poems, on Several Occasions* when More was her patron, but is most prominent throughout *Poems on Various Subjects*, and perhaps the simplest to recognize in Yearsley’s treatment of those in positions of power, such as her patrons or those who commission her to write.

This inversion of power is found in Yearsley's poem, "Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman desiring the Author never to Assume a Knowledge of the Ancients." Yearsley writes of ignorance that "Lactilla and thou must be friends" (8), the ironic framework allows us to see that Yearsley wants to belong to the ranks of educated writers, and that her poetry is very much designed to show her knowledge and skill. Yearsley uses such later poetry to not only assert ideas about education, but to also affirm her Christian belief by belittling those who do not possess such faith (Waldron 159). Examples of her faith are found in her verse:

More modern Voltaire joyless sits on yon bench,
Thin and meager, bewailing the day
When he gave up his Maker, to humour a wench,
And then left her in doubt and dismay. (lines 61-4)

In satirizing Voltaire, Yearsley exposes that she is able to discuss prominent writers of the period, not only Classical figures or "Ancients." Further, although there is satire and humor found within this stanza, Yearsley's endorsement of religion in her poetry allows her to be a more sympathetic character than More and her friends had previously drawn. Although there is no reason to suspect that Yearsley's piety was inauthentic, she may viewed her attack of another's impiety as a way to gain credit with her potential critics.

The poem is addressed to ignorance itself, but serves primarily as Lactilla's response to those who tell her to not "assume a knowledge of the ancients" (93). The poem serves as a mock-apology, and is filled with Classical allusions. Yearsley uses these to defy her critics; indeed, she mocks those who criticize her knowledge by offering revisions to Classical figures and stories. For example, Yearsley's Clytemnestra is in "Billingsgate Nell" and she describes Virgil as a courtier (97-98). By meshing Classical figures and stories with contemporary terms and places,

Yearsley flaunts her disregard for her critics, thus challenging the traditional structure of a laboring-class tribute poem and, by extension, the paradigm of natural genius. Forty years after Leapor and the initial wave of laboring class writers in Britain, it is evident that Yearsley understands the conventions of this literary tradition, and is willing to break or even, at times, ignore them.

Yet while “To Ignorance” defends Yearsley’s right to literary knowledge, “To Mr.—, an Unlettered Poet” seems to take up the question from the other side. In this poem Yearsley adopts an instructive tone in an effort to make a comment on a fellow poet’s “genius unimproved” (line 77). In many ways “To Ignorance” serves as a counterpart to “Mr.—”, as the messages of the two poems seem to contradict one another and in doing so reveal Yearsley’s inner debate about the importance of formal education for a poet. From the two poems it seems clear that Yearsley has not decided how she truly feels about this subject of education; indeed, she is eager to display her knowledge of the Classical world, but she also claims that she is happy and contented with her ignorance. Yearsley is metaphysical and introspective in her advice to Mr—, as she writes a poem about writing poetry. In many ways the poem seems to serve as an indirect response to those who questioned her ability to write due to her lack of formal education—Walpole’s letter to More was only two years earlier (Waldron 150). In the poem Yearsley instructs Mr.— to ignore Classical influences as such knowledge will not be incredibly useful:

Ne’er hail the fabled Nine, or snatch rapt Thought
 From the Castalian spring; ‘tis not for thee.
 From embers, where the Pagan’s light expires,
 To catch a flame divine. From one bright spark
 Of never-erring Faith, more rapture beams

Than wild Mythology could ever boast. (lines 19-24)

In these lines Yearsley suggests that Mr.— will not find new inspiration from reading Classical works of literature; instead, she claims that inspiration will occur spontaneously, as she deems herself an “independent spirit” (Waldron 151). Yearsley’s desire to be spontaneous and free-spirited is brought out by Waldron’s reading of the poem. Waldron observes that the poem allows the reader to interpret the “Faith” as faith in the poet’s own ideas as opposed to the “second-hand ones” (151). Indeed, it seems that Yearsley longs for the reader to self-assess, as many of the poems within *Poems Upon Various Subjects* encourage the reader to examine her or himself as a means of self-improvement. In her poem Yearsley’s advice to Mr.— is reflected by both the structure and the metric form, as she trades in heroic couplets for blank verse. Yet, despite Yearsley’s ability to display her “independent spirit,” “To Mr.—” also exposes Yearsley’s ambitions as a writer and her eagerness to be recognized as such (Waldron 151). For example, Yearsley advises Mr.— to not be concerned with Classical tradition, and yet she devotes a significant portion of the poem to displaying and exercising her knowledge of Classical literature. I argue that Yearsley positions herself as being culturally superior for possessing such knowledge; that is to say, she deems the knowledge useless yet uses it to expose her own intellectual capacity, as well as her ability to associate with prominent authors who do possess such knowledge.

In her advice to Mr.— Yearsley inverts the notion of “natural genius,” which was increasingly popular during the mid-to-late eighteenth century (Ferguson 54). While she adheres to the concept that writing poetry occurred naturally for her, the poem serves as advice for other poets and how they may also embrace their own natural genius. Indeed, this indicates that Yearsley understands the conventions of the laboring class poetic tradition, so much so that she

is willing to advise other writers on how to be successful in crafting poetry. Although Yearsley earlier poetry reflects her desire to see and experience as her patrons do, she also begins to adopt the attitude and responsibilities of a patron-figure in her verse. For example, in the poem she connects creativity with laboring class status, but again she is instructive in her tone to the fellow unlettered poet, thus inverting the traditional patron-poet relationship. She describes the “moment”⁹ when a poem occurs to “untaught Minds”:

I eager seiz'd, no formal Rule e'er aw'd;
 No Precedent controuled; no Custom fix'd
 My independent spirit: on the wing
 She still shall guideless soar

Deep in the soul live ever tuneful springs,
 Waiting the touch of Ecstasy, which strikes
 Most pow'rful on defenceless, untaught Minds;
 Then, in soft unison, the trembling strings
 All move in one direction. Then the soul
 Sails on Idea, and would eager dart
 Thro' yon ethereal way; restless awhile,
 Again she sinks to sublunary joy (lines 36-39 and 48-55)

Moments of creation are emphasized in both passages by Yearsley's use of such verbs as “seiz'd” and “strikes.” Yearsley spends a great deal of her second volume of poetry describing the writing process, how and why she writes, and even offers advice to fellow writers. This

⁹ The emphasis upon the “moment” of creation shares a relationship with the concept of natural genius. Moira Ferguson posits that for Yearsley the “intuitive response to inspiration . . . was an unencumbered, accessible poetic act” (54).

reveals the shift in her identity as an author; indeed, her perspectives have changed and she expresses little hesitancy instructing other writers. Her advice on improvement for another poet considered her equal in terms of rank and social status reveals her willingness to possess a position of authority or power.

Yearsley seems to have been incapable of fully following her own instructions while writing, and the advice she offers is to her relative equal; that is, like Mr.—, Yearsley was also considered unlettered or one without formal education. As evidenced by her contract dispute with More, Yearsley does not necessarily hesitate to offer her opinion. Indeed, “To Mr.—, an Unlettered Poet” is instructional and even, at times, philosophical in nature. In the poem Yearsley describes the writing process in abstract and allegorical terms:

Florus, canst thou define that innate spark
Which blazes but for glory? Canst thou paint
The trembling rapture in its infant dawn,
Ere young Ideas spring; to local Thought
Arrange the busy phantoms of the mind,
And drag the distant timid shadows forth,
Which, still retiring, glide unform'd away,
Nor rush into expression? No; the pen,
Tho' dipp'd in awful Widsom's deepest tint,
Can never paint the wild ecstatic mood. (lines 1-10)

These lines display Yearsley's eagerness to pose philosophical inquiries about writing, and in doing so she even provides the reader with her own insight about the writing process. Moreover, Yearsley's advice to a fellow “unlettered poet” does not include information about literary

patrons, but instead she concentrates on what writing means to her and, perhaps more importantly, how to improve one's writing. It is in this sense that Yearsley assumes the role of patron, and sets herself as an authority on writing. Further, the advice at the end of the poem encourages Mr.— to explore his own mind in order to seek improvement. In many ways these final thoughts—as well as the emphasis upon self-evaluation—ignore the patron as an aspect of the poet's work or process.

Yearsley places herself in a role of authority in many of her poems within her second book of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects*, which marks a definitive break in the tradition of writers with humble backgrounds writing expressions of gratitude to literary patrons (Waldron 131). Yearsley's "To the Bristol Marine Society" from this collection places her in a position of authority, almost as a patron herself. Mary Waldron offers a comprehensive reading of the poem but I wish to stress the areas of the poem that are not only instructional, but that also reflect Yearsley's eagerness to assume the role of a patron or a patron-figure. Indeed, throughout the course of the poem Yearsley uses an instructive tone when addressing the merits and possible problems that the Society faces. The poem indicates that Yearsley adopts many of the responsibilities, as well as the attitude of a patron in her address to the Society. She was aware that the society wanted to clear the docks of Bristol of destitute young men, but she seems to have not been upset by the Society's plan to donate fifty shillings per young man to sign up for Britain's Navy (Waldron 136). The Society's intent is to remove or deter the young men from working positions on the dock and instead entice them to enlist in the lower ranks of Britain's Navy. There is no evidence in the poem that Yearsley is angered or concerned with the Society's plan (Waldron 136). Further, Yearsley does not offer any advice for improving the conditions of those serving in the British Navy, instead she seems to "align herself as a paternalist" (Waldron

136). Any concern that Yearsley expresses in the poem is about the danger than can be found in sea travel itself:

In that sad moment, the devoted youth,
Whom your strong hand snatch'd early from the jaws
Of soul-devouring Guilt, shall tranquil meet
The death he cannot shun; and I hope to rise,
When Jesus, walking on the wave, shall bid
The deep throw up her treasures (53-8)

Yearsley expresses concern for the souls of the young men, not necessarily the working conditions of those aboard the vessel. In many ways Yearsley's writing, now free of the pressures that often arise from patron-influenced writing, still reflects More; that is, the poem condescends, instructs, and even pays tribute to the Society in its endeavors. Surprisingly, Yearsley's vivid description of the ship during the storm—while indicating her knowledge of the conditions aboard the vessel—omits the dangers that many reformers of the period sought to change: disease, overcrowding, accident, and so forth (Waldron 136). Critics that perceive Yearsley as a reformer, particularly because of her abolitionist poems, often point to the conclusion of the poem as a product of Yearsley's own thoughts and not the influence of More.

The final lines of the poem express that hope:

When dreary Death throws ope his prison doors,
While spirits rush on day; and in this hour
The Sons of Commerce may with firmness gaze
On Heav'n's recording angel; who, with smiles,
Holds high their institution: strike, ye throngs

Of winged cherubims! yet louder sound

The strain of mercy, mix'd with grateful praise (86-92)

Many of the sentiments in the poem reflect those of an Evangelical, which More was. Indeed, it seems that in terms of “To the Bristol Marine Society,” Yearsley’s rebellion against her patrons did not lead her to social radicalism (Waldron 135). Instead, Yearsley remarks upon only the souls and the spirituality of the men aboard the ship, not the conditions to which they were subjugated.

It is this sense of authority and patron-mimicking behavior that pervades many of the poems within *Poems on Various Subjects*. This seems to indicate the possible changes in Yearsley’s goals: she is eager to be ranked among the respected and educated writers of her day, and yet her poetry reflects defensiveness in terms of her own lack of formal education. Yearsley is eager to strike a compromise between her intellectualism and her own, largely informal education; indeed, where Leapor mainly used satire to assert her intellectual capacity, Yearsley mainly used philosophy and metaphysical inquiry. The changes are most notable after the break with More, but it seems that Yearsley simply expresses more confidence in her decisions as a writer. Indeed, her evolution as a writer reveals a pointed shift in the laboring-class poetic tradition, the patron-poet relationship, and also a change in contemporary thought itself. Yearsley redefines those conventions as well as the relationship between the poet and the patron (Waldron 130). Early Romantic writers, such as William Blake and Robert Burns began to publish poetry in the 1780s that highlighted the poverty and problems within their society; yet while Yearsley’s work indicates that she is aware of the change in contemporary thought, she is also seemingly unwilling to compromise what she believes to be the most essential: her intellectualism through history and her attempt to possess a Classical education.

Yearsley's public feud with her well-known patron, More, has made her one of the most commented-upon laboring-class female poets of the eighteenth century. Critics have cast Yearsley and More as possessing opposite characters rather than as having opposite social and financial circumstances. I urge readers to reconsider the conflict between Yearsley and More, and look more closely at Yearsley's expressions of gratitude, which are interspersed with expressions of lingering resentment. It seems clear that divide between these women was based on class and financial difference, and resultant miscommunication. The class differences that existed between Yearsley and More appear to be the source of their contentious relationship, as Yearsley expresses her hope and expectation of being admitted—through her patron's intervention—into the community of “bourgeois literati” (Kord 232). Further, where Leapor was “quite unimpressed by rank or fame and calmly aware of [their] own intelligence and skill,” Yearsley pays an enormous amount of attention to rank and status when attempting to have her writing read widely (Waldron 39-40). Indeed, Yearsley's poetry reflects that acceptance into the bourgeois circle of her patron is important, perhaps even a necessity, whereas More's correspondence—as well as her role in Yearsley's poetry—indicates that Yearsley will not likely be accepted because of her status as a milkmaid poet. After her break with More, the changes that Yearsley underwent as a writer are reflected in the ways that she asserts her intellectualism, building new imagery worlds for herself and leaving behind the restrictive “sisyphean” one that she felt some assumed she should occupy.

Indeed, much of Yearsley's poetry in her first collection reflects her willingness to uphold and revere More as other laboring class poets had done with their patrons, but during her second, post-More volume, Yearsley scoffs at the representation of patrons as those who can offer assistance and are sincerely charitable. For example, at the beginning of *Poems on Various*

Subjects Yearsley writes a narrative in response to those who say that she has “proved ungrateful to [her] patrons” (xv). Yearsley’s transition from suppliant poet to philosophical thinker is well documented from 1785 to 1787 in her first and second collections of poetry. This shift serves as a useful transition for the study of laboring class writers who begin to embrace the onset of individualistic attitudes and Romantic thought in their writing, such as Janet Little.

CHAPTER FOUR
PATRONAGE, MENTORSHIP, AND LITERARY PRODUCTION IN JANET
LITTLE'S POETRY

Nearly fifty years after the appreciation, tribute, and gratitude that appeared within Mary Leapor's poetry, a significant shift in the power dynamic between patron and poet appeared in the laboring-class poetic tradition. Such a shift is evident in the writing of Janet Little, whose verse reflects both her attentiveness to literary trends and conventions of earlier laboring-class poetry, and her willingness to invert and even at times to satirize the patron-poet relationship. While it remains unclear as to whether or not Little read the poetry of many laboring class poets—such as Duck, Collier, and Leapor—I wish to argue here that her own poetic discussions of patronage, mentorship, and literary production exemplify the changes that the tradition underwent during the mid- to late-eighteenth century. When Little's first collection of poetry, *The Poetical Works of Janet Little, Scottish Milkmaid*, was published in 1792, Romantic thought was beginning to pervade contemporary culture. The changes in contemporary thought are hinted at in Leapor's poetry and expressed even further in Yearsley and Little's writing; indeed, after several decades of reading and understanding the popular opinion of the tradition, laboring class writers of the late eighteenth century, like Little, seem to understand the expectations of their readers and, perhaps more importantly, how to obtain a large readership.

For Little, to be widely read was a central concern; where Yearsley battled against her patron for recognition it seems that Little's relationships with Robert Burns and with her patron Frances Dunlop resembled mentorship more than literary patronage. Indeed, Burns was also a Scottish laboring-class poet who had great success beginning in the 1780s, and his success brought with it many imitators and admirers. Unlike Yearsley, Little does not express any

hesitancy in embracing her status as a laboring-class poet. On the contrary, for Little such writing was to be praised and admired, even more than the previously in-vogue verse of prominent Augustan writers like Pope and Johnson. Moreover, Little first approached Burns—even before she sought the advice and patronage of Dunlop—with several pieces of her verse (Ferguson 91). Little’s background was similar to Burns’s, yet she was even of a lower class than he was; her father was a hired laborer and his was a tenant farmer (Ferguson 95). Unlike Leapor and Yearsley, who were heavily influenced by their patrons and prominent figures of London’s literary circle, such as Johnson, Little was inspired and influenced by other Scottish laboring-class writers. This view of laboring-class writing as being respectable and admirable marks a significant change in the way that the laboring-class poetic tradition was perceived by the reading public; indeed, Leapor was eager to write like Johnson and Pope, and Yearsley—only five years before Little’s collection—wrote poetry that reflected her interest in asserting her intellectual and philosophical inquiries, a project that involved disassociating herself from the “natural genius” model. Unlike Leapor and Yearsley, Little rejects these notions of intellectualism and in doing so redefines traditional models of writing.

Little’s defiant attitude extends beyond her rejection of Augustan models; several critics have observed issues of social and political currency in her poetry, and have noted that although Little’s poetry displays “a fine zest for life and a sense of humor often directed at the English literary establishment . . . none of them betrays any discontent with her social position” (Kord 43).¹⁰ Despite this notion that Little was content with her station, I wish to argue here that her poetry reflects that she is ambitious to distinguish herself as a writer; however, unlike Yearsley and Leapor, she does not seek to belong to the ranks of writers who possessed a traditional,

¹⁰ See also Moira Ferguson’s discussion of Little’s politics in a chapter from her book, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, entitled “Janet Little, the Ayrshire Dairywoman” (91-109).

formal education, but instead her ambitions seem to be largely based on her becoming a prominent laboring-class writer. Indeed, by the late eighteenth century the literary tradition was well established and Little understood the attention that many prominent writers of the period were beginning to give to the laboring class and the conditions in which those who were domestic servants or laborers endured. Unlike Leapor and Yearsley, Little's poetry reveals that she is unashamed of her rural upbringing, and she uses this as a cornerstone for much of her writing. Little's poetry that responds to Burns and his work indicates not only that she is unapologetic about being a domestic laborer, but also that she is disinclined to treat the bourgeois literati with the same reverence that other laboring class writers did.

Little is, however, attentive to the literary marketplace and how she presents herself within that market. For example, the Scots element certainly plays a role in Little's self-presentation as, by the 1790s, she had observed the success of Burns. Little frequently uses Scots vernacular, praises Burns, and champions her Scottish heritage, all of which contribute to a sense of defiant pride within her poetry. Little embraces the popularity of the Scottish laboring class writer and the possibility that it will allow her to be published and widely read. In doing so, she highlights many issues that faced the reading public. During this time Scottish laboring-class poets were widely read by not only the working class and middle classes, but also members of the gentry, such as Little's patron, Frances Dunlop (Ferguson 92). The confidence that Little had in regards to her own writing is a product of her awareness of the trends and conventions that were prominent in eighteenth century laboring class poetry. The sense of awareness that pervades her verse contradicts our understanding of her as one who was complacent and accepting of her position as a domestic laborer (Kord 43). Yet, despite Little's self-promotion her poetry reflects a balance between what she asserts and what she is concerned about. Indeed, like many laboring-

class writers of the period, Little includes her anxieties about being criticized or poorly received by the public. What is different about Little is that she expresses anxiety about the level of her writing. Such a fear indicates that despite Little's confidence in her marketability, she is not wholly confident in her abilities as a writer.

Little's knowledge of her marketability and her eagerness to be a successful laboring-class writer is evident from the way that she was willing to be situated as a child of nature, representing an aestheticized view of poverty and rural life in mid-to-late eighteenth century England (Waldron 80). Like Leapor and Yearsley, critics have either ignored Little, or found within her writing only an eagerness to enact many of the tropes of the laboring-class poetic tradition. Recently several scholars such as Susanna Kord and Moira Ferguson have begun to comment on Little's unique position in the laboring-class tradition, and her relationship with writing. Indeed, what perhaps emphasizes Little's awareness and dedication to the trends and conventions of the literary tradition was her careful selection of a dedicatee of her first published volume of poetry. She accepted Boswell's shrewd advice to dedicate her volume to one whose name would assist her in filling up her subscription: the Countess of Loudoun, Flora Mure Campbell, who was then only twelve years old.¹¹ In her dedication Little writes: "To the Right Honourable Flora, Countess of Loudoun. The following Poems are with Permission, Humbly Inscribed, by Your Ladyship's Ever Grateful, and Obedient, Humble Servant, Janet Little" (3). These lines indicate that Little was eager to impress potential patrons, benefactors, and readers. As a self-described "humble servant" Little's opening dedication—or rather, tribute—exposes

¹¹ The Countess of Loudoun, Flora Mure Campbell was born in 1780; she succeeded her father after his suicide in 1786, and according to Moria Ferguson she was considered a powerful ally for someone of Little's position (92).

her as one who is both aware of the demand for laboring class writers in the literary market place, and her position as a member of the laboring-class.

Later in Little's collection, the insincerity of this dedication and its practical function can be found in a few lines from her poem, "An Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns." The poem contradicts her dedication to the Countess at the beginning of the volume, as she mocks the "servile bard wha fawn an' fleech,/ Like beggar's messin" (lines 19-20). When Little restrains her displeasure when displaying appreciation for "aristocratic generosity," she imitates the way that Burns handles issues of patronage (Ferguson 100). Indeed, Little pushes the Countess's social status to the front of the opening lines, and throughout the dedication she describes the pleasures that a rural laboring-class person such as herself may derive from performing domestic labor. It seems unlikely that Little should actually enjoy such work, yet she writes in the commendatory poem:

Will gentle Loudoun deign to lend an ear,
 When nature speaks, and sorrow drops a tear?
 Within your walls my happiness I found
 Luxuriant flourish, like the plants around:
 Blithe as the birds that perch on yonder spray,
 In joyous notes, I pour'd the willing lay. . . . (lines 1-6)

Little is willing to play the part of the peasant poet, more than earlier laboring class writers. Unlike Yearsley and Leapor, Little embraces her degraded status. Indeed, the commendatory poem explains how Little and other rural people can find pleasure from the advice, patronage, and charity that the upper classes offer them, a claim that is repeatedly refuted by her more colloquial poetry. The contradictory messages found within Little's poetry indicate that she is willing to conform to the models of laboring-class writing laid in place by earlier writers, and in

many ways she exploits her own position. Indeed, unlike Leapor and Yearsley, Little expresses little hesitancy in using her degraded status to her advantage in the publishing world. By 1792, when Little's volume was published, Blake, Cowper, and many other writers had already published poetry that commented on rural life and the hardships of laborer. This popularity is likely what enabled Little to exploit her position as a laboring class writer, unlike Yearsley who attempted to disassociate herself from employing such poetic tropes. Despite actually being from the laboring classes, in her dedication Little describes her rural life as one that is largely free from stress, and she even suggests that such stresses are instead reserved for the very rich. This rhetorical inversion might seem conventional enough for the period, yet Little goes further. For example, Little does not revere English liberty the way that other laboring-class English poets did, nor does she adopt once-popular colonial stances (Ferguson 103).

It seems that Little was willing to show reverence for those who assisted her in obtaining wide readership, but her roots—like Burns's—were firmly Scottish.¹² In her poem, "An Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns" Little highlights her Scottish lineage and champions Scottish national identity, just as Burns does in his poetry. Little attempts not only to impress Burns and relate to him through their shared heritage and public-sphere themes, but also to celebrate his ability to appeal to a wide readership. She further praises him for extending beyond the rustic themes that many laboring class poets used exclusively in their writing, and toward less-frequently discussed national and public-sphere issues. Little praises Burns for writing more than just pastoral verse in her epistle to him: "To hearty song, all ranks desire; sae well thou strik'st the dormant lyre" (14).

¹² Although Little's exact birthplace is still largely unknown, in her study of Janet Little's national identity Moira Ferguson posits that she was born in northeastern Scotland because—among many reasons—she uses "queen" in place of "girl"—a common usage in northeast Scots (97).

It is as though Burns allows Little to see the success that she desires, as he was popular despite not always conforming to previously established trends.

Little further exercises her Scottish national pride in the poem by asserting that English poets would likely be jealous of Burns's talent. Indeed, Little holds Burns against prominent Augustan writers such as Addison, Pope, and Johnson, the very writers that Leapor and other earlier laboring-class writers sought to emulate. Little's admiration extends beyond epistles and tributes to Burns, as she models much of her persona after him; Burns was referred to as "the ploughman poet" and Little called herself "the Scotch milkmaid." Further, she shares with Burns a confident and defiant attitude about English writers and the traditional patron-poet relationship. Indeed, many of Little's poems express praise and gratitude for Burns, and in many ways the relationship between Little and Burns becomes a substitute for the more hierarchical patron-poet relationship that Leapor and Yearsley shared with Freemantle and More, respectively.

There is comparatively little in Little's poetry that shows the same level of mentorship and gratitude for her financial patron, Dunlop. In fact, Little's poetry does not express her gratitude for patrons and non-laboring class writers any more than convention requires, as the relationship between Burns and Little seems to replace a traditional patron-poet relationship. The praise, tribute, and gratitude that Little displays for Burns are a new version of the emotions Leapor expressed toward Freemantle—a version stressing common ground rather than deference. Further, Little's praise of Burns seems to bring out her own Scottish national pride is most evident; indeed, when paying tribute to Burns—and also when criticizing him—Little frequently uses Scottish vernacular. In her "Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns" she uses what she describes as "rude, unpolish'd strokes" when assessing Burn's poetry (line 1); she speaks to him on terms that are distinctly their own, ones that reveal her class status. Her poem to Burns is more intimate that

many tribute poems of the literary tradition; for example, she makes pointed references to his work and how it differs from other popular poetry of the period. In writing to Burns Little discusses his critics and how he is able to confront them with his use of “hamespun speech” or Scottish vernacular, which she allows herself to use when she writes to Burns (line 26).

Little champions the laboring classes and her native Scotland, and much of her praise for Burns stems first from his Scottish heritage and how he represents this in his poetry. Little expresses such admiration in her second poem to Burns, “On a Visit to Mr. Burns” wherein she discusses his positive relationship with the Muses, and how his inspiration does not lead him astray. In the poem she describes her admiration:

IS't true?or does some magic spell
 My wond'ring eyes beguile ?
 Is this the place where deigns to dwell
 The honour of our isle?
 The charming Burns, the Muse's care,
 Of all her sons the pride;
 This pleasure oft I've sought to share,
 But been as oft deni'd. (lines 1-8).

Little often writes that she is betrayed by inspiration, but in this poem to Burns she reveres him as one who has been blessed by the Muses, even more than anyone else. The poem outlines a visit that Little had with Burns, during which she felt overwhelmed and clearly inspired by his presence. Such a poem brings to mind the reverential verse that many laboring class writers wrote about and for their patrons, but the greatest difference between these poems and Little's is the collegial nature of her relationship with Burns. The tone of the poem indicates her reverence

for Burns, but also mutual respect. Burns is not Little's patron or a prominent figure of the literary elite, but a laboring class writer with problems and hardships of his own.

Although the Little understood the popularity of laboring-class poetry, Susanna Kord observes the disdainful muses and critics that saturate Little's already published poetry (231). Indeed, the first poem of Little's collection, "To Hope," includes a narrator who is frustrated by having to adjust her writing so that it may appeal to the reading public and her patron. Little writes that hope is the only quality that can "alleviate [her] wo" (line 14). The poem is permeated with frustration and disappointment, but champions hope as being the only defense against negative thoughts, as hope will "illum our dark and dreary way" (line 5). From the poem it is clear that Little's hopes are to first be widely read and published and second to avoid ridicule. That she selects such a poem to open her collection almost serves as a disclaimer to her critics; indeed, it is as if she attempts to protect herself from negative criticisms by self-reflexively pointing to that which her poetry indicates she fears most: negative criticism.

Little's selective usage of Scots dialect may speak to this issue of her care and caution in presenting herself as a poet. Her unwillingness to write poetry in either a purely Scots or a purely English voice, as some of her poems do mix the two, certainly typifies the work that other Scottish writers were producing at the time, but it also exposes her attentiveness to broader literary trends and conventions of the period. By adhering to this Burns-like tradition of combining Scots with English idioms, Little manages to display ambition through her self-censorship even at the risk of being semantically awkward. For example, in "Given to a Lady Who Asked Me to Write a Poem," Little's Scottish phrases collide with many of her English words, such as "ilka" with "dunce" (Behrendt 224). Little's use of the Scots language in her poetry contributes to her

overall tone of defiance, particularly in this case, where it is unclear as to whether or not the Lady within the title of the poem is Scottish herself.

Although it is evident that Little was able to publish poetry, and that laboring-class poets enjoyed a long period of vogue in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Little, like Leapor and Yearsley, expressed anxieties about having her work criticized by others. Though pointedly different and arguably more confident in her writing, Little still maintains many of the same anxieties as earlier writers of the laboring class poetic tradition. These anxieties concerning the negative reception of their work were expressed through recurring tropes and storylines. In Little's poem "To My Aunty" she focuses on this issue of discouragement from critics, and projects her anxieties about being berated by critics. The poem presents a harsh hypothetical, one that has Little's poetry only appearing in print so that critics can lampoon her verse. In the poem Little imagines that she produces verse that is berated by critics. This trope of disdainful muses and deceptive critics is present throughout much of Little's work, but "To My Aunty" epitomizes the phenomenon by assigning names and agendas to the archetypal critics. In the poem Little's critics—aptly named Tom Touchy, Will Hasty, Jack Tim'rous, and James Easy—focus on her background and class status rather than her capabilities as a writer. In the poem she discusses what it is for a writer to be criticized: "So much he fear'd a brother's scorn,/ The whole escap'd his claws untorn" (39). One of Little's critics in the poem even attempts to rewrite her poetry.

Throughout her poetry, there are further displays of Little's anxieties about being critiqued, but not all of these expressions of concern are directed toward critics or muses. Instead readers of the laboring class poetic tradition are given a better insight into Little's poetic identity because she expresses worry about the skill-level of her own writing. Thus, while we might think of Little's poetry as driven by identity politics, her crisis of artistic confidence is instead highly

individualized. For example, much like Leapor's "An Inspired Quill," Little has many poems that indicate the pressure that she places on herself, as she often blames her own quill for its inability to work with her or even suggests that it is sabotaging her. This is found, for example, in her epistle to Burns wherein she discusses her anxieties about writing for an audience. Little writes:

In vain I blunt my feckless quill,
 Your fame to raise,
 While echo sounds, frae ilka hill,
 To Burns's praise. (lines 39-42)

Little expresses frustration with her lack of inspiration, and again she styles Burns as having the capacity to satisfy his quill and the Muses more than anyone else. In many ways Little's reverence for Burns is the greatest—and most consistent—example of power-imbalance in her writing. Throughout the course of Little's writing she is assertive, defiant, and even aggressive in her address to those who challenge her, yet with Burns she is congratulatory and even at times submissive. Another example of Little's wavering confidence in her writing abilities is found in her second poem to Burns, "On a Visit to Mr. Burns", wherein the subtext of the poem subtly urges Burns to help Little with her career. Indeed, throughout the poem Little directly discusses critics and the critical reception of her work, but the final tone of the poem indicates her desire to be given support and guidance by Burns:

With beating breast I view'd the bard;
 All trembling did him greet:
 With sighs bewail'd his fate so hard,
 Whose notes were ever sweet. (lines 30-33)

The aforementioned poems certainly indicate the anxieties that many published writers feel—regardless of background or class—but I posit that in Little’s case they are first an enactment of convention and secondly a level of protection for the writer. Indeed, Little discusses the possibility of receiving negative reviews for her poetry from critics while simultaneously showing off her expertise in writing verse. Such contradictory messages are found not only throughout Little’s poetry, but also that of Leapor and Yearsley. Readers of laboring-class poetry were likely familiar with the tribute poems, epistles, and expressions of gratitude that permeate the laboring class poetic tradition, and expected to read certain conventions when reading the poetry of a laboring-class writer. But Little’s poems tend instead to focus on the process of writing as many of her poems are self-reflexive in nature; she acknowledges within her poetry that she is a laboring-class woman writing a poem within the laboring-class poetic tradition. From this, it seems that the fears and anxieties that Little projects in her verse are partially due to her desire to belong with other laboring class writers and to be widely read.

Little’s way of characterizing writing is reminiscent of Leapor’s references to “mischief” and “darling crime” (lines 4-5); Little’s “An Epistle to a Lady” indicates that she too believes her writing to be an illicit activity. Little’s relationship with writing is presented to readers paradoxically; on one hand she is capable of asserting her confidence in her marketability, and on the other she grapples with doubt about the quality of her work. For example, in the poem Little writes that she is a “crazy-pated dairy-maid” and deserves to “suffer” criticism for her writing (53). Additionally, in “On Seeing Mr.—Bake Cakes” Little describes herself as a “crazy scribbling lass” and as one whose writing should not be indulged for too long (line 4). Overall, Little certainly seems confident during her exchanges with Burns and Dunlop, but the moments

of doubt expressed in her poems reflect the pressing need for laboring-class writers to forestall accusations of unworthiness and inability.

Despite her attention and admiration to Burns, Little generally avoids the hyperbolic and grand statements of gratitude that are found in earlier laboring-class poetry. However, because of the popularity of the literary tradition, she conforms to a few of its conventions. For example, “disdainful muses” emerge in Little’s poetry nearly as often as they do in Leapor’s (Kord 219). In “To a Lady who Sent the Author Some Paper with a Reading of Sillar’s Poems,” Little writes of muses who scorn or reject her: “the Muses are fled far away,/ They deem it disgrace with a milkmaid to stay” (5-6). David Sillar, one of Burns’s well-known imitators and admirers was likely one that she would not wish to be compared to; indeed, no matter how much Little admired Burns’s work she remained eager to be considered unique (Ferguson 91). Like Leapor, Little is self-deprecating in much of her poetry and uses the inherently imbalanced relationship between patron and poet to her advantage. She supposes that muses and inspiration are likely to abandon her. While many writers express concern over receiving criticism, it is perhaps significant that such a theme seems to largely pervade the writing of the female laboring class writers such as Leapor, Yearsley, and Little, all of whom are tormented by the muses that inspired them to not write, but instead to abandon writing and publishing.

While Little has many poems in her volume that pay tribute to specific allegorical entities or literary figures, much of her poetry to Burns discusses the conundrum of imitation within the laboring-class writing community, and the difficulty of breaking free from it. Burns enjoyed much mainstream praise for his writing, and he also had many laboring class imitators. Although Little deeply respected him, it seems hardly accurate to describe her work as imitation. In “To a

Lady who Sent the Author Some Paper with a Reading of Sillar's Poems" Little states that she will stop writing if she only gains a reputation as an imitator:

And lest with such dunces as these I be number'd
 The task I will drop, nor with verse be incumber'd;
 Tho' pen, ink and paper, are by me in store,
 O madam excuse, for I ne'er shall write more (lines 15-18)

This ultimatum points to Little's awareness of herself and the literary tradition with which she is participating, and lines indicate her frustration with being perceived as simply another laboring-class writer. Instead, the poem expresses Little's desire to strike a balance between being profitable and widely read, but also as talented and unique.

Little's individualism comes through not only in her strategic expressions of admiration for Burns, but also in some pointed criticisms of his behavior. It is true that Little more often than not agreed with Burns's political views, but several of Little's poems express a sense of disdain for the way that Burns responds to and represents women in his poetry (Ferguson 106). Little's criticism of Burns—who in many ways is assigned the role of patron in her poetry—is perhaps most evident in "On Seeing Mr.— Baking Cakes." In the poem she playfully and comically satirizes Burns's well-publicized sexual relationships with other women by using the allegory of Burns baking cakes, but throughout the poem Little also criticizes Burns's attitude toward female poets. Burns's reputation as a womanizer was well known to many, as was his popularity among other laboring-class hopefuls, but Burns was often dismissive and his uneasiness around female writers is perhaps best documented by Little in her poetry. In the poem Little writes:

As Rab, who ever frugal was,

Some oat-meal cakes was baking,
 In came a crazy scribbling lass,
 Which set his heart a-quaking
 ‘I fear,’ says he, ‘she’ll verses write,
 An’ to her neebors show it:
 But troth I need na care a doit,
 Though a’ the country knew it (lines 1-8)

These lines indicate that Little shares a sense of intimacy and commonality with Burns. For Little, the relationship between herself and Burns is different than that of other poets who imitated and admired his work, as such lines intimate that she believes that he is affected by her presence and writing: “Which set his heart a-quaking” (line 4). Little clearly do not perceive herself as an imitator, but instead unique in that she is a possible equal to Burns.

Little asserts in the aforementioned lines that Rab, or Burns, has a complicated relationship with not only women, but more specifically women who write, as she believes he cannot endure the competition. It seems that a majority of Little’s complaints about Burns deal directly with his treatment of women, both in terms of sexual misconduct—taking liberties with laboring class women—and the role of the female poet in regards to the reading public. Little’s awareness extends beyond literary trend and the conditions of the laboring classes; indeed, she understood the impossibility of recovering from being a laboring class woman who falls. Further, in the poem Little describes herself in terms of how she believes her society to perceive her or, perhaps more specifically, how she understands Burns’s reaction toward a “crazy scribbling lass” (3). This indicates that in many ways Little’s role as a rustic poet is self-styled, as she willingly describes herself as such. This further reflects Little’s concerns about being a productive writer

who is widely read and well regarded by critics. Little is open about gender inequity in her poetry, more so than her contemporaries who seem to flirt with the subject and then return to more traditional, suppliant positions.

In Little's second poem to Burns, "On Visiting Mr. Robert Burns," she presses the topic further by characterizing Burns as one who charms and seduces women: "Oft have my thoughts, at midnight hour,/ To him excursions made;/ This bliss in dreams was premature,/ And with my slumbers fled" (lines 9-12). The poem is erotic and sexually charged by Little's representation of Burns as one whose charms pervade women's dreams. It seems that Little was critical of Burns's relationship with women for many reasons that have been noted by critics: the most central, as Moria Ferguson observes, is that Little perceived Burns's "making free with women" as a power-imbalance (Ferguson 100). Little raises questions about this lifestyle by subtly including anecdotes in her poems that expose the negative experiences of young women in pastoral poetry (Ferguson 100). Little writes in "The Month's Love" about young women who should avoid "that sly archer" (line 2), which serves as a cautionary tale for young women (Ferguson 103). Further, the poem expresses Little's awareness of what happened to young women who were not guarded with their sexuality, as the late eighteenth century was a period wherein many young peasant women who "fell" were often ridiculed and ultimately unemployable (Ferguson 104). This awareness indicates that Little is eager to see a change not only in the ways that her gender is represented, but more specifically in a society that rendered laboring-class women virtually voiceless and powerless to change their circumstances. Little's "On Seeing Mr.— Baking Cakes" serves as a warning or message for young women interested in Burns:

Some ca' me wild an' roving youth;
But sure they are mistaken:

The maid wha gets me, of a truth,
 Her bread will ay be baken (lines 29-32)

These lines, although written lightly and with jest, carry a concerning message from Little, who intimates that Burns has a reputation of taking advantage of young women. Although Little admires Burns's writing she is willing to critique his treatment of women as an equal or even a superior.

From Little's complaints about Burns's disparaging attitude toward women writers it is clear that she while she eagerly accepts her role as a laboring-class writer, she shows some hesitancy in adopting sincere notions of supplication, even for the benefit of her literary idol. This contrasts with the expressions of gratitude found in the work of earlier laboring-class writers, such as Leapor, whose poetry reflects that she seems to have had less confidence in entering a conversation with her literary idols, such as Pope. It is significant to note that Little shares a similar—or at the very least closer—class status with her literary influences than Leapor did. This could perhaps be responsible for the relative ease that Little has in communicating with Burns, but it seems more likely that Little's attitude reflects an awareness of her class status and position as a laboring class writer, as well as her ability to enter into such a conversation, particularly after the several decades of popularity that laboring class poetry received. Indeed, that writers like Burns and Little were read widely and considered fashionable to many of the middle class and even gentry indicates a significant shift in not only literary trends, but also the way that eighteenth-century readers perceived social mobility

Little addresses many of the concerns of the laboring classes in her poem "On Contentment." The poem describes a poor woman, Janet Nicol, and her struggle to find contentment, and in the poem Little applauds Nicol for not being a poet or in love. Instead, she is

happy that Nicol is a good, albeit poor person. Little describes Nicol's encounter with material wealth:

And blithy may ilk neighbor greet you;
 May cakes, and scones, and kibbocks meet you;
 And may they weel ilk pocket cram,
 And in your bottle slip a dram.
 May your wee glass, your pipe and specks,
 Be ay preserv'd frae doleful wrecks
 May your wee house, baith snug and warm,
 Be safe frae ev'ry rude alarm (lines 86-93)

In the poem Little describes Nicol's living conditions as poor and ones that provoke sympathy. Unlike Yearsley who often inverts the patron-poet relationship, or even at times usurps the patron's role, Little seems to ignore it entirely. The images of domestic objects presented throughout the poem maintain an "hamespun" quality; for example, Little uses Scottish vernacular when she describes cakes and scones greeting Nicol at the door. When describing Nicol and the kindness that should be offered to her, Little uses a tone of empathy and compassion for her, rather than pity and distance. Although the poem ultimately has an aristocrat helping Nicol, it is significant to note Little's surprise at the aristocrat's assistance.

"A Poem on Contentment" also provides a window on poverty in eighteenth-century England and Scotland, and Little makes this happen with more tension and resentment than most of her contemporaries. In the poem Little attends to many of the problems of the lower classes, a common trope within her poetry. She often writes of wealth as being a moral problem, one that

should be held against a person as a moral or ethical defect. The impoverished Janet Nicol is richer in wisdom than a wealthy person might be:

Content grows joy, in meeting there
 The little, lovely, blooming fair,
 Who makes thy cot and thee her care;
 Whose gentle, gen'rous, noble mind,
 Tho' great and rich, can here prove kind;
 Whose footsteps mark her path with peace,
 Whose smile bids ev'ry sorrow cease;
 For age and want, and wo provides
 And over misery presides (lines 88-96).

The poem outlines the problems of those within the laboring class, but it is significant to note that the outcome is positive simply because Little reminds Janet Nicol she will be fine regardless of what happens. Although the aristocrat is rich he is helpful and generous, Little notes that this is exceptional and in doing so offers a unique perspective upon the relationship between the working poor and members of the middle-class or gentry. Many of Little's contemporaries avoid such representations of suffering and poverty in their work in favor of pieces that will be perhaps more readily received by their patrons. Little's representation of the laboring class in her verse reflects a shift in the demands of her audience, and the confidence of the laboring class writer to dictate and contribute to literary trends.

Sentiments regarding the dangers of wealth are likewise found in Little's poem "On Happiness." The poem is more introspective than most of her work, but unlike Yearsley's later philosophical poetry, Little's verse continues to comment on the social and political atmosphere

of the period, much like Burns's and Blake's observations about the laboring-class conditions of the period. The poem offers a strategy for finding happiness, but in doing so also encourages those of the laboring class to congratulate themselves because of their moral superiority:

Misers for thee grope 'midst their bags of wealth,
 Nor find thy residence in golden ore:
 Fear, anxious care, bleak av'rice, and distrust,
 Forbid thy access to the grov'ling soul.
 Not riches, though in gorgeous pomp array'd,
 With all the dazzling splendour of the east,
 Secure thee 'mongst the gay, fantastic train.
 Pride and Ambition, vulture-like, appear,
 Gain access to the op'lent master's heart,
 And bid defiance to thy sacred charms,
 Now swiftly banish'd from his sumpt'ous seat (lines 12-22).

In the poem Little observes that evil and sin can often accompany wealth, status, and power. She posits that happiness can only be found in the absence of material goods, and makes several pointed allusions to England's imperialist attitude: "with all the dazzling splendour of the east" (17). This line—and Little's emphasis upon gold—is similar to Leapor's "On Discontent" as both poems address the dangers of seeking only material wealth. In many ways this poem is just as opinionated as her other tribute poems in that she encourages her readers to adopt a sense of self-sufficiency and to ignore feelings of pride and ambition, as she associates these with wealth. Little is ironic in the poem as she expropriates many of the insights found within Samuel

Johnson's "The Vanity of Human Wishes". Indeed, Little has criticized Johnson in many of her poems, and now uses an opportunity to flex her knowledge of his work.

It is interesting to juxtapose Little's tribute to happiness alongside other such writers' thoughts on maintaining happiness. Often these poems indicate that happiness is unattainable, or at any rate nearly impossible to achieve. For example, Mary Leapor's "Essay on Happiness" explains that in order to experience happiness, one must find contentment in one's station and position. This seems to correlate with the message of Little's poem, but the tone and execution reveals that the two are actually disparate; indeed, the tone of Little's poem is aggressive and questions the integrity and character of those who have, or even desire, wealth. Leapor, in contrast, posits that as humans we are all guilty of desiring that which we cannot have. It is Little nearly-militant defiance of wealth and status that sets a difference between the tone of her poetry and that of Leapor, or even Yearsley. Where Yearsley shows a sense of reservation and, even at times, angst for her position as a member of the laboring class, Little embraces her class status and in doing so challenges those outside of the laboring class.

Little further exerts her ambitions by setting herself as an authority on Britain's political and moral landscape. In "On Reading Lady Montague's and Mrs. Rowe's *Letters*"¹³ Little posits that because of Rowe's excellent writing a sense of national morality is altered:

O excellent Rowe, much Britain does owe
 To what you've ingen'ously penn'd:
 Of virtue and wit, the model you've hit;
 Who reads you must ever commend.
 Would ladies pursue, the paths trod by you,

¹³ This poem refers to Lady Mary Montague and Mrs. Elizabeth Singer Rowe, both of whom were poets that Little admired (Backscheider 53).

And jointly to learning aspire

The men soon would yield unto them the field,

And critics in silence admire. (lines 12-20)

As with her praise for Burns, the fact that Little enjoys Rowe's writing is evident from her notion of the silence of the critics and the imaginative quality of Rowe's writing. Little's poetry generally offers little reason for the reader to suspect her of being disingenuous. Indeed, if Little bestows false flattery she typically refutes such compliments in her verse, as with her dedication to the Countess. For Little, there must be a common thread to bind herself with another writer. In Rowe's case, Little was simply first and foremost impressed by her skilled writing. Moreover, Little's allegiance to Burns is primarily due to their similarities in class and national heritage. Indeed, in Little's letter of self-introduction to Burns she asserts how he was able to appeal to her: "I felt a partiality for the author, which I should not have experienced had you been in a more dignified station...I shall, in hope of your future friendship, take the liberty to transcribe them" (33). There are certainly many similarities between the two writers, and Little's openness at this indicates a significant difference in character between herself and Leapor and Yearsley. Unlike Leapor and Yearsley, whose poetry reflects that they both sought to belong to prominent literary circles of London, Little shares a bond in terms of class and gender with fellow laboring-class writers, Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley, but she avoids the sense of British pride that the other two discuss in their writing. Little is distinctive in her Scottish pride and in her willingness to expose her anger and frustration at being a laboring class woman.

Perhaps because Little was so eager to find a wide, approving audience, expressions of political consciousness in her poetry are subtly placed. Her patron, Dunlop, an Englishwoman, made no secret of her dislike for Burns's political openness, but she understood his popularity

and chose to largely ignore it (Ferguson 91). The tension of this triangle, when considered in conjunction with Little's poem, "Given to a Lady Who Asked Me to Write a Poem," is heightened when Little champions Burns for his politics and his contributions to Scotland. Throughout the poem she again comically dismisses prominent writers such as Swift, Pope, Addison, Thomson, Homer, and Johnson, and it is her recurring dismissal of those writers who set many standards and models within eighteenth century writing that simultaneously reinforces and is a product of the shift in contemporary thought. The poem discusses many of the issues that may arise when on the road toward literary recognition, but in many ways Little includes these writers to critique the predominantly male and bourgeois literary tradition. Additionally, it is significant to note that in the poem Little dismisses Johnson the most for his critique of Scottish society (Ferguson 97). Indeed, Johnson criticized the Scottish for lacking what he believed to be chief, English virtues (Ferguson 98). Little criticizes Johnson in return, partly by using dialect terms Johnson may not understand:

But Doctor Johnson, in a rage,
 Unto posterity did shew
 Their blunders great, their beauties few.
 But now he's dead, we weel may ken;
 For ilka dunce maun hea a pen,
 To write in hamely, uncouth rhymes;
 An'yet forsooth they please the times (lines 14-20).

For Little, Johnson's complaint about Scotland's culture sets in motion a defensiveness that seems to differ from that of Yearsley and Leapor, who were also often challenged because of their lack of formal education. Instead of asserting the ways that Scotland's culture shows

promise, or using an overt display of intellectualism, Little does the opposite: she challenges Johnson by accentuating her Scottish dialect and heritage. She asserts that Johnson's opinion matters little because "now he's dead," and in many ways the poem suggests that attention to Augustan models of writing are likewise deceased (line 17). Unlike Leapor and Yearsley, whose poetry reflects their eagerness to belong to the ranks of prominent English writers, Little defies such writers by concentrating upon laboring-class writers and conventions.

Little is interested in criticizing Johnson when and where she can. In "Given to a Lady Who Asked Me to Write a Poem," Little addresses Johnson's ability to appeal to an entire nation of readers, despite his less than generous opinions about the culture in Scotland:

An' what is strange, they praise him for't.
 Even folks, wha're of the highest station,
 Ca' him the glory of our nation.
 But what is more surprising still,
 A milkmaid must tak up her quill;
 An' she will write, shame fa' the rabble!
 That think to please wi'ilka bawble.
 They may thank heav'n, auld Sam's asleep:
 For could he ance but get a peep,
 He wi' a vengeance wad them sen'
 A' headlong to the dunces' den (lines 24-34).

It is interesting that Little chooses to criticize Johnson's versatility and his ability to reach a large audience, as she maintains a similar sense of variety in her own verse. In contrast to such a message, her "Epistle to Mr. Robert Burns" applauds Burns for being able to write poems for

both English and Scottish readers. In her epistle to Burns, Little asserts her desire to gain a wide readership of her own, but in the aforementioned lines she styles herself as one who does not maintain the flexibility of appealing an entire nation. Speaking ironically, Little places herself in a position of subservience to a literary giant like Johnson; that is, she dismisses her ability to write as he does—knowing full well that she does not want to write as he does—because of her position as a milkmaid. Such tactics are found in Leapor's poetry and much of Yearsley's earlier work. Despite this, by including lines in the Scots dialect Little suggests that she is not only capable of maintaining her defiant attitude toward the English, but also that Scottish culture and language needs little assistance from someone like Johnson. Indeed, the lines reflect that she is eager to challenge the alleged inadequacy of the dialect.

Janet Little's poetry simultaneously exposes her as one who is attentive to literary trends and conventions, and as one who is not afraid to defy them. Whereas Leapor was eager to have her work read widely and modeled her verse after that of prominent Augustan writers, and whereas Yearsley focused her later poetry upon philosophical inquiry, Little's defiant attitude toward many of the conventions of laboring-class writing, while also being seemingly selective in complying to certain tropes within this tradition, indicates her overriding ambition to be published and prominent in her own right, as a laboring-class writer. Despite appearing only five years after Yearsley's second volume of poetry, Little's collection indicates a significant change in the collective confidence of laboring-class writers; she assumes her right to cultivate and enjoy popularity as a poet, even at times through the exploitation and tokenization of her talent and class. Like many female laboring-class writers of the period Little has been largely ignored by critics until recent years. Her work deserves attention because it is attentive to the social and political landscape of the period, while also offering the reader with a unique perspective on the

shift in the patron-poet relationship. Indeed, unlike earlier poets of the literary tradition, Little's poetry reflects that she is willing to play the role of subservient poet in order to have her work published, and in contrast to her predecessors she bypasses many of the traditional expressions of gratitude that were often exchanged in laboring-class poetry.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have paid particular attention to changing notions of laboring-class identity and intellectualism in the eighteenth century, and how this shift is exemplified in the poetry of Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Janet Little. Until recently literary critics have largely overlooked the laboring class poetic tradition, but over the past several decades scholars of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century studies have started to pay particular attention to this area, as writers such as Leapor, Yearsley, and Little have begun to enter the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century canon. This thesis has explained how the inherent tensions of the patron-poet relationship impact our understanding of these women's literary careers, especially when we examine the ambitions that these writers express in their tribute poems and the ways they apply publicly available models of natural genius and literary influence to their own verse. Each of the chapters in this thesis observes the shift in eighteenth-century thought; indeed, by 1792 when Little's collection was published, there was a pointed dismissal of Johnson and Pope as models of writing. Even Yearsley's poetry in 1787 began to explore the use of blank verse, while also including introspective questions about life and her role as a poet. These Romantic tendencies connect Leapor, Yearsley, and Little to canonical writers of the period such as William Blake and William Wordsworth.

Each of the three central poets within this thesis builds upon the poetry of the last, revealing a shift in not only contemporary thought, but also in the literary marketplace. The high demand for laboring-class poets in the eighteenth century gave writers such as Yearsley and Little, who were later in the century than Leapor, a sense of confidence in the marketability of

their work. However, despite this, Little's poetry reflects her eagerness to be not only a marketable writer, but also a critically acclaimed writer. William Christmas observes the change in literary trends in the Introduction of *Lab'ring Muses* as he notes Samuel Johnson's advice to laboring class writer, James Woodhouse: " 'Give nights and days, Sir. . . , to the study of Addison, if you mean either to be a good writer, or what is more worth, an honest man'" (17). Although prominent eighteenth-century writers such as Addison continued to be well admired later in the period, poets such as Janet Little turned elsewhere for literary inspiration. Chapters Two, Three, and Four focused primarily upon the tribute poetry of these three poets, as this poetry best captures the unique position of laboring-class poets and their relationships with their patrons.

Many of Leapor's poems paid tribute to her patron and friend, Bridget Freemantle, and Chapter Two of this thesis examined Leapor's contributions to the laboring class poetic tradition and her desires to achieve literary stardom. The recurring metaphors and motifs in her verse indicate her intellectual and literary aspirations. Indeed, I found that much of the research that has been completed on Leapor ignored several important poems that reflected her dissatisfaction with her position as a domestic servant and her desire to be ranked with writers such as Pope, Swift, and Johnson. Of these often overlooked poems the most notable are "The Visit" and "The Disappointment" where readers can see Leapor is longing for change reflected in her choices of storylines and motifs. Leapor's complex attitude towards abasement also emerges here, and is particularly useful in understanding her literary ambitions. Several of the recurring metaphors that appear in Leapor's verse—gold and concerns for value—likewise indicate her desire for a change in her circumstance, even as she also typically offers a sense of acceptance or resignation

for not possessing material wealth. This dynamic set of messages serves as an excellent starting point for many of the motifs that are found in Yearsley's and Little's writing.

If Leapor contributed in laying the foundation for our understanding of the patron-poet relationship, Yearsley expanded this by inverting many of the traditional patron-poet roles in her verse. Despite their overt messages of acceptance and contentment, these poets subtextually express their ambitions through analyses of power. Many of Yearsley's critics have noted her tumultuous relationship with her patron, Hannah More, and have concentrated upon her abolitionist poems, such as "A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade."¹⁴ In my study of Yearsley I focused on her poetry during her working relationship with Hannah More and her poetry after the deterioration of said relationship. By examining these two collections I found that Yearsley's focus and authorial intent changed. Yet even after she was no longer willing to be considered as suppliant poet, she was also not wholly interested in dismissing the patron-poet relationship altogether; instead, she began to adopt the role of patron in her own verse. Although More and Yearsley only worked together for less than a year, Yearsley's poetry displays a shift in tone and perspective. Indeed, in her second book of poetry, *Poems on Various Subjects*, Yearsley adopts a sense of superiority as she assumes the attitude and responsibilities of her patrons. Throughout the course of her poetry Yearsley challenges traditional notions of the patron-poet relationship, particularly in her second volume of poetry. Yearsley uses the poetry in this collection to offer advice to fellow poets, and she even provides the Bristol Marine Society with instruction. By adopting an instructive tone in her poetry, Yearsley builds upon our notions of what it means to participate in a patron-poet relationship.

¹⁴ Anne Stott deals with this poem in a chapter from her book, *Hannah More: The First Victorian*, entitled "Loyal and Anti-Radical Female" (307-332).

Yearsley's self-presentation within her poetry indicates her confidence in her own intellectualism and her abilities as a writer. One of Yearsley's best-known poems, "Night. To Stella," functions as an excellent model for this mindset, as she positions herself as the patron-figure bestowing advice to willing listeners. It is through the adoption of such a perspective that Yearsley is able to serve as an ideal model for the shift in the laboring-class poetic tradition; she clings to Augustan models of writing while simultaneously rejecting the notion that she lacks the credentials to impart instructions and advice to others. The latter half of Chapter Three focused upon poems that displayed Yearsley's role as a patron rather than a subservient poet.

Yearsley's adoption of patron responsibilities is particularly interesting when viewed in conjunction with Little's acceptance of her role as a laboring class poet. Unlike Leapor and Yearsley, who were eager to shed their status, Little revels in the marketability of her laboring-class status. Chapter Four addressed this issue most completely through Little's verse. Little's defiant attitude toward traditional notions of intellectualism and the previously admired Augustan models reflects broader trends in literary taste and consumption. As for Leapor, gold and material wealth is a recurring motif in Little's poetry, but such a motif serves each poet differently; for Little, material wealth is dismissed and even portrayed as incriminating. Throughout Little's poetry, associations with status and wealth are perceived as faults or negative attributes. Instead of appealing to literary patrons or Augustan models, Little writes tribute poems to her literary idol, Robert Burns. Chapter Four reflects back upon my findings about Leapor and Yearsley in an effort to demonstrate the shift from an Augustan to a Romantic context for laboring-class poetry.

Although there has been comparatively little research performed on Little's poetry, particularly in comparison with Leapor and Yearsley, I found that there were many excellent

readings of her poetry from Mary Waldron and Moira Ferguson. Waldron and Ferguson certainly focus on Little's political identity, a subject that is prevalent in her poetry, and her fondness for Robert Burns. Indeed, this attachment to Burns certainly indicated that models for literary inspiration were no longer limited to Addison and Pope, but instead included other laboring-class authors. Despite Waldon and Ferguson's insightful readings, they do not focus on Little's authorial concerns or her anxieties about being a good writer. While it is clear that Little was savvy in selecting a sympathetic and prominent figure with which to dedicate her collection, she wished to be published, widely read, and also well respected. Chapter Four fills in many of these gaps in Waldron's and Ferguson's readings.

Leapor, Yearsley, and Little show us how the laboring-class poetic tradition continued to evolve from early in the eighteenth century into the Romantic era. When assessing the three previous chapters, it is clear that each of the poets uses issues of value and currency as recurring motifs. Despite Yearsley's confrontation with her patron and Little's resistance to traditional notions of the patron-poet relationship, what I found the most exciting throughout my study of these three poets is that they each show a disregard for status and material wealth. Indeed, in their poetry these poets often associated material wealth with sin and evil. My study allowed me to extend beyond arguments of whether or not these poets are ambitious to be published and praised as authors, but instead that they were savvy in marketing themselves and aware of contemporary trends. Although issues of poetic identity persist in the study of laboring-class writers, we also need to pay attention to these writers' efforts to move beyond their personal circumstances through their art.

The poets discussed in this thesis capitalized upon the demand for laboring-class poetry in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and serve to further emphasize the significance of

literary patronage and poetic identity in the laboring-class poetic tradition. Upon close examination, laboring-class poetry offers highly nuanced insights upon literary production, and prompts modern readers to reconsider common assumptions about class and intellectualism within the period. The blend of issues I have tried to bring forward in this study is captured by several lines from Leapor's "An Epistle to a Lady":

You see I'm learned, and I shew't the more,
 That none may wonder when they find me poor.
 Yet Mira dreams, as slumbring Poets may,
 And rolls in Treasures till the breaking Day:
 While Books and Pictures in bright Order rise,
 And painted Parlours swim before her Eyes:
 Till the shrill Clock impertinently rings,
 And the soft Visions move their shining Wings:
 Then Mira wakes,—her Pictures are no more,
 And through her Fingers slides the vanish'd Ore. (lines 19-28)

Although these writers are beginning to receive more attention because of their historical and literary value, there is more to be discussed in terms of their self-presentation and efforts at self-promotion.

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