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**Women's Place in Men's Poetry:
The Creation of a *Beata Femina* in Women's Poetry
of the Eighteenth Century.**

by

Rosemary Daniels

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the requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This dissertation examines a group of female writers in the eighteenth century, the Countess of Winchilsea, Sarah Fyge, Mary Chudleigh, Elizabeth Singer Rowe, Mary Collier, Mary Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Anna Barbauld, who reconfigured elements of an authoritative generic mode, the georgic. In undertaking this reconfiguration these women developed their own distinctive tradition of verse which I describe as a portrayal of a *beata femina*. The poetry of the *beata femina* acknowledges the separate sphere to which eighteenth-century *mores* restricted women and privileges the life of that sphere. Thus the narrative of the *beatus vir* is not figured as an appeal to rural retirement so much as a gendered escape from a male dominated world into a female life of the mind. The traditional affirmation of the georgic labour of the estate is transformed into a testimony of domestic labour. The country-house poem is rewritten to celebrate the women who give it life, while the topographical survey is reordered as a means for women to survey their own narratives.

However, the most significant way in which these women establish a sense of a *beata femina* within georgically inflected verse is through their employment of time. Women's poetry in this mode self-consciously rejects both the seasonal cycles and sense of historic progression associated with the georgic. Instead, women describe short periods of time within their quotidian lives in which they experience pleasure, connect to nature or other women, and, often, achieve transcendent experiences which seem to stand outside time.

Introduction

This dissertation examines a group of female writers in the eighteenth century who employed different elements of an authoritative generic mode, the georgic, in order to make it relevant to their lives. At the same time, their appropriation of this mode also enabled them to attach its literary significance to their lives and work. Their use of the georgic mode for this kind of adaptation reflects its importance generally to the eighteenth century and, perhaps more significantly, reflects the fluid nature of its generic boundaries. Anthony Low and John Barrell amongst others, have established the significance of the georgic mode for this period, while Margaret Anne Doody has shown that eighteenth-century poets consistently recombined, refashioned and cannibalised genres throughout the period.¹ This culture-wide enthusiasm for generic disruption allowed women poets, many of whom were of a social class that precluded almost any recognised labour, including the labour of gentlemen, to write georgically-inflected poetry without a loss of decorum and to experiment with its conventions.

In undertaking this reconfiguration, women writers who employed georgically-inflected conventions developed a distinctive tradition of verse associated with those conventions. Following Jean Mallinson in her examination of the work of Lady Winchilsea, I describe this tradition as a portrayal of a *beata femina*. Mallinson employs this term to describe how Winchilsea took the conventions of the *beatus vir* as it had evolved in England from Virgilian and

¹ Anthony Low, *The Georgic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1985).
 John Barrell, *English Literature in History, 1730 - 1780: An Equal Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983).
 Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985).

Horatian models and rewrote them to reflect her own life of rural retirement.² The term is particularly useful in examining women's reconfiguration of the georgic mode because the georgic convention they most often rewrote was the convention of rural retirement. Book II of Virgil's *Georgics* and Horace's "Second Epode" celebrate the "happy man" who lives on his own rural estate far from the corruptions of the city and is contented with the modest life of such an estate. In exploring these motifs and the ways women writers experimented with them, I employ the work of Maren-Sofie Rostvig. Rostvig demonstrates how classical models of retreat sentiments developed into the *beatus vir* mode in England from the Renaissance to the late eighteenth century.³ However, although Rostvig discusses several women writers in this tradition, she does not explore the ways they adapted its conventions to reflect their own lives.

The ideal of the *beata femina* as I employ it in this study begins with the English idealisation of rural retirement that Rostvig demonstrates but reorders it to become something new. There are elements here of Mallinson's reading of Winchilsea's retirement poems but this study takes that reading much further. The poetry of the *beata femina* acknowledges the separate sphere to which eighteenth-century *mores* restricted women as a sphere of retirement, and it celebrates the life of that sphere. This celebration involves giving value not only to women's activities but to the connections women share with each other, their connection with the landscape and their particular understanding of the world. In undertaking this project women

² Jean Mallinson, "Anne Finch: A Woman Poet and the Tradition," *Gender at Work: Four Women Writers of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Ann Messenger (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990), 68.

³ Maren-Sofie Rostvig, *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*. Two Volumes. Second edition (Trondheim: Norwegian UP, 1962).

poets recombine and intermix existing material and introduce new material into generic conventions in a way that becomes distinctive and recognisable as a woman's voice within the georgic mode. Thus the conventional opposition between city and country in the writings of the *beatus vir*, for example, is diminished or transformed in the writings of the *beata femina* so that the narrative of retirement is not so much figured as a rejection of the city as a gendered escape from a male-dominated world into a female life of the mind. As the century progressed women began rewriting other prominent features of georgically inflected verse, and in so doing they introduced the same kinds of gendered changes that they had already made in their re-ordering of the *beatus vir* tradition. Thus the sense of ownership of property and of the connection between georgic values and public virtue that is assumed in much georgically inflected verse is almost completely absent in women's versions. Women's verse in this mode concentrates instead on private, individual expressions of the virtues and spiritual rewards of country life. The traditional georgic labour of the farm or estate is transformed into domestic labour by women poets who affirm the community of women who perform it. The celebration of a country estate is rewritten as a celebration of the women who give it life, while the topographical survey is reconfigured as a means for women to survey their own narratives or bring their own sensibilities to bear upon conventional narratives.

But perhaps the most significant way in which eighteenth-century women poets establish a sense of *beata femina* within georgically inflected verse is through their idiosyncratic employment of time. As Stuart Sherman has demonstrated, social understanding of the movement of time was undergoing a significant shift in emphasis in this period. Sherman describes a developing reliance upon "mechanical time" in which people measured their lives by

the clock and the watch: a succession of minutes and hours in quotidian progression. This reliance upon mechanical time was replacing an older reliance upon natural and cosmic patterns (sunrise, sunset, or the seasons) and upon religiously ordered movements measured by the liturgical calendar and set within a larger teleology of salvation history. Sherman describes the way in which the new understanding of time led to the growth of a style of writing based upon the quotidian, including newspapers, published journals, travelogues and novels. Sherman and others have also claimed that these new ideas of time were ignored by eighteenth-century poets.⁴ But, in fact, the late seventeenth and early eighteenth-century fashion for satiric verse tends to emphasise the quotidian and the trivial details of the quotidian that Sherman claims are part of the adoption of mechanical time.⁵ This use of mechanical time understanding within eighteenth-century satire emphasises its absence within the non-satiric poetry of the period. Georgic and georgically-inflected verse continues to employ instead traditional understandings of time. Most common, of course, is the use of seasonal cycles, reflecting the agricultural activity at the heart of the traditional georgic. Equally common, however, is the use of historical progression, which displaces the teleology of salvation history, marking instead the significant movement of the British nation to a political apotheosis.

Women's serious, reflective poetry in the georgic mode seems to reject, often overtly and

⁴ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries and English Diurnal Form, 1660 - 1785*. (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), 1, 3, 10.

See also. Jacques Berthoud. "Mechanical Time in XVIIIth-Century English Literature." *Science and Imagination in XVIIIth-Century British Culture*, ed. Sergio Rossi. (Milan: U of Milan P, 1985), 39.

⁵ This indeed is a conception of temporal understanding within eighteenth-century satire which I have not seen discussed elsewhere and which would, I believe, repay further study.

self-consciously, both seasonal cycles and historic progression. While female poets do not ignore the significance of traditional temporal movements, they do not find them relevant to their reconfiguration of the mode and, indeed, often figure themselves as alienated from those movements. In some ways, because of the domestic nature of the labour they perform, women poets occasionally appear to incorporate the movements of mechanical time into their versions of the georgic mode. But while women poets in this mode do privilege the quotidian over more extended temporal periods, they situate their emphasis within the nature of their lives rather than in an acceptance of mechanical time. Women poets often associate mechanical time with the male world of ownership, public activity and control; and they reject it with as much conviction as they reject more traditional conceptions of time.

Instead, women accentuate short periods of time within their quotidian lives, moments when they experience pleasure, connection to nature, community with other women and, often, a kind of transcendence that seems to stand outside time. For women writers in the early eighteenth century this emphasis often involves a refusal to concern themselves with the past or the future in their poetry. Later writers gather the past and the future into their present moments of contemplation and make them part of the female narrative they are composing. But women throughout the period give to the present hour or moment a significance that is particular to their lives and sensibilities and which has little association with either traditional or mechanical understandings of temporal movement.

Women poets' concern with the immediate moment within the quotidian can most obviously be linked to the circumstances of their lives. Even aristocratic women led lives that were subject to the whims and demands of others, and the emphasis upon the present moment, in

which the mind can free itself for pleasure or meditation reflects the stolen minutes that were all that most women could grasp, in contrast with the contemplative hours available to men. There is also a sense in which women's emphasis upon the importance of each quotidian moment reflects a religious concern with the sacred significance of the day. Isaac Watts, the dissenting clergyman and poet, for example, who was a mentor to several women writers in the eighteenth century, stresses in his poetry the importance of using the hours of the day as a means to ready the soul for heaven. Women poets were generally not as educated in the humanist, classical tradition as most male poets and thus tended to avoid too pointed an emphasis upon classical models. At the same time, while they felt alienated from the institutional associations of historic progression, they had a greater sense of connection to Christian rather than classical narratives of time. In addition, women had been encouraged from the Reformation to record religious reflections in personal journals. Thus, the combination of the demands of their domestic lives, their familiarity with Biblical narratives, and the encouragement they received to record occasional reflections in journals probably led to the emphasis upon the importance of the moment of contemplation and composition that defines their reconfiguration of the georgic mode.

Several scholars focus on the quotidian in women's poetry, but they tend to use the word to signify the commonplace, everyday lives of women rather than their access to transcendence. Margaret Anne Doody, for example, argues that Jonathan Swift encouraged the women poets who were part of his circle in Dublin to write about their daily lives in a satiric vein and his influence, she claims, extended to those women who read his poetry throughout the eighteenth century. When "women writers of his era think of dealing with their domestic world in its hard detail," she

states, “they tend to look to Swift as one of their models.”⁶ Doody does not extend her examination to women writers of serious, georgically inflected verse. Indeed, she implies that women avoided such verse because it contains “ponderous *gravitas*” and highlights heroic stereotypes irrelevant to their lives.⁷ The same view is reflected in Karina Williamson’s response to the 1989 publication of Roger Lonsdale’s *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*. Williamson voices surprise at the “down-to-earth quality of many of these women’s poems: their uninhibited attention to physical appearances and functions and humdrum details of everyday life.” She notes that this attention led to the creation of an “alternative poetics” which emphasises the quotidian “as a means of breaking free of established norms.”⁸ Like Doody, however, Williamson tends to reflect more upon the satiric, the humorous and the earthy in women’s writings, claiming that women writers who emphasise the quotidian reject a “‘feminine’ poetics based on Fancy and Sensibility” and insist their readers “look at the actualities of common life *without* reaching after interior meanings, symbolic significances or transcendent values.”⁹ My study argues in opposition to Williamson’s assertions, claiming instead that women often find symbolic significance in short periods within the quotidian that give value to their restricted lives.

Stuart Curran champions a perspective closer to my own when he notes that “the

⁶ Margaret Anne Doody, “Swift Among the Women,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 18 (1988): 83.

⁷ Doody: 79.

⁸ Karina Williamson, “The Tenth Muse: Women Writers and the Poetry of Common Life,” *Early Romantics: Perspectives in British Poetry from Pope to Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Woodman, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1998), 13 and 18.

⁹ Williamson: 17 and 19.

quotidian is absolute” in women’s writings and allows them to access transcendent meaning within the ordinary.¹⁰ Anne Mellor, too, sees a similar propensity in eighteenth-century women’s poetry, in which “short lyrics . . . combine[] the details of the quotidian with the expression of a single feeling, implicitly assum[ing] the overriding value of ordinary, daily interactions.”¹¹ Both Curran and Mellor, however, explicitly discuss romantic women’s writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries rather than women’s writings from the rest of the eighteenth century. It is worth noting here that the early eighteenth-century female view of transcendence links it more closely with women’s role in nature, rather than with elements of female domesticity. Curran and Mellor thus tend to associate women’s interest in the quotidian with the late eighteenth-century cultivation of domesticity and sensibility. Neither of them associates women’s interest in the quotidian and the possibility of transcendence with the georgically inflected verse of women writing in the early eighteenth century as this study does. Like Doody and Williamson, they also emphasise the ordinary and the everyday in their readings of women’s poetry of the quotidian. While this sense of the everyday is certainly present in the poets I am studying, it is not what they value most. As I describe them, the writings of the *beata femina* invest women’s lives with significance, whether or not those lives are characterised in terms of labour or leisure. Women poets in the *beata femina* tradition sometimes write about the quotidian *minutiae* of their lives, but, as this study demonstrates, they more often give weight to their connections with each other and nature and to their special understanding of the universe.

¹⁰ Stuart Curran, “Romantic Poetry: The I Altered,” *Romanticism and Feminism*, ed. Anne K. Mellor. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988), 192.

¹¹ Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), 11.

Furthermore, their employment of time reflects this significance.

In describing this sense of connection, I often characterise it as “affective.” I use this term to define a difference from the male poet’s sense of his relations with others and with nature which, until the development of the poetry of literary loneliness and the cult of sensibility in mid-century, emphasised the public and the rational. I also highlight the sense of affection, and even veneration, that women poets often express towards each other and to nature. The realm of the affective and the non-rational was, in any event, considered a defining feature of the woman’s separate sphere even in the late eighteenth century. In this context, Isobel Armstrong’s account of what she calls “affective discourse” has proved a useful starting point:

I believe that many women poets neither consented to the idea of a special feminine discourse nor accepted an account of themselves as belonging to the realm of the nonrational. They engaged with two strategies to deal with the problem of affective discourse. First, they used the customary ‘feminine’ forms and languages, but they turned them to analytical account and used them to *think* with. Second, they challenged the male philosophical traditions that led to a demeaning discourse of feminine experience and remade those traditions. They did not take these philosophical traditions — the only traditions they had — as an inert model but reconstructed them through critique. A subtext of women’s poetry is the question of how far the affective *is* knowledge and how far it may just be affect.¹²

¹² Isobel Armstrong. “The Gush of the Feminine: How Can We Read Women’s Poetry of the Romantic Period?” *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Countervoices*. ed. Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley, (Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1995), 15.

Armstrong goes on to argue that “the subtle negotiations with male texts by women poets” need to be examined in analysing women’s poetry and that “a formal, structural, and linguistic project is bound up with intellectual debate in women’s poetry and asks to be addressed.”¹³ Armstrong’s focus here is Romantic women’s poetry, in particular Barbauld’s “Inscription for an Ice-House,” but her argument can be applied to women’s writing throughout the eighteenth century. I would question whether all women in the *beata femina* tradition rejected the philosophy of separate spheres for men and women. There is some evidence that certain women poets embraced it. However, most women poets claim a place in which the intuitive and sensitive connections of the *beata femina* are not figured as non-rational but as part of a deeper understanding than can be accessed in the male sphere.

This study also depends to a certain extent upon the work of Marilyn Williamson and Margaret Doody.¹⁴ They assert that women poets throughout the eighteenth century influenced each other and constructed particular poetic traditions. I do not fully follow their particular arguments concerning the nature of these traditions. However, I find their discussions of influence useful in arguing that, while the *beata femina* was not a self-conscious poetic practice for these women, their reactions to the material conditions of their lives produced a distinctive tradition which spread from one to another through the publication of their works. I have also employed Donna Landry’s application of Luce Irigaray’s concept of “ventriloquism” to describe

¹³ Armstrong: 17.

¹⁴ Marilyn Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650 - 1550*. (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990).
 Margaret Anne Doody, “Sensuousness in the Poetry of Eighteenth-Century Women Poets,” *Women’s Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon* ed. Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), 3 - 31.

the way that women writers adopt and adapt established genres in order to gain entry to mainstream literary acceptance.¹⁵ Landry's argument is limited to women's labouring class poetry of the eighteenth century, but her use of the term "ventriloquism" can be effectively extended to all the writers of *beata femina*.

In talking about women's employment of a particular understanding of time in this study, I should make it clear that I am not talking about the "women's time" of Julia Kristeva. Kristeva's philosophy of women's time is based on a kind of biological determinism, a relationship between women's production of literature and their connection to monthly cycles, parturition and motherhood; consequently, women writers make use of the semiotic (associated with bodily drives) as opposed to the symbolic (associated with male authored linguistics and grammar).¹⁶ I argue instead that eighteenth-century women writers adapted male authored genres because they wanted to be published and accepted as serious authors. This desire meant that their use of language had to be as much like the authoritative voice of the male poet as possible. Their adaptations, therefore, did not attempt to access a different female voice based on their physical differences from men but to obtain authority for aspects of their lives as women. The women whose work I examine did not theorise about their poetics in the manner of Pope, Wordsworth or Coleridge, and I feel uncomfortable imposing a kind of theoretical reading upon their work that would probably not be recognised by them. Their privileging of a moment of time in which to meditate or to connect with other women arises, as I argue, out of the material conditions of their

¹⁵ Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Labouring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739 - 1796*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 6.

¹⁶ Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time" *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. Toril Moi. (New York: Columbia UP, 1986), 189 - 193.

lives, not from a self-conscious creation of a theory of female poetics.

In talking about time, I have often used two terms which perhaps need some explanation here. "Teleology" refers to "evidences of design in nature," as *Webster's Dictionary* puts it. It also connotes an understanding of the movement of time which privileges a forward movement to a purposeful ending or apotheosis. Where I have used the term, I have used it with a combination of these meanings. I also use the term "temporality" in a somewhat specialised sense. Originally an ecclesiastical term referring to the temporal possessions of the clergy, it later acquired the sense of the quality and experience of being in time. There is evidence that seventeenth and eighteenth-century writers also employed the term in this way. Edward Rainbow in a sermon preached at St. Paul's in 1634, for example, urged the congregation not "to be too much taken and affected with secular affaires" because "though in the act of our laboures sometimes we place temporality, yet ought we alwayes before our intentions to set aeternity."¹⁷ Where I use the term "temporality" I use it in this sense as a reference to an understanding of the movement of time by men and women as opposed to an understanding of eternity.

In undertaking this project I have necessarily had to make choices about which women poets to include or exclude. I have included writers who were publishing in the seventeenth century, if the body of work in which I am interested was published by them in the eighteenth century. I did not consider those writers of the late eighteenth century who are more connected to the Romantic movement than to earlier eighteenth-century poetry. This is because these later writers have been so well-covered by scholars such as Stuart Curran and Anne Mellor. I

¹⁷ Edward Rainbow, *Labour Forbidden and Commanded: A Sermon*. (London: N. Vavasour, 1635), 10 - 11.

restricted my choice to women writers who wrote a significant number of works in the georgic mode. This meant leaving out important writers I would otherwise have liked to include. Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, for example, wrote "Constantinople, To –" which is a lovely poem in the *beatus vir* tradition but it is almost the only serious work she attempted in the georgic mode, and she is more well known for her letters and satiric poetry.¹⁸ I would also have liked to included the works of Anna Seward, Joanna Baillie, Charlotte Smith or Helen Maria Williams but I decided that my work on Yearsley and Barbauld covered very similar points of discussion so that I would merely be repeating myself. Instead of attempting to cover many writers in brief, I chose a few representative writers and examined one or two of their works in detail. In this strategy, I was influenced by Margaret Ezell who argues that we should fully recover and explore in detail the works of writers about whom we wish to theorise.¹⁹

I have also made an effort to choose those writers whose published works extended to more than one edition. In constructing an argument that depends to a certain extent upon questions of influence, I felt it was important to know that several of the writers I examine had potential access to one another's works. Without a close examination of their correspondence, which lies outside the purview of this project, it is difficult to establish precisely which women poets other women were reading. Female poets rarely acknowledge publicly their debts to previous female writers. For eighteenth-century writers who wished to be taken seriously as poets, this is understandable. They are far more likely to emphasise their connections to

¹⁸ Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, *Essays and Poems and Simplicity, A Comedy*, ed. Robert Halsband and Isobel Grundy, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 206 - 210.

¹⁹ Margaret Ezell, *Writing Women's Literary History*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1993), 70 -93.

established male poets who can give their work authority. An important source of evidence, therefore is the close and careful reading of poetic texts, which reveals, for instance, that some poets like Chudleigh and Fyge seem to aim their works self-consciously towards a female readership and others, including Barbauld, occasionally acknowledge earlier poets like Singer Rowe or connect their works to them in more subtle ways. It is perhaps an ironic paradox that women who reconfigured authoritative modes in order to embody them with female understanding should rely upon male poets for authority. But in the early eighteenth century, in particular, women had to struggle for acceptance as serious writers. Even in the late eighteenth century, Barbauld was extremely cautious in her claims to an autonomous authoritative voice, a caution justified in the critical reaction to "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven." Of course, as Judith Philips Stanton argues, the more women published their work, the more they created an atmosphere in which their particular tradition could thrive.²⁰

Chapter One looks at the historical background to the problems my thesis explores. I examine in some detail the development of mechanical time understanding in the eighteenth century and how it differed from authorised understandings of temporal movement. The different ways that the movement of time was envisaged are important in order to comprehend the ways that women's employment of time transgressed the accepted practices. I also examine the position of women in the period, noting the ways that Renaissance and seventeenth-century social movements affected eighteenth-century *mores* as they concerned women. In addition, I appraise changes in the position of women throughout the eighteenth century, particularly noting the ways

²⁰ Judith Philips Stanton, "Statistical Profile of Women Publishing in English from 1660 to 1800," *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed. Frederick Keener and Susan Lorsch, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 254 - 255.

that the culture of sensibility and domesticity affected women's roles in society.

Chapter Two examines one male poet, Alexander Pope, in connection with one female poet, Lady Winchilsea. The women I examine all look to authoritative models for the genres they employ, and the poet they look to perhaps more than any other throughout the period is Pope. I thought it an important point of comparison to observe how an authoritative poet like Pope approached issues of time and place. Because of my own constraints of time and space, I chose only two of his works to examine in detail. *Windsor Forest* contains within it a variety of georgic features including a prospect survey and the ideals of the *beatus vir*. It thus seemed a model vehicle to show how Pope emphasises traditional conceptions of time in the georgic mode. By contrast, the fourth book of Pope's final version of *The Dunciad* gives a distinctive view of mechanical time as it was employed by writers of satirical poetry in the eighteenth century. It is, of course, an exceptionally bleak vision of the world of mechanical temporality but, because of the extreme nature of its vision, it offers a useful comparison to the temporal movements of the *beata femina*. I juxtapose a detailed examination of Winchilsea's poetry with my examination of Pope in this chapter because Winchilsea's works stand in stature as a female version of his. She established many of the ways in which women ventriloquised the differing elements of the georgic mode, including the essential temporality of the *beata femina*. This stands in opposition to both the authorised temporal movements of the georgic and mechanical temporal movements of satire employed by Pope.

Chapter Three looks at three female contemporaries of Winchilsea who wrote in the tradition of the *beatus vir*. This chapter examines the different ways that Sarah Fyge, Mary, Lady Chudleigh, and Elizabeth Singer Rowe ventriloquised the conventions of retirement poetry in

order to reconstruct the ideal of the *beatus vir* as an ideal of the *beata femina*. In doing this I show how these three writers looked to the example of Winchilsea, and influenced later writers like Barbauld, to develop a conception of time in which snatched moments of contemplation can lead to transcendent experiences out of time.

Chapter Four looks at two labouring writers of the mid-century, Mary Collier and Mary Leapor and the ways in which they reconfigured both the georgic and the country house poem. Not surprisingly, there is a strong emphasis upon the labour that both women perform and they can thus be seen to introduce the sanctioning of domestic labour into the georgic mode in a way that becomes a feature of late eighteenth-century poetry by women. They also employ understandings of time that reject the authorised temporal movements of the modes they use and emphasise instead the short periods of time within the quotidian in which they find some meaning for the lives they live. Despite the very different status of these women from the other women whose works I examine, Collier and Leapor, like their more privileged contemporaries, underscore a sense of community with other women. Leapor also emphasises a female connection with nature which places her work, in particular, in the wider tradition of the *beata femina*.

In Chapter Five I conclude with an examination of the work of two late eighteenth-century writers, Anne Yearsley and Anna Laetitia Barbauld. These writers encompass the differing elements of the *beata femina* as it has been expressed by earlier writers in the eighteenth century. In particular, they both introduce their own visions of the *beata femina* into the topographical survey, which had formed an important part of the georgic mode since Denham's *Coopers Hill* in the seventeenth century. This undertaking involves an introduction of ideals of female

community, of subjective connection with nature and, above all, of a female understanding of temporal movement into a mode significantly associated with authoritative ideas of history, ownership and nationhood. I also look at two shorter poems, a reflective poem reminiscent of Chudleigh's "On Solitude," by Yearsley and a domestic georgic by Barbauld which, despite its satiric tone, accords a significance to women's labour that we first see in Collier and Leapor.

Finally, I would like to address briefly my protocol in the use of poets' names. Unlike male poets who have been assigned a universally accepted mode of address (either surnames or titles), women poets, probably because of a combination of their adoption of married surnames and because of a shorter history of study of their works, seem to have been given a variety of naming styles. Even the Countess of Winchilsea, whose works have been studied since Myra Reynold's 1903 edition of her poetry, is known variously as Winchilsea or Finch. In this study I have adopted the practice given to aristocratic male writers of naming them through their titles. Therefore I use Winchilsea and Chudleigh, rather than Finch or Lee. Where a name appears on the title page or is part of an already accepted usage, I employ whichever form is most commonly used in modern critical commentary. Therefore, I use the name Barbauld, although some of her important early poetry was published under her maiden name of Aiken. Similarly, I use the name Singer Rowe, although she was published under both her maiden name, Singer, and her married name, Rowe, because that is the practice of her only modern editor, Forell Marshall. Finally, I made a somewhat arbitrary choice in naming Sarah Fyge. She was married twice and it is not uncommon to see all three names used in the few articles about her and in anthologies. However, "Sarah Fyge (Field Egerton)," which is the most common usage, seems rather awkward. The choice was made more difficult by the fact that, like many women writers in the early eighteenth

century, she did not attach a full name to her work. The ambiguous "Mrs. S. F." included on the title-page of her collection of poetry is made even more ambiguous by the fact that she had been Mrs. Egerton for three years by the time that the book was published. I finally decided that in consideration of her views on marriage expressed in "The Emulation" and elsewhere and because some of the works that I examine are self-evidently written before her first marriage, I would employ her unmarried name only.

Chapter One

Historical Background: Mechanical time, traditional time, and women's lives.

In late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, rapid technological advances in the production of clocks and watches led to the creation of what Jacques Berthoud and others have described as a "horological revolution."²¹ Watches, which had been luxury status symbols for the wealthy in the sixteenth century, became commonplace objects in the pockets of the middle class by the eighteenth century.²² Striking innovations in the production of these timepieces made them highly accurate, reliable, portable and affordable.²³ Stuart Sherman, for example, cites a story by John Aubrey in which a group of maids in the early seventeenth century, unfamiliar with the sound of clockwork, were convinced that the ticking of a watch was a voice of a devil.²⁴ By 1726, as Jacques Berthoud reminds us, Jonathan Swift could enumerate a watch

²¹ Jacques Berthoud, "Mechanical Time in XVIIIth-Century English Literature," *Science and Imagination in XVIIIth-Century British Culture*, ed. Sergio Rossi, (Milan: U of Milan P, 1985), 39.

See also Samuel L. Macey, *Clocks and the Cosmos: Time in Western Life and Thought*, (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1980), 17.

²² See Carlo Cipolla, *Clocks and Culture 1300-1700*, (London: Collins, 1967). See also: David Landes, *Revolution in Time: Clocks and the Making of the Modern World*, (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap, 1983).

²³ These innovations were so efficient that watch and clock technology remained largely unchanged until the introduction of electronics in the mid-twentieth century.

²⁴ Stuart Sherman, *Telling Time: Clocks, Diaries and English Diurnal Form 1660-1785*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), 1.

in careless confusion with other domestic articles in an inventory of Gulliver's pockets.²⁵

This growing reliance upon and fascination with clockwork in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries has been linked with the development of the new science which explained the universe in terms of mechanical order and construction. More than any other development in this period, the workings of the clock seemed to many philosophers and early scientists to stand as the most compelling metaphor for the workings of the universe.²⁶ Cartesian philosophy, for example, argued that animals should be considered as clockwork automata, unable to think rationally.²⁷ Robert Boyle famously compared the workings of the universe to the great cathedral clock at Strasbourg, which could not only signal the hours but indicate cosmic movements and the timing of eclipses.²⁸ It is not surprising that God came to be understood as a cosmic clockmaker in this period, and, as Samuel Macey notes, "the role brought him no loss of status."²⁹ Some philosophers were concerned that an over-reliance upon mechanical philosophy could lead to atheism, yet, despite this concern, mechanical philosophy remained an important an important means of understanding the universe throughout the eighteenth century.³⁰ Indeed, while mechanical philosophy developed out of the horological revolution, it then gave philosophical

²⁵ Berthoud 39.

See also Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, ed. Louis Landa, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), 28.

²⁶ Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1996), 30 - 34.

²⁷ Macey .47 and 77.

²⁸ Shapin 34.

²⁹ Macey 69.

³⁰ Macey 84 - 85.

weight to other consequences of the revolution.

In industry, for example, the manufacture of timepieces was the first industrial process to be fragmented into a series of sequential tasks. While there were notable clock and watch makers in the eighteenth century, such as George Graham and Thomas Tompion, most people involved in timepiece production only constructed small parts like the springs, the fusees, the cases, or the faces, with no idea of how to make complete pieces.³¹ By 1700, London was the major centre for the manufacture of timepieces in Europe, and by 1775, its workshops were producing over 200,000 watches per year.³² This kind of production and innovation ensured that the new timepieces came to be seen as the privileged means of understanding the movement of time. Berthoud and Sherman among others, have argued that this sudden and widespread access to the private ownership of mechanically precise time led to the birth of a new perception of time in the eighteenth century. This new perception was largely centred in England and was one of several cultural and scientific developments in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries contributing to a secularisation of society in Western Europe.

Time perception in Western Europe had long been defined and governed by natural phenomena or by religious and liturgical constructions. Thus, the perception of the movement of time within a day, for example, was governed by the apparent movement of the sun through the arc of the sky. This understanding of time was necessarily cyclical, and was largely unaffected by

³¹ This kind of division of labour was used, of course, as a significant part of the argument of Adam Smith in *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Mortimer Adler, (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 3-37.

³² Cipolla 89. See also Macey 17 - 18.

attempts to measure time with sundials or early mechanical clocks.³³ This cyclical understanding was modified by a developing historical sense among the ancient Greeks and Romans, and this more linear temporality was strengthened by the Judaeo-Christian belief in a teleological temporal movement through salvation history.³⁴ By the eighteenth century, a similarly linear or progressive construction of national history had modified this more religious understanding of temporal movement. Nevertheless, the normative experience of time for most people must have continued to be cyclical because it reflected the seasonal patterns of agricultural labour and the management of rural estates which continued to be the dominant way of life until the nineteenth century.

While these traditional temporal constructions retained much of their power, the horological revolution in the eighteenth century ensured that time was increasingly viewed as abstracted from its traditional moorings. It was becoming, in Sherman's words, a mechanical "running sequence" or "a succession of small identical impulses."³⁵ In the same way that the mechanical philosophy of Descartes and Boyle or the scientific discoveries of Isaac Newton created a sense of separation between divine action and physical effect, so the evolution of mechanical time abstracted the perception of time from the cycles of nature and from traditional religious understanding. Mechanical time perception, according to Sherman, is not determined by

³³ Shapin 33. See also Landes 15 and 58 - 70.

³⁴ Henri Charles Peuch, "Gnosis and Time," *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbook*, (New York: Pantheon, 1957) 51. See also Gilles Quispel, "Time and History in Patristic Christianity," 85 - 107, and G. van der Leeuw. "Primordial Time and Final Time," 324 - 350 in the same volume.

³⁵ Sherman 3.

a naturally flowing cycle or a socially authorised linear progression, but is experienced as a diurnal or quotidian movement which is an end in itself. It was associated with an increasing interest throughout the eighteenth century in the action of the present moment, in the *minutiae* of daily life that fill a sequence of these moments, and in the intimate lives of the individuals who inhabit those moments.

Although an understanding of traditional movements of time did not disappear in the eighteenth century, this sense of temporal abstraction contributed to a growing cultural alienation from natural, religious or traditional understandings of the place of man in the universe.³⁶ Thus, while the course of time was still understood as being cyclical or progressive in movement during the eighteenth century, the transcendent significance of those movements was gradually lost, and human experience of time became “a low grade infinity of succession without beginning or ends.”³⁷ The physical appearance of the new timepieces retained in their circular construction an inbuilt analogy with the ancient movement of traditional temporality, but the teleological and natural meaning of that temporality was increasingly abstracted and lost. The development of mechanical time perception in the eighteenth century led to a shift to what Sherman, quoting Walter Benjamin, describes as “a culture-wide acceptance of ‘homogeneous, empty time.’”³⁸ The

³⁶ See J. T. Fraser, “Time, Infinity and the World in Enlightenment Thought,” *Time, Literature and the Arts: Essays in Honour of Samuel H. Macey*, ed., Thomas Cleary, (Victoria: U of Victoria P, 1994), 201.

³⁷ Helmuth Plessner. “On the Relation of Time to Death.” *Man and Time: Papers from the Eranos Yearbook*, (New York: Pantheon, 1957), 237.

³⁸ Sherman 10.

precision watch, claims Berthoud, stole “Time out of the sky.”³⁹

The hegemony of mechanical time perception did not, of course, happen in isolation. It formed part of a society-wide move towards the mechanised and urbanised culture that would eventually create the industrial revolution. While the beginning of that revolution is normally situated in the mid-eighteenth century, its roots can be traced to the scientific discoveries of the late seventeenth century and the growth of the urban merchant class. The establishment of both scientific academies and trading companies, amongst other cultural developments, led to a privileging of empirical systems of knowledge and of mercantile imperatives in society. The Royal Observatory at Greenwich, for example, built under the auspices of the Royal Society, was not just a means to intellectual exploration but was also specifically enjoined, in its founding charter, to search for a solution to the problem of establishing longitude at sea for England’s merchant fleet. The resulting demand for new precision instruments for astronomical observation led to the commercial development of an instrument industry, which in turn fueled demands for commercial applications for those instruments.⁴⁰ The development of precision timepieces and of mechanical time perception was an important part of this more general scientific and industrial development.

The literary and artistic responses to these changes can be seen in the introduction of new technological and scientific terms into general usage, the quarrel of the ancients and moderns, the

³⁹ Berthoud 46.

⁴⁰ For more information with regard to this extensive and important topic see David Landes, *Revolution in Time*, James Bennet, *The Divided Circle: A History of Instruments for Astronomy, Navigation and Surveying*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1987), 83-142, or Derek Howse, *Greenwich Time and the Discovery of the Longitude*, (Oxford: OUP, 1980).

satires of the Scriblerians, the engravings of Hogarth and the journalism of Addison and Steele.⁴¹ With reference to the new perception of time, Sherman argues that mechanical perception of time contributed to the emergence of daily newspapers, published diaries, and travelogues, while Berthoud and, more recently, April London highlight the effects of the new perceptions of time in the construction of the novel.⁴² However, when the role of mechanical time in eighteenth-century poetry is addressed, critics such as Berthoud argue that new ideas of time are ignored by eighteenth-century poets. This, however, is not a completely accurate assessment of the situation. The effects of mechanical time can be found, for example, in much of the satirical poetry of the eighteenth century.

The emphasis in satirical poetry upon the trivia and *minutiae* of the quotidian world is, indeed, remarkably similar to the perception of mechanical time understanding as Sherman has delineated it. Gay's *Trivia, or Walking the Streets of London*, for example, or Swift's *A City Shower*, emphasise mundane events taking place in apparently aimless succession. Samuel Macey demonstrates the way that Pope, in *Peri Bathous* describes the modern production of poetry through an analogy to eighteenth-century batch production of watches.⁴³ However, in poetry with serious rather than a jocular satiric tone, such as Pope's *Essays* and some of his *Epistles* for example, expressions reflective of the movements of mechanical time are rare. The absence of mechanical time is particularly noticeable in poetry associated with the georgic mode.

⁴¹ Donald Davie, *The Language of Science and the Language of Literature, 1700 - 1740*, (London and New York: Sheed and Ward, 1963), 15 - 23. See also Macey 54 - 64.

⁴² April London, "Clock Time and Utopia's Time in Novels of the 1790s," *Studies in English Literature* 40:3 (Summer 2000): 539-555

⁴³ Macey 135 - 136.

Poems that celebrate rural life and labour and the values associated with that life privilege instead the traditional movements of the seasons. Where that poetry uses georgic values to give significance to national or family history, it also employs a more linear and progressive understanding of time. This employment of traditional temporal movements within georgically inflected poetry remained almost unchanged until the end of the century and because of the different uses of time in satiric and georgic forms we can, perhaps, read a sense of disapproval of mechanical time in eighteenth-century poetry that establishes an opposition of values between the city and the country.

Certainly, when we examine women's poetry in the georgic mode, we might expect to find traditional movements of time emphasised by writers who felt largely excluded from the satiric forms associated with authoritative male wit. Instead, what can be seen in poetry by women who employ this mode is a willingness to engage successfully with concepts of time that stand outside the traditional movement of cycles and teleologies. Because of women's almost absolute confinement to a domestic realm, their experience of time was surprisingly reflective of Stuart Sherman's definition of the cultural expression of mechanical time. These eighteenth-century women poets writing about labour, rural retreat and landscape concern themselves to a far greater degree than their male counterparts with the quotidian *minutiae* of everyday life that largely define the literary expression of mechanical time. Women's georgically inflected poetry is, for example, more likely to be concerned with the personal life of the narrator or with the domestic geography of the household than with national geography in a sweeping survey of landscape and nation. This concern means that their poetry is more likely to reflect the sequential events of the household, rather than the cyclical labour of the land and with their own individual

narratives within the landscape rather than with workers and owners in the process of agricultural production. Generally in women's poetry in the georgic tradition, the diurnal takes precedence over the cyclical or teleological, the personal and particular takes precedence over the general, and the activity of the present moment takes precedence over the significance of the historical survey. However, these women are not content to write only about their quotidian lives. They emphasise short periods of time within the quotidian in which they can interact with each other, take pleasure in nature and even access a transcendent experience that stands outside of time. They give a significance to the moment that is not reflected in Sherman's conception of mechanical time. These poems are still recognisably part of the georgic tradition, and indeed, women poets are often careful to include intertextual references in order to ensure generic attribution to georgic models. However, the differences are significant, and reflect a different approach to labour, landscape and to time.

It was perhaps inevitable that women poets should transform the georgic tradition into a eulogy of domestic and social responsibilities and the intimate communities that perform them. From the period of the Renaissance, domestic geography was generally viewed as the essential cultural space for all women. Women had probably always been viewed as primarily domestic and familial figures, but prior to the sixteenth century, that characterisation was leavened by women's active involvement in a household-based economy, and their role as active, if minor, participants in religious activities and institutions.⁴⁴ The early beginnings of capitalism in the Renaissance led to the displacement of the household as the centre of commercial production, and

⁴⁴ Merry Weisner, *Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1993), 181.

this development “went hand in hand with the increasing restriction of women to the domestic space of the house.”⁴⁵ Even those women who continued to labour in non-domestic jobs were defined first in domestic terms as housewives or daughters by the magistrates who set local wage-rates.⁴⁶ At the same time, the Reformation removed or emasculated many of the religious activities that gave women a recognisable public function in community life.⁴⁷ In particular, the loss of convents meant that educated women lost access to possible centres of intellectual excellence, as the universities were closed to them.⁴⁸ That this was seen as a profound loss by female protestant writers is illustrated by the recurrent calls for women’s colleges by these writers from the Reformation onwards.⁴⁹ But while many women were aware that their restriction to the domestic realm was the consequence of historical and social changes, not natural or divine determinism, they were unable to alter the social reality that allowed them only one privileged role in their world. Despite its encouragement of women’s private studies of religious works, protestant humanism actively promoted the belief that a woman could operate in society only as

⁴⁵ Juliana Schiesari, “The Face of Domestication: Physiognomy, Gender Politics and Humanism’s Other,” *Women, “Race” and Writing in the Early Modern Period*, ed., Margo Hendricks and Patricia Parker, (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 55.
See also Kim Walker, *Women Writers of the Renaissance*, (London: Prentice Hall, 1996), 2

⁴⁶ Michael Roberts, ““Words they are women and deeds they are men’: Images of Work and Gender in Early Modern England,” *Women and Work in Pre-Industrial England*, ed., Lindsey Charles and Lorna Duff, (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 133.

See also: Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603 - 1714*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), 19.

⁴⁷ Weisner 181.

⁴⁸ Weisner 182

⁴⁹ Bridget Hill, “A Refuge From Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery,” *Past and Present* 116 -117 (1987), 107 - 130.

the dependent of a male relative because a woman's non-rational nature, while it promoted her tendency to religious and familial devotion, prevented intellectual rationality and thus made her unfit for a public role.⁵⁰

This confinement to retirement and domesticity was associated with a restriction in another area of women's lives: their public reputations were inextricably linked to sexual purity. Social insistence upon female chastity existed well before the Renaissance or the Reformation, of course, but it was during this period that female sexual incontinence became linked to public speech, and thus to writing, so that a woman who spoke to or wrote for a public audience was deemed to be sexually unreliable: "a 'loose' tongue implied other sorts of loose behaviour, and a woman who wanted her thoughts known by others was suspected of wanting to make her body available as well."⁵¹ This was such a powerful belief that its effects resonated throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and prompted the elaborate apologies and "emphatic declarations of bodily integrity" that fill the prefaces of women's printed texts.⁵² Men also apologised for appearing in print during this period as well, of course, but their apologies are often conventionalised in tone and rarely sound the note of anxiety that we find in women's prefaces. Women did not always obey the cultural demand that they remain silently submissive

⁵⁰ Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Women: A Study in the Fortunes of Scholasticism and Medical Science in European Intellectual Life*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 63.

See also Weisner 42.

See also Phyllis Mack, "Introduction," *Women and the Enlightenment*, ed., Margaret Hunt, Margaret Jacob *et al.*, (Binghamton, New York: Haworth Press, 1984), 2-3.

⁵¹ Weisner 160.

⁵² Walker 22-3.

in a domestic retreat, but they had always to acknowledge the power of that demand and often to admit its injunctions into their work. Thus, while women did write and organise public transmission of their works, they were usually careful to do so in ways that did not too flagrantly oppose the social and religious prohibitions against them. With few exceptions, women writers in this period confined themselves to those genres and means of transmission their society judged acceptable. For example, women tended to remain far longer than their male counterparts within the less overtly public confines of manuscript circulation, amongst a coterie of literary and courtly friends.

The Countess of Winchilsea, for example, adopted a strategy that many women writers of this early period employed in order to deflect antagonistic criticism: her most personally revealing poetry remained in manuscript circulation, while “she sent to the printer only those poems which for a variety of reasons, she felt would not stir up contempt and ridicule.”⁵³ This strategy did not mean that her manuscripts were not widely read. As Margaret Ezell has demonstrated, scribal publication was an accepted part of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century literary circulation.⁵⁴ But scribal publication does have a targeted and sympathetic readership, while the readership of print publication is an unknown and possibly unfriendly quantity. Charles Hinnant points out that “it is clear that Finch expected this wider audience to be largely masculine and largely hostile.”⁵⁵ This was an expectation that would have affected most women writers of the time, and so, when

⁵³ Ann Messenger, “Publishing Without Perishing: Lady Winchilsea’s Miscellany Poems of 1713,” *Restoration* 5:1 (Spring 1981), 27.

⁵⁴ Ezell 70 - 92.

⁵⁵ Charles Hinnant, *The Poetry of Anne Finch: An Essay in Interpretation*, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1994), 21.

they did publish, they tried to respect the publicly accepted boundaries limiting their interests. Even in the late eighteenth century women writers needed to be cautious in their use of subject matter and form. Few women wrote in the judgmental form of satire, for example, and few engaged with issues of either sexual or political explicitness.⁵⁶ The antagonism evident in the critical responses to transgressive writers like Aphra Behn or Delariviere Manley was probably warning enough to many female poets to remain within the constraints of the personal, the chaste and the domestic.

By the eighteenth century, then, most women, whether they were labouring in the fields or writing at desks, were operating within a well-defined social framework. This framework evolved in different directions as the century progressed, but it nevertheless retained its essential shape and powerfully influenced the portrayal of labour in women's poetry. As women's work within the home focused less and less on agricultural or commercial production, social expectations focused increasingly on a female creation of a pleasant and welcoming haven within the home and the equation between domesticity and femininity was intensified. A woman not concerned with domestic matters was not considered to be truly feminine.⁵⁷ At the same time, cultural ideology now limited even working class women, in theory, to unpaid housework and childrearing rather than the cloth making and weaving their forebears would have seen as the norm.⁵⁸ In the middle and upper classes women had, perhaps, greater physical freedom than ever,

⁵⁶ Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Voices: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women*, (Athens and London: The U of Georgia P, 1994), 322.

⁵⁷ G.J. Barker - Benfield, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain*, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992), 156.

⁵⁸ Barker-Benfield 156.

with an accepted presence in the new urban spaces of shops, libraries, museums and assembly rooms, but the ideal woman was still considered to be domesticated, unsophisticated, dependent, loving and passive. Her emotional and intuitive responses were widely supposed to be more refined and delicate than those of a man, and while she might be satirised by male writers for her immersion in the apparatus of the *toilette*, concern for her physical appearance was also understood to be as proper a part of her domestic routine as the production of meals and comfortable homes.⁵⁹

Later in the century, as Anne Mellor and many others have demonstrated, the framework changed again as social developments led to the privileging of the mother as the central figure of the newly constructed nuclear family. Replacing the father in social significance, she became celebrated as the primary nurturer and educator of her family.⁶⁰ The public prominence given to women in this role still confined them to domestic concerns, but it did allow them greater access to education and more widespread social activity. Women also had a new model of the rational woman offered to them in the novels of Burney, Austen and Edgeworth, in the writings of radicals like Mary Wollstonecraft, and in the female intellectual societies such as Elizabeth Montagu's Bluestocking salon in London or Lady Miller's literary salon in Batheaston. This development in the social understanding of women's role did not, however, change its essentials. The vogue for novels and poetry of sensibility, for example, privileged the so-called "female" traits of heightened affective response and delicacy of taste but however celebrated these traits

⁵⁹ Carole Shammas, "The Domestic Environment in Early Modern England and America," *Journal of Social History* 14:1 (1990), 6.

⁶⁰ Mellor 81.

became, and to whatever degree they became attached to male protagonists, sensibility continued to define women as essentially private and domestic beings. Similarly, by the end of the century a cult of domesticity encouraged women to employ their domestic skills for the benefit of their communities, but they were not encouraged to become truly active figures in any political or social sense. Work in the Sunday School movement, for example, was always presented as an extension of a woman's natural family and domestic concerns. The durability of the ideal of the domestic woman is illustrated by the fact that it was still powerfully current at the end of the century and heavily influenced domestic relations into the twentieth century. The domestic role of women in the eighteenth century, indeed, came to be seen as an essential part of the moral and political strength of the nation and the idealised mother figure came to represent a model of piety, frugality, familial love and social duty.⁶¹ Conduct books throughout the century continued to acclaim the retiring and domesticated young woman, even after the publication of works by reputed female scholars, like classicist Elizabeth Carter or historian Catherine Macaulay, indicated that women could make as capable scholars as men.⁶²

Interestingly, belief in the essential domesticity of women was supported by female as

⁶¹ Carol Shiner Wilson, "Lost Needles, Tangled threads: Stitchery, Domesticity and the Artistic Enterprise in Barbauld, Edgeworth, Taylor and Lamb," *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776 - 1887*, ed., Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), 168 - 9.

⁶² Ellen Messer-Davidow, "'For Softness She': Gender Ideology and Aesthetics in Eighteenth-Century England," *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed., Frederick Keener and Susan Lorsch, (New York: Greenwood P, 1988), 45 - 46 and 49. See also: Kathryn Kirkpatrick, "Sermons and Strictures: Conduct-Book Propriety and Property Relations in Late Eighteenth-Century England," *History, Gender and Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ed., Beth Fowkes Tobin, (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1994), 198 - 220.

well as male commentators, and by women attached to the Bluestocking movement as well as by more conservative critics. Hannah More, a renowned member of the Bluestocking circle, argued for the reality of essential differences between men and women, differences that placed women modestly in their homes, nurturing their families and communities.⁶³ Anna Laetitia Barbauld, once a teacher in a prestigious dissenting academy, refused to support a project for furthering women's education because she felt that women were not generally suited to organised intellectual activity. Her 1773 poem, "To a Lady With Some Painted Flowers," clearly reflects the prevailing social attitude. Here, men are defined as towering, rugged oaks while women are lovely, delicate flowers: they each partake of a different nature and purpose.⁶⁴ As Michael McKeon points out, this view was almost universally accepted: "England acquired the modern wisdom that there are not one but two sexes; that they are biologically distinct and therefore incommensurable; and that they are defined not by behaviour which is variable, but by nature, which is not."⁶⁵ While some women writers, such as Mary Hays, Ann Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, and Mary Wollstonecraft, did question this received wisdom, very few rejected it altogether.⁶⁶ Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, condemned the sentiments of "A Lady With Some Painted Flowers" in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, but her argument also concurs with other

⁶³ See, for example, Hannah More, "Strictures on the Modern System of Education: With a View of the Principles and Conduct Prevalent Among Women of Rank and Fortune," *The Works of Hannah More. Vol 8*, (London: T. Caddell and W. Davies, 1818), 27 - 30.

⁶⁴ Anna Laetitia Aikin [Barbauld], *Poems*, (London: Joseph Johnson, 1773).

⁶⁵ Michael McKeon, "Historicizing Patriarchy: The Emergence of Gender Difference in England, 1660 - 1760," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 28:3 (Spring 1995), 301.

⁶⁶ Mellor 10.

female radicals of the 1790s that while educated women would prove a beneficial force in the public world, it was women's domestic virtues that would lead to political and social improvement.⁶⁷ The "domestic affections" were invoked by these women "as the model for all political action."⁶⁸

This enduring belief in a collective domestic identity and environment for women separate from the accepted social orthodoxy of the male world meant that women were also understood to inhabit a different temporal reality from men. Amy Boesky argues that seventeenth-century women were believed to live in "a temporal world of dilation and delay," a world of domestic leisure in which the discipline of filling time with publicly-acknowledged labour was weakened and unenforced. By the eighteenth century, she claims, this leisured temporality was "increasingly understood as feminine."⁶⁹ It is certainly true that a great deal of public commentary on women emphasised the leisured and undemanding nature of their routine. Alexander Pope's "Epistle: To a Lady," for example, describes women pursuing trivial pleasures in the same way that children grasp at toys.⁷⁰ Male writers like Pope quite typically place women in a domestic environment and then assume they have nothing substantial with which to

⁶⁷ Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. (1792), ed., Carol Poston. Second edition, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988), 192.

⁶⁸ Mellor 66.

⁶⁹ Amy Boesky, "Giving Time to Women: The Eternising Project in Early Modern England," *This Double Voice: Gender Writing in Early Modern England*, ed., Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000), 131.

⁷⁰ Alexander Pope, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed., John Butt, (New Haven: Yale UP, 1963), 559 - 569 (line 231). All references to Pope's poetry is from this edition and are cited by title and line number.

employ time there. This was not simply a reflection of reality for middle-class and aristocratic women but a belief that, with a few exceptions, women had more available time than men because of their lack of significant occupations. There is some evidence that even within the labouring classes men believed women experienced time in a more leisurely and undisciplined way. Stephen Duck in *The Thresher's Labour* complains of women farm workers finding time to gossip with one another, and he fails to describe the labour the women actually perform. Yet, women themselves, in writing about their lives, fill these narratives with activity and temporal movement. Anna Barbauld's poem, "Washing Day," is filled with references to women's work and the passing of time, while, at the other end of the social scale, Mary Collier's, *A Woman's Labour*, replies to Duck with a detailed account of the ways in which working women fill their hours.

Nevertheless, while women's lives were never as free from the discipline of time as they were believed to be, I would argue that they did experience a different kind of discipline. For labouring women and middle class women alike, temporal understanding must always have been more closely allied to the overwhelming domestic requirements of their lives than to the authorised temporal movements of the public world. As Stuart Sherman argues, even gentlewomen lived lives that were "constantly subject to the demands and interruptions of family and household management."⁷¹ Amanda Vickery agrees that aristocratic women, in common with women of lower status, were subject to daily recurring duties and responsibilities. These responsibilities were "essentially organisational and administrative," involving family and, often (perhaps surprisingly), business relationships and the domestic arrangements of the household.

⁷¹ Sherman 251.

Even in those households with several servants, her evidence indicates a high degree of personal involvement in household duties by mistresses of all rank. Similarly, married women from all social backgrounds were affected to varying degrees by the effects of childbirth and motherhood.⁷² Furthermore, as domestic and sentimental ideology gained momentum through the last half of the eighteenth century, the demands and interruptions of domestic life would have become more and more insistent.

For Sherman, these demands meant that, despite the supposed idleness of women's lives, in reality they never had the leisure to engage fully in "the dialectic of diurnal form" as reflected in the published journals and travel diaries that first appeared in significant numbers in the eighteenth century. These lengthy, discursive and yet coherently organised genres took a great deal of leisured time to produce, he claims, time that few women possessed. Instead, a female journal writer, like Hester Thrale, wrote what he terms an "*ana*," (as in *Thraliana*) an occasional prose genre which is formed by a selective "record of observations, reflections, conversations, and anecdotes composed at moments when leisure and impulse converge."⁷³

This kind of intermittent construction of text illustrates the temporal environment most women really experienced. It was an environment not of leisured hours dilating to fill the day, but of moments filled with repetitive, interruptive domestic duties that recurred with quotidian insistence, in which a few moments free from interruption might be snatched for reading or writing. It was a temporality that was largely unaffected by traditional time perceptions of

⁷² Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36: 2 (1993), 409 - 411.

⁷³ Sherman 252.

seasonal cycles or teleological trajectories, although, of course, women experienced these too. It was, in fact, far closer to the experience of mechanical time that Sherman explores in his book, and it is, perhaps, a somewhat ironic reflection that the writers with some of the most direct experience of mechanical time enjoyed so little uninterrupted leisure that they were unable to produce the texts that, according to Sherman, most effectively reflected it.

Indeed, as the following chapters demonstrate, this ironic paradox highlights the true difference between men's and women's experience of time. While men above the labouring class expected to possess leisure time, women of all classes knew that they did not. Amy Boesky argues that these expectations were reflected in the fashions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Women continued the Renaissance practice of wearing highly ornamental watches displayed as jewelry, either upon the breast as a brooch or hanging from a chatelaine at the waist, while men's watches disappeared into pockets, and eventually into specially designed fobs. For Boesky, as for Sherman, who comments upon the same phenomenon, this difference indicates a different perception of temporal discipline between the sexes. Whilst men owned the time that resided secretly in their pockets, women merely displayed time for their male companions.⁷⁴ The interruptive nature of their domestic duties meant that most women could not claim time of their own, any more than most of them could claim property of their own, and they were thus almost as much slaves of time as any labouring man. Leisure, therefore, becomes a much more self-consciously sought-after commodity in women's poetry than in men's. The free time to write cannot be taken for granted by women writers in the way that men writers can. Male georgic writers are therefore more likely to concentrate upon the praise of labour in their poetry. Women

⁷⁴ Boesky 128 - 131.

writers are more likely to concentrate upon the retreat element of georgic poetry. Time to concentrate upon intellectual or artistic matters becomes a georgic virtue for them.

This particular understanding of georgic virtue becomes a coherent tenet in women's poetry over the course of a century and in examining this tenet it is also necessary to explore two linked issues in women's writing. The first is the extent to which any significant group of women writers can be claimed as part of an ongoing tradition of women's writing. The second is the way in which women writers subscribed or failed to subscribe to generic conventions when they wrote in a georgically inflected mode. These issues are linked because it is hard to claim that women writers in this mode were following a thematic pattern of generic alteration without situating them within a certain poetic, however loosely that might be defined. The question of whether or not a female tradition of poetry exists at all is part of an ongoing debate between those who assert the existence of a female poetic tradition and those who claim that any poetic is an editorial construction of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries or of the modern academy.

Margaret Ezell and Paula McDowell, for example, have separately argued that the idea that women as a gender wrote in a particular manner did not exist in seventeenth or early eighteenth-century England.⁷⁵ McDowell and Ezell agree that eighteenth-century anthologists like George Ballard were largely responsible for the development of a theory of gendered writing because of editorial decisions that included or excluded certain women writers on the basis of their social reputations, rather than their literary achievements. Nevertheless, many scholars have

⁷⁵ Ezell 70 - 92

See also Paula McDowell, "Consuming Women: The Life of the Literary Lady as Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century England," *Genre* XXVI (Summer / Fall 1993), 220 - 227.

recognised a commonality of approach in various genres amongst women writers of the eighteenth century. Marilyn Williamson, for example, while she agrees with Ezell that before the seventeenth century “women’s poetry is hardly distinguishable from that of men,” contends that from the seventeenth century “a definite female voice is heard: women take female pseudonyms, turn discourse to their needs, create distinctive needs and conventions.”⁷⁶ Margaret Anne Doody agrees with Williamson that there “is a ‘feminine tradition’ from at least the seventeenth century, within English poetry of the early modern age of print.”⁷⁷ As Judith Stanton has shown, by the end of the eighteenth century, more than 900 women were publishing in nineteen different fields from translation to science from 1660 to 1800.⁷⁸ These figures illustrate the difficulties of establishing a female poetic tradition to which women writers were subscribed. In such diversity, it does seem as programmatic to claim a universal “female poetic” as it would to claim a universal “male poetic.”

I have presented these views in some detail because my examination of women’s poetry engages with both. I fully support Mcdowell’s and Ezell’s argument that an essentialist view of the direction of women’s textual production delimits the women who appear to conform to essentialist patterns, and erases or diminishes those who do not. However, I think it can be equally limiting to claim with Ezell and Mcdowell that any female poetic tradition was and is an

⁷⁶ Marilyn Williamson, *Raising Their Voices: British Women Writers, 1650 - 1750*, (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1990) 18.

⁷⁷ Margaret Anne Doody, “Women Poets of the Eighteenth Century,” *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700 - 1800*, ed., Vivien Jones, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) 218.

⁷⁸ Judith Philips Stanton, “Statistical Profile of Women Publishing in English from 1660 to 1800,” *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed., Frederick Keener and Susan Lorsch, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), 248.

artificial construction. There is evidence to show, as I have demonstrated above, that women were often constrained by cultural demands to live and write in certain ways. Most women conformed, and a significant minority refused, but whether they conformed or not, women were affected by the material conditions of their lives, and they made literary choices based on those circumstances and on models of how other women had already responded to that context. Certainly, it is evident from their own writings that women poets were aware of participating in an artistic endeavour dominated by established conventions and guarded by male critics anxious to preserve that domination from female contamination. In this kind of disciplinary environment women writers turned for support to male supporters like Dryden, Cibber and Swift, as Ezell has shown, and to literary exemplars like Marvell, Pope and Thomson.⁷⁹ But, as Stanton's analysis indicates, women also noted the increasing presence of women's printed texts, and found encouragement there.⁸⁰ Women writers also received a similar kind of encouragement in the formation of loosely-organised literary groups. Like their male counterparts, women writers were attuned to the support of literary coteries, and within these, it would be natural for various traditions to flourish.

The career of Winchilsea's contemporary, Sarah Fyge, is an apt illustration of the operation of this kind of associative tradition. In 1686, at the age of sixteen, Fyge published *The Female Advocate*, her response to a misogynistic satire by Robert Gould. *The Female Advocate* reached a readership sufficiently large that an expanded version was published the following year. Attacks on women by male writers often provoked women to enter the growing print culture,

⁷⁹ Ezell 71 - 74.

⁸⁰ Stanton 231 - 248.

notably Rachel Speght in *A Muzzle for Melastomus* (1615) and Mary, Lady Chudleigh in *The Ladies Defence, or the Bride-Woman's Counsellor Answer'd* (1701). The immediate consequences of publication for Fyge were notoriety and banishment from her family in London to cousins in rural Buckinghamshire. Nevertheless, she continued to publish, and achieved enough of a reputation that in 1700 she was invited by Delariviere Manley to contribute to *The Nine Muses on the Death of John Dryden* (1700), a collection of poetry written by women. There is evidence that by this period she was, as Jeslyn Medoff has demonstrated, part of a female literary circle which included Delariviere Manley, Elizabeth Thomas, Catherine Trotter and Mary Pix.⁸¹ In 1703, Fyge published her own collection, *Poems on Several Occasions*,⁸² to which a group of women, including Mary Pix and, possibly, Susannah Centlivre, contributed prefatory verses.⁸³ In these, Fyge is described as a successor to "*Orinda's* Judgement and *Astrea's* Fire,"⁸⁴ and as modern representative of "*Sappho* the Great whom by report we know."⁸⁵ The compilation of poems written by and edited by women who were part of a literary group, as well as the construction of dedicatory poems by women for a fellow woman author, place Fyge in an illustrious pantheon of previous women authors. Fyge is representative here of several women

⁸¹ Jeslyn Medoff, "New Light on Sarah Fyge (Field, Egerton)," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 1:2 (1982), 170 - 171.

⁸² Sarah Fyge (Field, Egerton), *Poems on Several Occasions, Together with a Pastoral, By Mrs. S.F.* (London: Printed and Sold by J. Nutt, 1703). All citations from this text are from this edition and are identified by title and line number..

⁸³ Medoff: 171.

⁸⁴ M[ary] P[ix], "To Mrs. S.F. on her poems," *Poems on Several Occasions*. Orinda is Katherine Philips and Astrea is Aphra Behn.

⁸⁵ M.C., "To Mrs. S.F. on her Incomparable Poems," *Poems on Several Occasions*.

writers who were part of this kind of supportive female circle, indicating that women were conscious of being part of a gendered literary community with its own traditions.⁸⁶

I would not wish to take this argument too far and describe this kind of support and influence as an essential poetic. But, I think it is fair to argue, with Williamson, that women “looked to one another for support, . . . and frequently wrote for other women.”⁸⁷ I think it is particularly important to acknowledge this response when we examine the ways in which women approached writing about time in the georgic tradition. In writing georgically inflected verse, women were able to share in the general eighteenth-century sense of generic freedom which permitted them to employ a variety of established models yet remain within the orthodox conventions to which they were bound. At the same time, the female tradition in which they were writing also encouraged them to modify those conventions to better reflect their own reality. Donna Landry calls this kind of adoption and adaptation, “ventriloquism”: poetry that both reproduces and challenges “the verse forms and values of mainstream culture.”⁸⁸ Women employ ventriloquism, Landry argues citing the feminist theories of Luce Irigaray, because women are “simultaneously outside and inside the discourse that they imitate.”⁸⁹ Landry is discussing labouring women’s poetry here, but her definition is appropriate for women’s poetry

⁸⁶ Carol Barash, “‘The Native Liberty . . . of the Subject’: Configurations of Gender and Authority in the Works of Mary Chudleigh, Sarah Fyge Egerton, and Mary Astell,” *Women, Writing and History, 1640 - 1740*, ed. Isobel Grundy and Susan Wiseman, (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1992), 67.

⁸⁷ Williamson 14.

⁸⁸ Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women’s Poetry in Britain, 1739 - 1796*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990), 6.

⁸⁹ Landry 7.

generally in the eighteenth century. Women writers of all backgrounds, as much of their public work and private letters attest, felt themselves to be both part of, and excluded from, different aspects of their culture, including their experience of temporality. Women were part of authoritative temporal movements such as cycles and teleologies, but they also experienced the new movement of mechanical time affecting the wider culture, and were immersed in a domestic experience of temporality which echoed the manifestations of mechanical time. In other words, they were ideally situated to explore non-traditional uses of time in genres that conventionally employed very traditional uses of time.

Chapter Two

Alexander Pope, The Countess of Winchilsea, and the Construction of a Beata Femina.

I. Alexander Pope

Women poets throughout the eighteenth century tended to look to male authoritative exemplars as they established their own poetic identity. Lacking the kind of formal education that most male poets could take for granted, almost their only source of knowledge about poetic construction came from the poetry they read. It was natural, therefore, that women would employ the diction and forms of the most distinctive of the male writers whose works were available to them. As female poets ventriloquised these male-authored forms, they acknowledged their obligation to their sources, often through allusions or the use of epigraphs from their favourite authors. One of the most influential of these authors was Alexander Pope.

Pope was one of the most authoritative authors of the eighteenth century and he wrote in such a wide variety of styles and genres that his works provided *exempla* in almost any field. Despite his occasionally demeaning attitude towards women, displayed in poems such as *Epistle II: To a Lady*, and the resentment offered to women he had come to dislike such as Wortley Montagu, there was also a sense in which his poetry reflected something of women's experience in the world. As a catholic and as a chronic invalid he was excluded from full participation in the active, public life of other men of his rank and education. He could not attend university, he could not live within the boundaries of London and, perhaps of more immediate concern to him as he grew older, his increasing ill-health ensured that he could not partake in the usual activities

of a gentleman.⁹⁰ I would not wish to take this analogy too far and, of course, even at his most debilitated, Pope lived a more public and publicly active life than most women. Nevertheless, the lack of mobility that was often forced on him placed him somewhat outside the conventional male world and possible responses to this disadvantage can sometimes be traced in his poetry. His sensitivity towards the suffering of hunted birds in *Windsor Forest*, for example, or his ability to convey the despair of Eloisa in *Eloisa to Abelard*, seems to convey the kind of sensibility that was associated with women rather than men in the early eighteenth century.

This combination of authority and sensitivity in his works ensured that his poetry continued to act as a model for women writers to ventriloquise until the end of the century. Late eighteenth-century poets such as Ann Yearsley and Anna Barbauld, for example, both employ Pope's work as an authority against which they position their own poetry. In particular, they positioned the temporality that invested their georgically inflected verse against the traditional temporal movements that animated most georgic models. By contrast, Pope's use of temporal movement in his poetry emphasises the importance he gives to traditional ideas of time.

I do not claim that women writers throughout the eighteenth century always used Pope's works to ventriloquise the georgic mode, nor do I undertake specific comparisons of their work to his (although I often show connections). But in undertaking close readings of two of his works I provide precedents both of the kind of georgically influenced work women writers were attempting and of the satirical form from which they were discouraged. I have chosen *Windsor Forest* as the representative text for an examination of Pope's georgically inflected verse. This is

⁹⁰ Marjorie Nicolson and G. S. Rousseau, "*This Long Disease, My Life*": *Alexander Pope and the Sciences*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1968), 3 - 50.

a poem which has been widely identified as a georgic although it does not conform to Virgilian conventions. It also conducts a topographical survey linking English landscape to history and, within this georgic survey, positions Pope as a Virgilian or Horatian *beatus vir*. This combination and revision of generic form is typical of eighteenth-century practice and it offers to female readers a model both of a variety of georgic modes and of a means of reconfiguration. More importantly, Pope maintains a traditional temporal structure within this fusion of forms which he equates with the harmony of a universe serenely ordered and composed. In my examination of this poem I emphasise Pope's use of this temporal structure so that women's very different construction of time can be assessed. Similarly, I have chosen to examine the temporal action of Book IV of the 1742 edition of *The Dunciad* to illustrate the use of mechanical time in satire. Here Pope illustrates the loss of traditional temporality in the hegemony of mechanical time as a universe disordered and confused. For women writers, as my subsequent examination of the Countess of Winchilsea's poetry demonstrates, both traditional and mechanical expressions of time are portrayed as irrelevant to their reconstruction of the georgic mode.

In its nine-year revision between 1704 and 1713, *Windsor Forest*⁹¹ came to include those elements of pastoral, georgic and topographical genres which all explore the role of time in space. What can be found in these genres is a temporal pattern in which time is understood both as a natural cycle of seasons or as a teleological movement from golden age to golden age in a defined geographic space. At the beginning of the poem Pope appears to construct a typical survey or topographical poem by describing, as if from a high place, the prospect before him, and then

⁹¹ Alexander Pope. *Windsor Forest. The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt. New Haven: Yale UP, 1963: pp. 195 - 210. All references to Pope's works are from this edition and are cited by title and line number.

referring to the English history that the scene invokes. As Ralph Cohen demonstrates, Pope takes John Denham's *Coopers Hill* as a model and introduces revisions which emphasise the spatial and temporal harmony. Denham sites his narrator on a named hill and describes what could realistically be seen from that spot. Similarly, his historical reflections have a particularity that appear to document real events, even if those events are mythic in nature. Thus the "Crown of . . . Majestic towrs" (59) at Windsor leads to a description both of the mythic Brutus and the historical Edward III (65-82); the sight of Chertsey Abbey provokes a reflection upon the dissolution of the monasteries (149-164); the view of Runnymede reminds the narrator of the signing of the Magna Carta (301-330); and the prospect of Egham Mead stimulates a memory of a royal stag hunt, which symbolises for the narrator either Charles I's destruction of Stafford, or of parliament's destruction of the king (250-300).⁹² Although Denham is constructing a political narrative here, there is no sustained attempt to place these events in a historical chronology: they are recalled in a heterogeneous fashion by the physical sights before the narrator's eyes. However, in a very powerful way, geographic space becomes an expression of time in this poem, as time past and time present meet simultaneously in the landscape.

What Pope takes from *Coopers Hill* is this sense of space as a reflection of time. Pat Rogers has shown that "typically in *Windsor Forest*, statements ostensibly about place (here the look of the countryside) turn out to be really statements about time (here the providential

⁹² John Denham, *Expans'd Hieroglyphics: A Critical Edition of Sir John Denham's Coopers Hill*, ed., Brendan o Hehir, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969). All references to this text are from this edition and are cited by line number. The symbolism of the royal stag hunt changes with the different editions of the poem

occurrence of Stuart rule).”⁹³ What Pope resists is both Denham’s geographic particularity in *Coopers Hill* and his lack of an ordering principle for the role of time. The initial survey view of Windsor shows how Pope has reordered the structure of space in *Windsor Forest*. While the narrator’s poetic eye seems to sweep across the landscape from an elevated position, the narrator is not specifically located in geographic space at all. Similarly, while lines 11- 42 appear to detail the Windsor landscape, we are given none of the geographic particularity of *Coopers Hill*. Because of this resistance to particularity, Pope is free to gather imaginatively the whole of England into his poetic compass. Thus, the lyrical description of “the Hills and Vales, the Woodland and the Plain” (11) the “Lawns and opening Glades” (21) , the “humble mountains” (13) and the “blueish Hills” (24) becomes a generalised and idyllic vision of the whole country. This sense of a national, rather than a local, vision is emphasised not only by comparisons to Milton’s Eden and to “proud Olympus” (33), two sites of legendary perfection, but also to India, a country at once remote, exotic and desirable. Because “from the start we are never quite in the forest” it is easier to characterise Windsor as England, which is characterised, in turn, as a place of idealised and often mythic excellence.⁹⁴

This displacement of an actual geographic site into a mythic understanding of national identity is repeated throughout the poem. The river Thames in *Coopers Hill* remains a physical river winding through a real landscape, even when the flow of water is imagined to visit “Jove’s aboads” (67). In *Windsor Forest*, the river loses geographic precision and becomes a god who

⁹³ Pat Rogers, “Time and Space in *Windsor Forest*,” *The Art of Alexander Pope*, ed., Howard Erskine-Hill and Anne Smith, (London: Vision, 1979), 46.

⁹⁴ Rogers 44

foretells the future golden age of the nation. Windsor castle, which for Denham is a centre of political power inhabited by named monarchs, becomes for Pope “the mansion of our earthly gods” (230). While London is realistically figured as a dirty smudge on the horizon and an ant heap of business by Denham, Pope imaginatively refigures it as a visionary site of “glittering spires” and the “beauteous works of peace” (378). Pope further distances his refigured London from geographic reality by constructing it as part of Father Thames’s prophetic vision, rather than as a direct visual experience understood through the eyes and words of the narrator. Even in Pope’s description of the forest itself, the representation of the rural sports actually enjoyed there is interspersed with references to mythological figures, such as Nimrod, “the mighty Hunter” (61) of the Old Testament, or Diana, the Roman goddess of the hunt, so that, as readers, we tend to conflate this specific geographic space and activity with a comprehensive and mythic understanding of what that space signifies. Further, in his original construction of the story of Lodona (171-213) Pope enhances in a very particular way the numinous qualities of a land in which an English nymph becomes a forest river. This mythologising tendency is heightened at the end of the poem when we learn exactly where the narrator has placed himself. In a reversal of the accepted survey technique, he is not at the brow of a hill, but deep within the woods singing to “the list’ning swains”(433). What this poetic positioning achieves here is an emphasis upon the function of the imagination, rather than upon the poetic eye, as it creates a mythic landscape. It is worth noting here that it is this emphasis upon the action of the imagination rather than the poetic eye that most women poets take from Pope. Both Barbauld and Yearsley in their surveys accentuate their narrative position of retired imagination even as they appear to privilege positions above the landscape. This similarity to Pope then heightens the very different

significance they give as women to the landscape they describe.

This process of imagination is anchored by Pope's evocation of time in this poem, which is fixed in ancient orderings that seem self-consciously to predate mechanical time. Instead of the portrayal of a precise establishment of time or of the infinite sequencing that the new mechanisms and perceptions encouraged, Pope constructs comprehensive and transcendent, yet finite, patterns which offer temporal harmony and order while resisting particularity. For example, in the linear movement that Pope describes from Norman conquest to the accession of Queen Anne, we are given a sense of the progressive momentum of history without being offered a precise list of kings and dates. This is not the heterogeneous data of *Coopers Hill*, but an ordered pattern leading from a nation's past to its present and on to its glorious future. This linear movement is given a mythic dimension by Pope's structuring of a teleological movement from golden age to golden age. After describing the current beauty of Windsor Forest, Pope shows that the "dreary desert and gloomy waste" (44) of England under Norman rule has replaced an earlier civilisation, which, with its ruins of temples & broken columns, implies a classical rather than a Saxon culture. The implication is that a golden age centred, not in Greece or Italy, but in England has been ruthlessly destroyed.⁹⁵ The resulting historical pattern is constructed of disaster, a short return to fertility, and then a "dreadful series of intestine wars"(325) which ends with the accession of Anne, who commands peace and achieves it with her word. In her ability to translate word into action, Anne is represented by Pope as a godlike figure. She is a second and unfallen Eve, mirroring the typology of Christ as a second Adam. Just as Christ will inaugurate a new

⁹⁵ Thomas Edwards, *This Dark Estate: A Reading of Pope*, (Berkeley: U of California P, 1963), 8-9.

heaven and a new earth, so Anne ushers in a new golden age. The prophecy of Father Thames that follows the words of Anne points to an eternity of transcendent glory for England. This is not the meaningless infinity offered by mechanical time, but a progressive, sublime and “figurative expansion of the forest.”⁹⁶

This teleological and progressive movement of time in the poem is interspersed with two cyclical movements which are equally powerful. The movement from Golden Age to Golden Age is also, of course, a circular movement of return. Moreover, as Vincent Carretta has noted, the poem contains a cyclical movement of history in which the prophecy of “Augusta’s glittering spires” (377) is imagined as a return to the mythic cities of pre-Norman days, while the accession of Anne is seen as a return to the glories of Elizabeth.⁹⁷ This sense of return is emphasised in Pope’s description of “the bright . . . Goddess and . . . chaste Queen” (162) whose care “protects the sylvan reign / The Earth’s fair light and Empress of the Main” (163-4); as we read a description which, without naming either monarch, seems to describe both, we tend to conflate their images in an cyclical movement of return. Cycles of history are also created when the actions of William I and William II in the eleventh century can be seen to foreshadow the “intestine wars” (324) of the King William of the seventeenth century.

As Pope creates this conflation of progressive and cyclical movements of history in the poem, he also constructs a seasonal cycle of time in his account of the hunting activities of Windsor Forest. This movement is reflective of the agricultural cycle of the seasons in Virgil’s

⁹⁶ Rogers 49.

⁹⁷ Vincent Carretta, “Anne and Elizabeth: The Poet as Historian in *Windsor Forest*,” *Studies in English Literature* 21 (1981), 425.

Georgics. However, Pope's emphasis upon the cyclical movement of the sporting, as opposed to the agricultural, year enables him to link this natural movement of the seasons to England's imperial ambitions, and to its growing sense of identity as the new Rome. Thus, the eternal hunting cycle in *Windsor Forest* is figured by Pope as a kind of military and imperial training ground where the hunting of a pheasant is compared to the capture of a foreign town by British troops. This representation of imperial destiny is deliberately tainted by the language that Pope employs to describe the victims of hunting. The destruction of the "thoughtless Town with Ease and Plenty blest" (107), is compared to the death-agony of the pheasant as it "flutters in Blood, and panting beats the ground." (114). Imperial destiny is not figured by Pope as a prospect free from bloodshed or even injustice, yet this does not alter the sense of its inevitability which is conveyed through Pope's construction of the hunt as cyclical and recurrent. The evocation of an eternal return which underlies the pre-destined national imperative is emphasised by Pope's unusual descriptive movement from summer to summer. Unlike the more usual georgic cycle from spring to winter, Pope's construction of a movement from the middle of one year to the middle of the next, together with his repetition of the summer season, reminds the reader more forcefully of the unchanging cyclical momentum of natural time, and of the ancient activities that accompany that cycle. In the same way that summer returns inevitably to the forest, always and forever bringing in its wake the summer hunt, so imperial destiny inevitably awaits the nation as the ancient cycles end in the golden age and the *pax Britannica* prophesied by Father Thames.

What Pope achieves in *Windsor Forest* with his eclectic mix of description, myth, history and reflection is a presentation of the world "harmoniously confused" (14), the traditional view of *concordia discors*. Indeed, much of Pope's poetry characterises the natural world as a place of

harmonious confusion born out of the disorder of chaos. In *Windsor Forest*, Pope also constructs a portrait, or even a map, of a nation imaginatively idealised and given an ordered pattern through the traditional structures of time. If we think of a map, we think of lines of latitude and longitude covering an imagined representation of geographic space, and imposing a reference system of order and structure on that space.⁹⁸ On a globe, these controlling lines curve back on themselves to form circles. *Windsor Forest* can be understood as a poetic map employing linear and cyclical movements of time as ordering systems of reference. Within these boundaries of time which curve and form circles, the “harmonious confusion” of Windsor, and thus England, is serenely controlled, and resists the potential for that mythic identity to fall back into chaos.

The potential for a return to chaos is illustrated in *Windsor Forest* in the story of the nymph, Lodona. The narrative of Lodona is inserted at a point in the poem when Pope has already established that the forest symbolises the nation and that its history and mythology are ordered by the encircling restraints of natural and traditional understandings of time. When Lodona escapes from the secure boundaries of the forest, she encounters the chaos which lies outside that harmonious world, a chaos characterised by the mindless lust of Pan. Pope might, of

⁹⁸ Somewhat ironically, in view of the argument that I am making in this paper, accurate measurement of longitude depends upon the kind of mechanical, precision timekeeping that I claim Pope rejects in *Windsor Forest*. However, at the time the poem was written, and for many years following, the highly inaccurate measurement of longitude was dependent upon natural phenomena, and it was generally expected that a final solution of its accurate measurement would be found (like the measurement of latitude) in the movement of heavenly bodies. Pope, like Dr. Johnson, Swift, and Gay, was interested in the longitude problem. With other members of the Scriblerus Club, he satirises those who were attempting to find a mechanical rather than an astronomical solution to the problem of measuring longitude.

See Derek Howse: *Greenwich Time and the Discovery of the Longitude*, Dava Sobel: *Longitude*. (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), and Alexander Pope: “Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus.” *Works of Alexander Pope*. Vol VII. 1764. p. 92

course, have constructed a traditional, Miltonic portrait of chaos, lying outside the edenic order of Windsor Forest. However, the presence of Pan, a demi-god associated with the wild disorder of fear and the chaotic primacy of desire, conveys with greater immediacy the dangers associated with breaking the barriers of ordered time. The flight of Lodona has movement, as mechanical time has movement, but it is a movement bereft of harmonious and teleological direction. It is a meaningless forward motion in which the continuous present moment of terror is overwhelming. Motional and temporal disorder are emphasised here in Pope's continual shift from past to present tense. Elsewhere in *Windsor Forest*, as Pat Rogers has shown, language tense has consistently harmonised with theme, as time and place complete each other.⁹⁹ The fracturing of this harmony in the story of Lodona indicates Pope's concern to illustrate the potential power of chaos to overwhelm order when the controlling barriers of traditional time are broken.

A far stronger sense of the power of chaos over harmony is conveyed in one of the last poems of Pope's career, Book IV of *The Dunciad*.¹⁰⁰ *The Dunciad* forms a compelling contrast to *Windsor Forest* because, while it is as concerned as *Windsor Forest* with ideas of space, time and identity, it explores those ideas in the context of a very different narrative universe. The complete poem, published in its final form with Book IV in 1742, portrays a world that has lost the traditional temporal and spatial principles governing *Windsor Forest* and is given over to the urbanised, commercial and technological principles Pope associates with the mercantile City of London. In such a universe, we might expect to find a transition from the privileging of

⁹⁹ Rogers 43.

¹⁰⁰ Alexander Pope. *The Dunciad: In Four Books*. "Book the Fourth." [1742] *The Poems of Alexander Pope*: pp. 764 - 800.

teleological and cyclical conceptions of time found in *Windsor Forest* to a critique of mechanical time and its meaninglessness. In fact, Pope avoids this kind of overt critique. Instead, he represents a world in which trivial activities are privileged and in which all that is destructive in the new mechanistic and mercantile world is portrayed as the loss of historical and teleological narratives. Time and space exist in *The Dunciad*, but, in contrast with Pope's construction in *Windsor Forest*, they are defined with the kind of exactitude that the new precision instruments and the new mechanical understanding have authorised. Once the broad, overarching framework of history, teleology and nature has lost its authority, England loses its imaginative identity as the new Eden or the new Rome. Its identity shrinks to the minutely defined space of the City of London and the precisely timed movement of the Lord Mayor's procession, and is characterised by the chaos of *minutiae*. Writers in this limited universe no longer "Paint the green Forests and the flow'ry Plains" (*Windsor Forest* 428) or compose at the behest of a Granville, who recites "the Thoughts of Gods" (*Windsor Forest* 425): they have become dunces in thrall to a mechanistic and commercial authority. As the poem develops, the corruption of this authority is seen to infect every area of society, until, in Book IV, Time itself and the cosmos are thrown into apocalyptic confusion. There is no longer any possibility of harmony in this confusion: Pope shows us only the power of chaos itself, overwhelming the reader with surreal and scatological images.

The addition of Book IV to the earlier version of *The Dunciad* affirms the importance that Pope gives to traditional temporal harmony in the ordering of cultural identity. His depiction of the final degradation of English society, swept along in the "vortex" (84) of the goddess of Dulness, is framed within a vision of an apocalyptic fracturing of temporal harmony. As Book IV

opens, Chaos is triumphant, and his "Seed" (13), Dulness, prepares to "blot out Order and extinguish Light" (14). Pope describes this extinction of order and light in Miltonic terms as the "darkness visible" (3) of hell.¹⁰¹ The hell of the empire of Dulness, like the hell of *Paradise Lost*, is a world of negation in which the constructive power of light is overwhelmed by its antithesis. This portrait of universal negation is emphasised in the completion of the framing narrative, when "light dies before the uncreating word" (654). Here, Chaos is characterised as the antithesis of the generative and light-filled Word of God.¹⁰² In both characterisations of Chaos, Pope invokes a Judeo-Christian understanding of the primary role of light in the harmonious composition of the universe. In this understanding, universal harmony originates in the divine creation of light, which is also the first principle of a natural temporal order. In Genesis and in *Paradise Lost*, when God creates light, he simultaneously constructs the cosmic separation between night and day.¹⁰³ The destruction of light in the framing narrative of Book IV is not only a negation of all positive harmony, but also represents the final disruption of cosmic temporal order.

When divine light and temporality are extinguished under the hegemony of chaos, the

¹⁰¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed., Christopher Ricks, (Penguin: New York, 1968):
 "... yet from those flames / no light, but rather darkness visible." (I 62-63).

¹⁰² See John I 1-5: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . All things were made through him . . . In him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness, but the darkness comprehended it not."

¹⁰³ See Genesis I v 3-5: "And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning was the first day."
 See also *Paradise Lost* Book VII v 249-252: "... God saw the Light was good; / and light from darkness by the Hemisphere / Divided: Light the Day, and Darkness Night / He named. Thus was the first Day Ev'n and Morn."

serene progression of the heavenly bodies which govern the traditional movements of time become disordered. We are shown an anarchic universe where the “unlucky” stars (9), the “sick” sun (11), and the moon of the lunatic prophet all exist in the same “madding hour” (12). In the same way that mechanical time offers no numeric differentiation between midday and midnight, or between the temporal divisions authorised in Genesis, so triumphant Chaos promotes the undifferentiated and disordered hegemony of chaotic temporality. The nightmare experience of the loss of cosmic temporal authority is accentuated by the imagery of ill-fortune, blight, and lunacy with which Pope characterises the disruption of the heavenly bodies and the divisions of time they have historically governed. In this universe, time has been abstracted from the divine and natural order that gave it meaning: it has become an agent of Dulness, carrying the poet into the oblivion of chaos. This is not a place where existence ceases, but a place where everything, including time, exists in cosmic disorder.

The final disruption of divinely constructed temporal order occurs in the completion of the framing narrative at the end of Book IV when “the all-composing Hour / resistless falls” (123). Although the hour is a definition and a division of time which has been appropriated by the operation of mechanical time, it is, in fact, an ancient construction of natural and traditional time. Given divine status by the Romans as the *hora*, it was measured by the natural phenomena of the length of the rotation of the planet about the sun and by the movement of a shadow on a sundial.

¹⁰⁴ Pope’s definition of the hour as “all-composing” also links it to the order and harmony of the universe. However, while the word “composing” denotes composure and order, it also describes

¹⁰⁴ Gerhard Dohrn-van Rossum, *History of the Hour: Clocks and Modern Temporal Orders.*, trans, Thomas Dunlop, (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996).

the creation of music, which, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century literature, was often used as a metaphor for the creation of the universe.¹⁰⁵ Thus, in the closing framework of Book IV of *The Dunciad*, Pope represents the destruction of the universe as the loss of an ancient ordering of time which he defines as harmonious and creative. It is a definition of time which resists chaos: when the hour falls, the generative power of the cosmos is extinguished.

In the disordered temporality of this chaotic universe, the narrator's plea for "one dim Ray of Light" (1) in order to complete his poem, emphasises the powerful connection that Pope draws between divine order in the universe and creative activity. In the empire of chaos, where time exists without the temporal framework ordered by God, both "the Poet and the Song" (9) are subsumed into the overwhelming inertia of Dulness. The relationship between creative activity and temporal order is stressed in the final lines of the poem when Pope compares the extinction of imagination, intelligence and art at the approach of Dulness to the fall of "the sick'ning stars . . . off th'ethereal plain" (636). Stars, with the sun and the moon, have always provided the cosmic data for the traditional organisation of time; when, like the stars, "Art after Art goes out, and all is Night" (640), the meaningful structure of culture, as well as the temporal order of the cosmos, is lost. Without the harmonious framework of traditional time, the *concordia discors* of the world falls back into chaos. The absolute moral certainty of Truth sinks beneath the multitudinous arguments of "mountains of Casuistry" (642), while the comprehensive mystery of divine

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, John Dryden: "A Song For St. Cecilia's Day, 1667," *Dryden: Poems and Prose*, ed., Douglas Grant, (London: Penguin, 1971):

"From harmony, from heav'nly harmony
 This universal frame began;
 From harmony to harmony
 Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
 The diapason closing full in man." I 11-15

revelation disappears into the precise and abstract definitions of mathematics (646). Time exists without differentiation when “all is Night” (640) and the universe loses its divine order in a “Universal Darkness” (655).

The construction of this framing narrative determines our understanding of the action of the poem that operates within that narrative. When the narrator portrays a society and a cultural identity bereft of meaning or context, we perceive that absence as an absence of the divinely ordered framework of cosmic temporality. Book IV tells of poets who “murder” and “mince” (120) the literature of the past in order to spread their own “glory thin or thick, / on passive paper” (129-30); it depicts teachers who ignore history, philosophy or literature in order to abstract “Words” (150) from “Reason” (151); it describes academics obsessed with pointless controversies in which they “explain a thing till all men doubt it, / and write about it . . . and about it” (251-2); it depicts the adoption of social forms lacking any moral compulsion or intellectual understanding, so that the Grand Tour becomes an excuse for debauchery, while the cultural primacy of classical learning is replaced by ephemeral popular music, “the Echo of a Sound!” (322); finally, we are shown a study of science reduced to the production of fragmented, arbitrary information, a relentless and aimless pursuit of “the naked fact without disguise” (433). The differing portrayals of these dunce-like activities have one element in common: they all operate under the hegemony of the present moment. The craving for instantaneous fame, the fulfillment of momentary desires and the endless construction and reproduction of isolated abstractions have paramount authority.

Melinda Rabb has shown that “the mind without the remembrance of history is chaotic, malleable, without fixed shape or order,” and therefore the empire of Dulness is an empire of “the

ephemeral, of the constant production of forgettable ‘momentary monsters.’”¹⁰⁶ This experience is made more nightmarish by Pope’s emphasis upon the undifferentiated numbers of dunces surrounding the throne of Dulness. They are “a Vast involuntary throng” (82) who “roll in her vortex” (84), and who, like “locusts blackening all the ground” (396), exist without identity in a continuous present tense. Here there is no temporal context; in the final chaos of *The Dunciad* there is no knowledge of the past to offer coherence to the present, and no belief in a meaningful future for which the present moment can be seen as a preparation. No vision of a glorious future nor reverence for an ancient history influences the cultural productions of this society; in a universe governed by a fractured temporality, the contexts of the future and the past do not exist. Chaotic time in Book IV seems, in fact, to offer the eternal present tense of mechanical time, an unending “running sequence,” and “a succession of small identical impulses,” as Sherman has described it; as a concept of time abstracted from its traditional, natural or teleological moorings, it perfectly reflects the universe of *The Dunciad*.

The temporal framework of teleology, nature and history that was so important to the identity of the nation in *Windsor Forest* is manifestly absent in the universe of *The Dunciad*. The framework of *Windsor Forest* offers identity to society in the knowledge of history and the hope for a future that is inherent in the traditional understanding of temporality. Book IV of *The Dunciad* shows that, without the context of that ordering movement, all identity is lost. Men in society are reduced from inheritors and wielders of a transcendent destiny to an aimless mass of insects. Society and its cultural productions lose all meaning in a directionless and unmotivated

¹⁰⁶ Melinda Rabb, “‘Soft Figures’ and ‘A Paste of Composition Rare’: Pope, Swift and Memory,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 19: 191.

activity. Lacking the temporal framework, or map, of *Windsor Forest* to offer needed direction, human imagination in *The Dunciad* becomes focused on ephemeral trivia. The final apocalypse of *The Dunciad*, standing in marked contrast to the conclusion of *Windsor Forest*, presents Pope's last vision of his society. It is a vision that seems to take the development of the new mechanical and commercial episteme of his contemporary society to an exaggerated, if logical, conclusion. In *The Dunciad*, the loss of the ordering of traditional time, the lack of the kind of ancient reference system which defines *Windsor Forest*, indicates Pope's belief that the move away from traditional systems is linked to a chaotic loss of cultural identity.

II. The Countess of Winchilsea

Pope's final vision in *The Dunciad* might offer us a bleak understanding of mechanical time but, in many ways, it is an understanding that many women poets, despite their own celebration of the moment within the quotidian, seem to share. Writers as dispersed through the century as Sarah Fyge, Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley write of their suspicions of clock-ordered temporality even as they celebrate their moments of leisure or transcendence and reject the established temporalities that invest *Windsor Forest*. One of the most productive ways of establishing the complex movement by which these women privileged the present moment or the present hour is to examine the georgically inflected poetry of the Countess of Winchilsea. Read in connection with Pope's verse, Winchilsea's portrait of the life of a woman in rural retirement accentuates the gendered ways that eighteenth-century women ventriloquise the georgic mode and, more particularly, emphasises Winchilsea's idiosyncratic employment of time. She rejects the mythologising import with which Pope invests traditional temporality and privileges instead a

temporality composed of present moments of pleasure and contemplation within a diurnal world. Winchilsea's moments are not the successive measurements of quotidian *minutiae* that Sherman describes as the signifiers of mechanical time, and which Pope associates with chaos, but short periods filled with significance which sometimes expand to encompass transcendent possibilities. Like Pope, Winchilsea stands as an exemplar to women poets throughout the century. Her work may not be as openly acknowledged by women poets as that of Pope and other male writers', but both Leapor and Barbauld, for example, seem to self-consciously echo her work in theirs and her influence can be traced in the work of almost every poet I examine.

Despite her aristocratic rank, Winchilsea would have been as aware as most women through the century of the need to seize each leisured moment for contemplation and pleasure. It might seem somewhat perverse to claim a lack of time and leisure for Winchilsea, who, as a childless aristocrat with a co-operative husband and supportive literary coterie, probably had more encouragement and leisure than most of the other female writers whose work I examine. Yet, even as a childless gentlewoman, Winchilsea would have found her days consistently interrupted by the kinds of duties expected of her. We might not recognise some of these duties, such as the reception of visitors, and the maintenance of family and neighbourhood relationships as labour, but they were, nevertheless, often vexing requirements that no gentlewoman could with propriety ignore. In fact, despite changes in the domestic expectations for women in the late eighteenth century, these requirements retained all their force. Jane Austen, for example, was expected to interrupt her writing to take care of domestic duties and receive daily visitors. Even in her final illness she continued to share these duties with her mother and sister, lying across an arrangement of three parlour chairs when she could no longer sit upright. In the late nineteenth

century, Florence Nightingale would write bitterly of the impossibility of women achieving anything that required sustained intellectual effort because of the social demand that they should be constantly available for interruption by domestic and social requirements. Thus, the kind of domestic duties to which Winchilsea was subjected were not unlike those familiar throughout the century to most of the women whose work I examine.

In the early eighteenth century, Winchilsea was doubly unfortunate in that not only were interruptive social duties an inescapable part of her day, but they were awarded very little social status. Similarly, her domestic duties would not have been accorded the kind of respect they would have attracted later in the century. Up until the mid-Renaissance, women's domestic responsibilities were believed to confer a material benefit upon their households; in the mid to late eighteenth century, as we have seen, they were believed to confer a moral benefit. At the end of the seventeenth century and beginning of the eighteenth century, when Winchilsea was writing and publishing, "housework" was not only the "exclusive domain of women" but was "increasingly denigrated as unproductive."¹⁰⁷ The geography of women's lives was viewed in much the same way as their occupation of time: with varying degrees of disdain and condescension. Conduct books might well praise the self-effacing and domesticated woman, but that praise was couched in assumptions of the inferior nature of domestic work and the child-like qualities of the sex. Women were confined to "the dull manage of a servile house," as Winchilsea describes it, because domestic labour was generally believed to be their "utmost art

¹⁰⁷ McKeon 298.

and use" (19 - 20).¹⁰⁸

Questions of labour and improvement in the eighteenth century were, of course, profoundly affected by issues of class and gender. Georgic poets may have praised the physical labour of the shepherd or husbandman, but the improvements of the male landowner and the creativity of the male poet were equally privileged in the georgic hierarchy, if not more so. Winchilsea, like the male poets she wished to emulate, saw poetic composition as her proper and natural work and immersion in the natural world as a means by which that work was best nourished. But, with a publication history that began in 1694, she was writing early enough in the century that her desire to write and publish, and, even more, her belief that it was her proper job, would have been seen as potentially transgressive. She describes this gendered criticism in her unpublished "Introduction":

Did I my Lines intend for public view,
 How many censures would their Faults pursue!

 True judges might condemn their want of Wit;
 And all might say, they're by a Woman writt.
 Alas! A Woman that attempts the Pen,
 Such an Intruder on the rights of men,
 Such a presumptuous Creature is esteem'd,

¹⁰⁸ "The Introduction," in *Poems of Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, from the Original Edition of 1713 and from unpublished Manuscripts*, ed., Myra Reynolds, (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1903). Unless otherwise specified, all citations from Finch's poems are from this edition and are identified by title and line number.

The fault can by no Virtue be redeem'd. 1-2 and 7-12.

The tensions that must have existed between the privileged labour of poetry, her own desire to partake of that labour, and the variety of restraints under which she attempted to enter that privileged world are explored in her most celebrated poem, *The Spleen*. The spleen was a chronic emotional ailment, strongly associated with gentlewomen in the eighteenth century. It was often viewed as a product of boredom, melancholy and emotional self-indulgence: the nineteenth century would rename it hysteria. Winchilsea describes it as a serious depressive illness that is caused by her socially mandated role as a woman. She describes herself as one whose

... Hand delights to trace unusual Things,
 And [who] deviates from the known and common way;
 Nor will in fading Silks compose
 Faintly th'inimitable *Rose*,
 Fill up an ill-drawn Bird, or paint on Glass
 The Sov'reign's blurr'd and undistinguish'd Face. 83 - 89

The accepted labour for women had always been needlework, of course, but in this period most gentlewomen were confined to the kind of decorative embroidery and commonplace watercolouring Winchilsea satirises here: accomplishments rather than art. In *The Spleen*, Winchilsea signifies a rejection of what she regards as a pointless exercise in favour of the “delights” of poetry. That poetry is neither mere entertainment for her nor an alternative to embroidery, but work that she must perform, is made evident in her portrayal of the bleak despair she suffers when “the Spleen” decries her “Employment” (79) as a “useless Folly, or

presumptuous Fault" (80). Kathryn King points out that "the exchange of the needle for the pen" in women's texts often "stages a movement of female desire," with the needle representing "the sheer tedium of the domestic role . . . against the possibilities for intellect and learning associated with the pen."¹⁰⁹ We can see this movement in *The Spleen* and "The Introduction" and, to a certain extent, in Winchilsea's complete output. Yet, when she writes poetry in the georgic mode she nevertheless privileges women's lives, women's potentialities and women's geography. By this I mean that, while she might on one level resent the occupations to which she and her contemporaries were restricted, because they acted as interruptive obstacles to the work of poetic composition, she nevertheless assigns the same kind of privilege to the intimate, personal and retiring world of women that is normally associated with georgic labour and improvement.

In order to do this, she undertakes a variety of strategies that, in one way or another, anticipate strategies followed by women writers of the georgic throughout the eighteenth century. Potential reader hostility, for example, meant that in adapting georgic conventions to women's lives and women's desire to write, Winchilsea could not figure her poetry as georgic labour in the same way as her male exemplars, nor could she employ a conventional georgic form to explore the national or civic applications of the genre. Pronouncing upon the state of the nation, as Pope had done in *Windsor Forest*, and "relating personal experience to universal moral principles" was a male prerogative, and any women writer could expect scorn and outrage for encroaching upon it.¹¹⁰ Winchilsea's poetry in the georgic mode, therefore, remains firmly in the realm of the

¹⁰⁹ Kathryn King, "Of Needles and Pens and Women's Work," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 14:1 (Spring 1995), 84.

¹¹⁰ Katherine Rogers, "Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea: An Augustan Woman Poet." *Early Women Writers, 1600 - 1720*, ed., Anita Pacheco, (New York: Longman, 1998), 226.

personal and particular. Where she occasionally ventures into more general commentary, it is still restricted to the concerns and experiences of women. This concentration upon the personal and particular continues to be a significant element of women's georgically inflected poetry until the late eighteenth century, even after a poet like Barbauld in "Corsica" or "The Invitation" claims the right to make general social and political commentary in her work.

Similar concerns about female propriety and male prerogative probably encouraged Winchilsea to avoid the epic tone and expanse of much conventional georgic in the early part of the century. Her 1713 volume, *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions: Written by a Lady*, contains poetry in a wide variety of genres, but none of them is longer than 300 lines.¹¹¹ Towards the end of the century when women writers were well-established, such female poets as Anna Seward and Charlotte Smith would publish long-form poems such as *Llangollen Vale* or *The Emigrants*, but for most of the period women poets to a far greater degree than men restrained themselves to miscellanies and occasional verse. Pope, for example, published shorter poems in miscellanies, but he did not restrict himself to this form. Restriction to a short form meant that Winchilsea, and the women poets who followed her, often concentrated upon the employment of one or two elements associated with the georgic mode, such as the survey or the celebration of a life of retreat. Praise of labour is not, therefore, an inevitable function of women's poetry in the georgic mode. It is often replaced with a desire for retreat and the kind of uninterrupted leisure that is necessary for the production of text. In addition, Winchilsea would often undertake a strategy which was widely followed by other women writers throughout the century: she rewrites

¹¹¹ *Miscellany Poems on Several Occasions: Written by a Lady*, (London: printed for J[ohn] B[arber] and sold by Benj. Tooke at the Middle Temple Gate, Wm. Taylor in Pater Noster Row, and James Round in Exchange Alley, Cornhill, 1713).

women's occupations as morally superior pursuits. She occasionally even sets the conventions of traditional georgic improvement against her understanding of the different relationship to nature in the female world. She is always extremely cautious when she undertakes this kind of critique, disguising it beneath an apparent eulogy or a lightly humorous tone, but it forms a significant presence in her work. Together with her understanding of women's georgic activity as intimate, personal, non-invasive, and harmonious, this critique of conventional georgic also forms a significant presence in women's georgic for the rest of the period.

But perhaps Winchilsea's most significant and interesting reconfiguration of the various elements of the georgic form is in her employment of time. Women's experience of time in the eighteenth century was, as we have seen, often at odds with culturally organised temporal movements, and was, through the circumstances of their confinement to a domestic realm, closely related to the social experience of mechanical time. In ventriloquising the georgic mode, Winchilsea rewrote the kind of established temporal progression that we have seen in *Windsor Forest*. Temporal movement in her poems is almost emptied of linear historical progression and seasonal cycles and where such movements are present she is always willing to disrupt them. More importantly, she demonstrates a sustained interest in the present moment of the hour, the day or the night. We do not gain any sense in which these moments are portrayed as representatives of mechanical time. They are not denigrated as in *The Dunciad*, nor do they represent the temporality of succession. Instead, the present moment or the quotidian is always figured by Winchilsea as a time of meaningful intimacy for women. In this, she most profoundly typifies the women who follow her. These women, while they might acknowledge traditional movements of time, tend to privilege temporal movements that reflect the momentary or the

diurnal, and they are as willing as Winchilsea to disrupt temporal progression.

The relationship between women and time is most fully explored in Winchilsea's poem, "A Description of One of the Pieces of Tapesty at Long-Leat," published in her *Miscellany* of 1713. Here she describes the production and process of women's domestic labour: not a despised piece of embroidery, but a woven cloth that is designed for use as well as beauty. Tapestries typically take months of construction, and an unspoken subtext to this poem is the uninterrupted hours that the weavers have spent in order to construct their detailed work. Winchilsea's sense of the importance of this domestic labour is indicated by the several georgic conventions she employs to describe it. She praises the labour and artistry of its production; she appeals to an authorising Muse, and eulogises the property owner; she places the tapestry in its historical context; finally, she surveys the details of its terrain and elaborates upon the significance of what she observes. She also uses her narrative of women weaving a tapestry to introduce the elements of epic that are often employed in male-authored georgics but which are usually prohibited for women writers. Winchilsea's generic methodology here invests women's activities with the kind of import that is normally denied to them. She does this, not by illustrating a movement from domestic labour to the pen, but by equating certain kinds of domestic labour *with* the pen. The female weavers of this poem are telling an epic tale. Indeed, the construction of authoritative narratives is portrayed as their privileged employment: their georgic labour. Significantly, Winchilsea places this privileged domestic labour, which has taken many uninterrupted hours, firmly in the past:

This Tapesty of old, the Walls adorn'd

Ere noblest Dames the artful *Shuttle* scorn'd:

Arachne, then, with *Pallas* did contest
 And scarce th'Immortal Work was judged the Best.
 Nor valorous Actions, then, in Books were fought;
 But all the Fame, that from the Field was brought,
 Employ'd the *Loom*, where the kind *Consort* wrought:
 Whilst sharing in the Toil, she shar'd the Fame
 And with the *Heroes* mixt her interwoven Name. (1 -9).

While rewriting georgic labour as women's labour she nevertheless places that labour outside of her own experience of interruptive domestic responsibilities. Here, Winchilsea's strategy is similar to her unpublished "Introduction." In that poem she demonstrates that social rules preventing women from writing or intellectual activity have no Biblical authority because in ancient times art which celebrated national victories and civic responsibilities was considered to be a proper job for a woman to perform. Then, she mourns, "Holy Virgins" would sing praises of King David's victories, while the prophet Deborah

. . . . leads fainting Israel on,
 She fights, she wins, she Triumphs with a Song;
 Devout, Majestick, for the Subject Fitt,
 And far above her Arms, exalts her witt. 45-48

The domestic artistry of the tapestry weavers is equated with the kind of literary artistry that Winchilsea eulogises here. While weaving is mourned as another lost avenue of expression for women, this similarity of treatment emphasises the importance that Winchilsea invests in it. She equates domestic labour with the same georgic and epic values that male poets often give to

agriculture and improvement. Women weavers share as equal partners in the labours of men by recording their “valorous Actions” on the field of battle. Winchilsea’s sense of loss for this ancient skill is highlighted by her use of the Arachne myth, which functions on two levels. This myth, in which Athena challenges Arachne to a weaving contest, equates this domestic artistry with the kinds of skills that ancient heroes display in their heroic contests. However, Winchilsea’s use of the myth also signifies her anxiety that her own art will be “eclipsed by a poetry that relates the exploits and victories of the gods.”¹¹² In other words, she fears that whatever significance she attempts to give to her own artistic production, her restriction to the woman’s realm of retreat and domesticity will always be overshadowed by poetry that relates to national and civic issues.

Winchilsea’s awareness of the vulnerability of the female artist leads her to undertake several defensive strategies in this poem, and these strategies add interesting syntactical, spatial and temporal elements. First, in a poem in which she rewrites domestic work as georgic labour, and complains that men have taken away all forms of artistic expression for women, she forestalls hostile criticism by claiming for herself and the women weavers of the tapestry an authorising muse who is male, rather than the more conventional female figure. She chooses to describe a tapestry which is a copy of a cartoon by Raphael portraying a scene from the New Testament, and she invokes Raphael’s genius throughout the poem. Thus Winchilsea and the tapestry weavers are, in effect, undertaking a work of translation. Translation, particularly the translation of religious works by men, had long been considered an acceptable intellectual and artistic activity

¹¹² Ruth Salvaggio, “Anne Finch Placed and Displaced,” *Early Women Writers, 1600 - 1720*, ed., Anita Pacheco, (London: Longman, 1998),. 252.

for women. They were understood to be acting under the authority of a male superior and were therefore not perceived to be breaking the constraints of orthodox female behaviour. In describing the translation that the weavers have undertaken of Raphael's work from pencil to wool, Winchilsea submits her text to the originating authority of the "mighty Raphael, just sure renown'd" (80), and consistently claims him as her muse. Only Raphael, she claims, can inspire her to risk "the Censures of the World" (20) in writing this poem, and only in his "Works" could "such Excellence [be] found" (81). In fact, as we read her poem, it is almost possible to forget that it is not Raphael's original cartoon that she describes.

However, the geographic space that she surveys on the wall at Longleat has been produced by the labour of women. The highly detailed description of each character in the scene is the result of the interpretive power of the female weavers. They "in tinctur'd wool . . . / Correctly follow[] in each Shade and Fold" (16 - 17) as they reproduce Raphael's artistry. But it is also worth noting that Raphael's cartoons are preparatory and generalised plans in pencil for future paintings. They rarely offer the kind of particularity that Winchilsea portrays here. In giving Raphael's cartoon body, detail and colour these weavers are not merely translators but collaborators: they have completed his artistic vision and given it spatial solidity. Winchilsea's defensive strategy in employing Raphael as an authorising muse both for her art and the weavers' skill not only allows her to retreat behind his eminence, but also allows her to subtly emphasise the true artistry of these women, and by extension, her own.

Similarly, Winchilsea's defensive strategy of surveying the product of women's labour rather than the agricultural work of an estate means that her georgic topography is not the prospect view of a rural landscape, such as the one described in *Windsor Forest*, but a detailed

portrayal of a relatively small and particular space that is situated in the female geography of the interior of house. Her survey shows the interactions and connections of the characters in the tapestry, each of whom is named and described. The sense of intimate connection is highlighted by Finch's emphasis upon the way that each one is either looking at or touching another character:

On SERGIUS first, upon his lofty Seat,
 With due Regard our Observations treat;
 Who, whilst he thence on ELYMAS looks down,
 Contracts his pensive Brow into a frown

....

To sacred PAUL a younger Figure guides,
 With seeming Warmth, which still in Youth presides;
 And pointing forward, Elder Men directs,
 In Him, to note the Cause of these Effects;

....

Thus stand the LICTORS gazing on a Deed
 Which do's all humane Chastisements exceed;

....

Thou BARNABAS, though Last, not least our Care,
 Seem'st equally employ'd in Praise and Prayer

....

Yet soft Compassion in thy Face we see:

Whilst lifted Hands implore a kind Relief.

24 - 100.

This crowded scene (and I have merely cited the bare details here) functions in several ways in the poem. It emphasises women's interest in conveying meaning through particularity. The reader is given the significance of the scene, not through a didactic statement, but through the details of the characters' positions and facial expressions. This strategy works to give a great sense of life and immediacy to what is essentially static space. We do not appear to be surveying this scene from a great height, as in the traditional prospect view, but are in amongst the actors in this drama. At the same time, because Winchilsea is, in fact, surveying the whole of the scene from a certain distance, she retains the omnipotent eye of the georgic poet: every character is clearly described. Indeed, the themes of sight, observation, and, as we shall see, blindness, are central to this poem, and form another means by which Winchilsea associates herself with the observant narrators of male authored topographical poems.

Furthermore, this multi-layered and tightly woven portrait constantly evokes considerations of time. The tapestry records a climactic moment of time, when St. Paul strikes a wizard blind, and continues to record that moment through the centuries. It is a moment of time which has no female concerns at all. St. Paul and St. Barnabas confront the wizard in the presence of the Roman governor, his lictors and administrators. It is a narrative which is in many ways more political than religious, and thus, in eighteenth-century terms, it is a narrative of male action and prerogative. Yet, as Winchilsea stresses at the beginning of the poem, the female weavers were not prohibited from interpreting this political narrative in domestic art. It was considered part of their proper work as women. Even if they were acting under the authority of

Raphael, the body and life the weavers have given to his cartoon is itself a true expression of art which has preserved a significant narrative moment through time.

The temporality Winchilsea employs here is not a depiction of the conventional cycles of the georgic mode which reflects the movements of the seasons nor the linear movement of the survey which reflects the historical significance of time and place. The tapestry is physically situated in the internal domestic space of women, and is thus not subject to the seasons and, while Finch emphasises the past as we have seen, it is not a past that lies in a direct linear direction from her own. The tapestry is physically placed in time, at least partly, by her use of the authorising figure of Raphael. If the tapestry is a copy of one of Raphael's cartoons, then in 1713 it was nearly 200 years old (Raphael died in 1520). Yet, Winchilsea initially portrays the physical presence of the tapestry in terms of two much older traditions. In describing the tapestry and the means of its production, Finch recalls the myth of Arachne and Athena (3), and then calls upon a medieval image of knights on the field of battle and noble dames at their looms (6 - 9). The tapestry, so artfully contrived in the poem's particularity, brings not only its own physical history and the history of the narrative it inscribes with it into the present moment but all the history of women's artistic labours upon the loom. History is not organised into a line behind this tapestry but is invoked as a place upon a wall in which a variety of historical narratives can be surveyed in one moment as geographic space.

In some ways, of course, this connection between geographic space and history is a convention of the georgic survey. Sir John Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, for example, performs the same narrative act. But where Denham is stimulated to a separate historical reflection upon each geographic site he views, and uses those reflections to envision a national dream, Winchilsea

brings all historical narratives in the poem to one geographic site and ensures that their relevance is particular to her. Obviously, weaving signifies writing for Finch in this poem: the women inscribe the activities of the men and give them significance. As all the historical narratives that the tapestry contains meet in the moment of time that Winchilsea gazes at it, she mourns the loss of the kind of female activity and partnership with men that the different histories of the tapestry represent. Winchilsea's willingness to circumvent traditional movements of time here, can be seen as a function of that loss. If women no longer share a partnership with men in the wider world, she seems to indicate, then they are equally alienated from the temporal movements of that wider world. Their history cannot be conveyed by the progressive teleology of the conventional georgic mode, which traditionally traces an historical movement from the past to the present to a glorious future. Women have not progressed, according to Winchilsea; they have regressed and thus their past has not led to the present. The past for women exists as a group of narratives (classical myths, Biblical stories, medieval traditions, Renaissance history) from which they are cut off because they no longer have the means to inscribe those narratives, and she offers no hope that a glorious future awaits them. They are no longer part of a teleological movement, and all they can claim, as Winchilsea does in this poem, is the temporal moment in which that loss is recognised.

This alienation is emphasised when Winchilsea introduces the owner of the tapestry at the end of the poem. Theanor (Henry Thynne) not only possesses the tapestry, but is shown to possess time as well. His observation of the tapestry in the company of Finch, she claims, could turn days into hours, and hours into moments (111-112). Significantly, this movement traces a reversal of the time the tapestry must have taken the women to produce. Theanor has the power

to take ownership of the women's expenditure of time represented in the tapestry and to reverse it if he wishes for the entertainment of his guest. Unlike herself, Winchilsea seems to imply, Theanor actually possesses detailed knowledge about the tapestry. He could give the linear history of the tapestry and its narrative, place both within the teleology of the Longleat estate, and recount the tapestry's significance to the aristocratic Thynne family and thence to the nation. However, Winchilsea's construction of Theanor's potential act of possession at the end of the poem, while it overtly compliments Theanor and modestly submits her own powers of observation to his far greater powers, also covertly undercuts those same powers. He is syntactically credited with being able to turn days into hours (112), but he is constructively submerged in a temporal disruption. Although the poem ends quite correctly with observations "taught . . . by HIM" (113), we never hear what they are. It is the "fresh Beauties" (110) of the ancient tapestry that truly seem to offer the meaning of all its different histories to the present moment. It is Winchilsea, not Theanor, who describes the tapestry and uncovers the significance of its terrain, and it is Winchilsea who actually turns the centuries of female labour that the tapestry represents into the moments that it takes to read the poem. Winchilsea thus turns Theanor's power of possession into a display of the power of alternatives. Winchilsea and other women artists may be alienated from the affairs, temporalities and potentialities of the wider world but, as this poem makes plain, women can at least adapt for themselves what they are permitted to use. Instead of a georgic survey, Winchilsea substitutes a survey of domestic art; instead of the affairs of nations, she substitutes intimate gestures and narratives; instead of rolling seasons or the linear progression of teleology, she substitutes moments experienced between friends as they look at a tapestry. Winchilsea complains of dispossession at the beginning of this

poem:

No longer Females to such Praise aspire,
 And seldom now we rightly do admire.
 So much, All Arts are by the men engross'd,
 And Our few Talents unimprov'd or cross'd. (10 - 14)

She offers no explicit sense of possibility for women writers at the end of the poem, but she does subtly repossess both labour and time and adapts both to her needs and the needs of other weavers of words.

Winchilsea never again wrote a poem making such explicit use of the georgic for female labour, but many of the strategies of this poem can be found in her other works. Her emphasis upon the particular, the intimate, the quotidian, and the hours or minutes within the quotidian, can be found in all of her nature poetry, together with a miniaturisation of scale which she herself appears to associate with the restricted female world to which she belongs. At the end of "The Introduction" Winchilsea laments the loss of women's power and dignity, represented by the prophet Deborah, and "appears to withdraw into a private garden of solitude."¹¹³ The nature she celebrates in her poetry is often this garden, or, when she occasionally describes a wider estate or landscape, it is invested with all the intimacy of a garden. The garden was to prove a useful geographic space for Winchilsea. No awkward associations of ownership or power could arise. The garden or estate park was identifiably owned by the possessor of the estate, and many men, notably Alexander Pope, took an active interest in landscape gardening. Yet, at the same time, it was commonly associated with feminine decorum and meditation. The metaphysical poets, for

¹¹³ Hinnant 74.

example often used the space of the garden as a place of meditation.¹¹⁴ As such, the garden or park could be used, without criticism, as a site of female freedom and creativity, and, indeed, became a poetic trope of freedom for female writers into the nineteenth century. Jacqueline Labbe describes the manner in which this trope operated in the Romantic period:

The masculine privilege of ownership hovers above the feminine associations of the garden space emphasising the garden's potential for female limitation. Yet the garden refuses either one or the other designation: as an embodied conduct book, it encloses the female into the feminine; as a site for female creativity . . . it encourages the female out of the feminine.¹¹⁵

All these elements come into play in "Upon My Lord Winchilsea's Converting the Mount in his Garden to a Terras." This poem from Winchilsea's *Miscellany* of 1713 is in many ways a typically georgic poem. The Earl of Winchilsea, her husband's nephew, is praised for improvements to his estate at Eastwell, and for his studies which will, she states, "blesse the present, and succeeding Age" (71) and ensure that Eastwell will always "boast a kind and fruitful soyle" (78). But it is significant that both seasonal cycles and progressive teleologies are either missing from or subdued in this poem. Instead Winchilsea uses a highly subjective temporal movement to critique the young earl's improvements, which, despite the final eulogy, do not involve his agricultural acres, but his garden and his house. Thus, Winchilsea does not situate herself upon rising ground obtaining a prospect view of her nephew's estate, but upon the newly

¹¹⁴ Stanley Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and The Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, (Madison, Milwaukee and London: The U of Wisconsin P, 1966), 112.

¹¹⁵ Jacqueline M. Labbe, "Cultivating One's Understanding: The Female Romantic Garden," *Women's Writing* 4:1 (1997),. 41.

built terrace with friends, where, in a specific moment of time, they walk and discuss the changes that have been made. As they walk, they praise, but criticism is implied in the act of memory that Winchilsea constructs as she walks. The alterations remind her of an earlier improvement by an ancestor of the present earl, identified by Myra Reynolds as the second Earl of Winchilsea, which entailed the destruction of a grove of trees surrounding the house. Winchilsea's tone here as she reconstructs this particular history is one of unalloyed condemnation. The grove, she says, was beautiful, "the Glory of the Seat" (25), and useful, as it "Repell'd the Winter blasts and skreen'd the Somer's heat" (26) from the house. In a narrative that must be almost wholly imagined, Winchilsea describes how the earl's plans caused dismay amongst his workers, tenants and friends:

The heavy tidings cause a gen'ral Grief

.....

Some Plead, some Pray; some Council, some Dispute,

Alas, in vain, where Pow'r is absolute;

.....

Their sorrows, in their secret whispers break,

Sigh as they passe beneath the sentenc'd Trees

Which seem to answer in a mournful Breeze. (29 - 35)

Faced with a mutiny amongst his workers, the earl himself seizes an axe, and, forces his workers to follow his example, in a scene which Winchilsea compares to Alexander's sack of Persepolis:

Then in a moment, ev'ry arm is reared

And the robb'd Palace sees, what most she fear'd,

Her lofty Grove, her ornamental shield,

Turn'd to a Desart and forsaken Field.

41 - 44.

Unlike Winchilsea's description of the terrace, which is conveyed in the most generalised terms as having "graceful simetry, without" (53) and "Use, with Beauty" (54) within, or its construction which is merely hinted at with her statement that "No Loame, and Lath does now the Building shame" (52), her reconstruction of the previous improvement is detailed and particularised. It stands out from the surrounding georgic conventions as if it were the heart of the poem, and indeed, Winchilsea places this vivid narrative at the centre of the text. In one sense, she is constructing a comparison between the two improvements, similar to the one Pope makes in *Windsor Forest*, when, after describing the beauties of the forest, he turns to the evils of the past with the phrase: "Not thus the land appear'd in Ages past" (43). In a corresponding phrase, although significantly, one that appears later in the poem, Finch politely states that the present earl's improvements mend "ev'ry fault that in the Old was found" (66). However, where Pope portrays the present age and the future of the forest in terms as vivid and compelling as his portrayal of the past, Finch ensures that the reader's interest is almost wholly caught by the exciting and traumatic narratives of the past alone. Winchilsea's commentary here is also somewhat reflective of Pope's *Epistle to Burlington* in which Pope contrasts self-indulgent, tasteless improvements with ones that are not only tasteful but contribute to the national welfare. However, unlike Pope, Winchilsea focuses our attention on the evils of the old destruction of the grove and offers only brief praise to the current improvements. By staging a comparison between the previous improvements and the current improvements instead of a contrast, Winchilsea rejects Pope's understanding of what ensures an acceptable improvement and seems to reject any

interference with nature.

Winchilsea emphasises this equation in interesting ways. She characterises the natural elements of the garden which have been removed as belonging to a particularly female space. The house, which the mount and the trees are shown to protect, is described as a woman “robb’d” (42) of protection and left vulnerable to attack. In both alterations this female space within the garden is invaded and its guardians are replaced with man-made structures. No real difference is indicated in Winchilsea’s portrayal of these two invaders: the old earl is Alexander who destroyed Persepolis, and the present earl is Caesar who “Came and Saw and Overcame” (14). Finch also highlights the comparison of one event with another by claiming that the new “Fabrick” (49) of the Terrace has replaced the despoiled grove as well as the flattened mount (46 - 50). This sense of despoliation is even more significant because the earl undoubtedly flattened the mount for the same reason that the old earl destroyed the grove: in order to provide an uninterrupted prospect view from the house and terrace.

But the strongest emphasis upon comparison between the two events is in Winchilsea’s employment of time. As she walks upon the terrace, the old destruction of the trees and the modern destruction of the mount appear to have taken place at the same time. There is no transitional phrase or word employed as Winchilsea moves from praise of the terrace and its builder, “From whose unwearied Genius Men expect / All that can farther Polish or Protect” (21 - 22), to the destruction of the grove of trees “just rising from the same proliffick ground” (24) upon which the mount had once arisen. There is a period of distinct confusion for the reader as the three events, the destruction of the grove, the flattening of the mount and the construction of the terrace are portrayed in one sentence divided only by a semi-colon. Significantly, all are

described in the present tense.

What Winchilsea has achieved here is a georgic commentary upon men's invasion of female space in which georgic conventions are overtly proclaimed and subversively undermined. By focusing on the more intimate space of the garden and house at Eastwell, rather than the wider estate, Winchilsea conveys a sense that the geographic space she describes is as much a part of a female domain as a male prerogative: a sense emphasised by her characterisation of the house as a woman. In this womanly space the cyclical temporality and linear teleology of the traditional georgic are abandoned or disrupted as Winchilsea portrays the reflections that can be crowded into the present moment. Thus, while past, present and future are all described, the only significant temporality in the poem is the moment when Winchilsea calls up the past into the present. Although the improvement of the past is described as destruction and the improvement of the present is described as civilisation, Winchilsea's spatial and temporal strategies, bringing past and present together in a way that submerges the present in the past, encourages us to view both expressions of georgic improvement as invasion.

This reading of the poem as a covert repudiation of the kind of georgic improvement that opens up the secluded garden space, is supported by Winchilsea's use of imagery in most of her poems in the georgic mode. In these, the garden is invariably portrayed as a shadowed and secret retreat where women can escape from the bright sunlight and open spaces which, for her, signify the aggressions of the masculine world. For Winchilsea "the sweet pleasures of a rural seat," as she writes in a poetic fragment to Lady Worsley at Longleat, are the "Groves [which] nature made

/ Prolifick in delightfull shade”¹¹⁶ They function as a “secure retreat” (4) for those “who never there are chac’d or of the toiles afraid” (5). It is an escape based on the *beatus vir* tradition, but which she transforms to her own needs. Winchilsea not only escapes from the evils of the town, as in the tradition of retreat poetry described by Maren-Sofie Rostvig in *The Happy Man*, but also from the masculine world within the retreat. Significantly, this female escape is also signified by her emphasis upon a temporality in her secret world which rejects the cycles of the seasons or the teleology of history for shorter and more intimate moments in a day or a night.

Charles Hinnant argues that Winchilsea places Nature in opposition “not only to history but also to a generalised . . . and implicitly masculine intrusion and threat.”¹¹⁷ She does appear to remove from her poems the temporal movements of the wider world. Hinnant argues that Finch’s response to masculine threat was an escape to a pastoral timelessness, “summoning up a landscape that is either absent or hypothetical,” as she “creates a highly conventionalised image of the ‘Arcadian Plaine.’”¹¹⁸ Even when she specifically refers to Eastwell, he argues, Winchilsea portrays the estate “on the analogy of the Vale of Tempe rather than the English countryside.”¹¹⁹ While I agree that Winchilsea often uses pastoral elements in her description of the countryside, I would contend that her evocation of country gardens and parks is not a repudiation of temporal reality for timeless fantasy, but a means by which her quiet and

¹¹⁶ In *The Anne Finch Wellesley Manuscript Poems: A Critical Edition*, eds., Barbara McGovern and Charles Hinnant, (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1998).

¹¹⁷ Hinnant 139.

¹¹⁸ Hinnant 136 and 139

¹¹⁹ Hinnant 139

commonplace retreat at Eastwell could be characterised as vivid and glamorous. Indeed, even her most conventional poems of retreat, relying heavily on models by Cowley and Marvell, contain particularities of situation, place and time which reject a wholly pastoral and timeless reading. She emphasises moments of pleasure or reflection rather than timelessness, which, freed from the movements of the seasons or of teleology, come to represent a possibility of constant renewal in the female domain.

“An Invitation to Dafnis,” for example, is characterised by Hinnant as a pastoral in which Winchilsea escapes into a highly conventionalised fantasy world in order to disguise the political realities to which the poem refers: Winchilsea’s husband, “Dafnis,” is reading ‘Sansom’s World,’ a book of geography representing the political escape from England he is not allowed to make, and reflecting on “the Protestant forces besieging the French armies around Mons and Namur.”¹²⁰ Nevertheless, the pastoral elements of the poem, while they are evocatively employed here, do not overpower the particularity that gives Finch’s georgically inflected poems an anchor on the real world and moments in real time. The poem begins with a reference to a particular day, with its typically English weather of “Warm without Sun, and shady without rain” (2). On “such a day” (1) states Finch, even the nymphs and shepherds of Arcadia would have danced “from noon to night” (8); therefore, on this particular day, her husband should “descend” (9) from his studies to walk through fields and groves with her (9 - 12). In spite of the pastoral elements of the poem, such as the classical names she gives to her husband and herself, and of the references to nymphs and shepherds (significantly contained in a subjunctive clause), this is a poem with its roots in a particular moment, in a particular relationship and in a particular geographic space.

¹²⁰ Hinnant 138.

In spite of Hinnant's belief that this is a conventional and imagined Arcadian landscape, the references to "faery Cercles" (16), the "daz'ling Poppy" (19) and the cornflowers in "our standing corn" (22) situate the walk that Winchilsea wants to share with her husband in the countryside of southern England. Indeed, the personal possessive pronoun referenced in "*our* standing corn" (my emphasis) underline the fact that Winchilsea is describing Eastwell. What she achieves by investing the particulars of Eastwell with elements of pastoral is not only a disguise for her husband's political situation, but a means by which the familiar walks of the estate are made glamorous and inviting. Jean Mallinson points out that this poem "adapts the conventions of the seduction poem so popular with Cavalier and Restoration poets, with its refrain based on the alluring 'Come'"¹²¹ But Winchilsea is not simply tempting her husband away from scholarly pursuits. Her detailed account of Dafnis's activities confirm that he is immersed in the cultivation and improvement of his mind and her use of the word, "descend," in persuading him to accompany her emphasises that this invitation offers no mere "contrast between art and nature."¹²² Dafnis is being asked to leave the elevated male world of epic concerns and georgic improvement and enter the everyday world of "plainer Nature" (50) and "rural joys" (63), which, with the repeated refrain linking Winchilsea with the fields and groves, are characterised as female.

Although Winchilsea describes a wider scene here than is usual in her nature poems, the details she gives of a typically "shady" (2) day and a walk that offers nothing more extraordinary than the estate's cornfields, woods, streams and "chearfull" (48) birds, keeps the temporal and

¹²¹ Mallinson 49 - 50.

¹²² Mallinson 50.

spatial boundaries of this poem in the female domain that she has constructed for her poetry: shadowed, domestic, intimate, detailed, and temporally situated in quotidian moments and activities. I agree with Hinnant that there is a sense of timelessness here, but it is a timelessness based not in escape to a fantasy world of pastoral, or even in an Horatian retreat from the city, but in her immersion in the moments of an intimate, quotidian world cut free from the determining principles of seasonal cycle and teleology.

These moments are the “verdant circles” (50) through which she strays and “to which no end we know” (51), as she states in “A Ballad to Mrs. Catherine Fleming in London from Malshanger farm in Hampshire.”¹²³ Somewhat similar to the movement of the seasons, Winchilsea’s circles take her through the daily moments of life in the country: “the driver whistling to his team” (26) in the morning, and the farmer herding his flocks home at sunset (29 - 34). In between these quotidian signifiers, she describes the meals eaten and the walks taken in the “shades” (58) and “shelter of the groves” (59) of this “plain farm” (13), or of her own estate. Even when the circles she describes are more idealised and metaphysical as in “A Petition for an Absolute Retreat,” they are still grounded in particular moments and intimate details. Hinnant argues that this poem describes “as much a spiritual ideal as an empirical reality.”¹²⁴ Indeed, Winchilsea places her retreat in an ideal wished-for world where important elements are “prescribed by convention” and “motifs are freely borrowed from other poets, like Marvell’s “The Garden,” Pomfret’s “The Choice,” and Milton’s “Il Penseroso.”¹²⁵ Yet, even this imagined and

¹²³ In *The Anne Finch Wellesley Manuscript Poems: A Critical Edition*.

¹²⁴ Hinnant 146.

¹²⁵ Mallinson 62.

conventionalised garden contains so many of Winchilsea's specific requirements that the poem does contain a definite particularity: not perhaps a named garden or estate, but a particular life and a particular desire. The same might be said, perhaps, of the whole convention of retreat, but while Pomfret and Marvell rarely stray outside narrative conventions, and even Milton's man of contemplation is a fictive figure, Winchilsea moves outside of convention to introduce intimate details from her own life, and her narrator is demonstrably herself. She thus subtly alters convention into singularity, adapting "a masculine tradition, the *beatus vir*, to her own conception of . . . the *beata femina*." ¹²⁶

In her conception of the *beata femina*, Winchilsea, "keenly aware," for example, "of the niggling details that clog women's lives" demands that "No Intruders thither come! / Who visit but to be from home" (8 - 9). ¹²⁷ Most writers in the *beatus vir* tradition welcome friends from town, but Winchilsea longs to refuse a "tiresome burden imposed by society's views of ladylike behaviour" such as being expected to listen to gossip about "who's Deceas'd, or who's to Wed" (17). ¹²⁸ Similarly, whilst most poems of retreat commend in general terms simplicity of dining and dressing, Winchilsea as a woman responsible for housekeeping, and expected to undertake an elaborate toilette each day, specifies "A Table spread without my Care" (23), clothes "cheap and new" (67) expressing "unaffected Carelessness" (71), and perfumes produced by "what the Winds from Gardens bear" (87). In other words, as a woman condemned to "the dull manage of a servile house," Winchilsea's ideal retreat would free her from the kinds of interruptive duties that,

¹²⁶ Mallinson 68.

¹²⁷ Katherine Rogers 233

¹²⁸ Katherine Rogers 233.

as we have seen in *The Spleen*, have prevented her from her proper labour of writing.¹²⁹

But two important desires are even more “specific” to her and her personal history:

Give me there (since Heaven has shown

It was not good to be alone)

A *Partner* suited to my Mind,

Solitary, pleas'd and kind;

Who, partially may something see

Preferr'd to all the World in me;

Slighting by my humble Side,

Fame and Splendour, Wealth and Pride.

The reference to her own happy marriage is clear, even if it is somewhat exalted by comparisons to Adam and Eve before the Fall. Katherine Rogers and Jean Mallinson both note that this particular desire is in direct contradiction to the conventional privileging of celibacy found in the *beatus vir* tradition.¹³⁰ Pomfret in “The Choice,” for example, merely requests a respectable female neighbour for occasional visits in his retreat, while several others, like Marvell, descend into misogyny, claiming that true happiness in retreat, as in Eden before Eve, can only be found without women. He and other writers in this tradition are equally subject to convention with regard to the friends they wish to visit: they are rarely named and are usually referred to in generic terms. Winchilsea, as we have seen rejects this common grouping of visitors and her second request, after her request for her husband, is for a named friend. Arminda (Catherine, Countess

¹²⁹ “The Introduction” (59).

¹³⁰ Katherine Rogers 233. Mallinson 65.

of Thanet) is not only characterised by her personal virtues, such as her warmth, wisdom, and generosity (164 - 179), but by the real history that Ardelia (Winchilsea) and Arminda share. In a lengthy digression, Winchilsea details the way in which she had been “Blasted by a Storm of Fate” (160) which left her “Fall’n, neglected, lost, forgot” (162) by all except Arminda who “warm’d anew [Ardelia’s] drooping Heart” (166). Referring to the period when Winchilsea and her husband, supporters of the deposed James II, were expelled from their positions at court and threatened by the new regime, this extended reminiscence significantly particularises Winchilsea’s otherwise conventional desire for “a Friend in that Retreat” (197).

Thus, the circles that Winchilsea describes in the reiterated refrain of “those Windings and that Shade” (21), while not obviously quotidian circles are nevertheless circles through a particular life. This poem is much more than a conventional portrait of an idealised and timeless garden. In some ways it is reminiscent of Virgil’s *Eclogues* or Renaissance pastorals which combine idealised landscape with realistic commentary. But it is very different from the more recent pastoral tradition championed by Pope in which the real world is totally absent. The pathways of Winchilsea’s “sweet but absolute Retreat” (3) seem to combine the more ancient pastoral tradition with the georgically inflected elements of the *beatus vir* tradition. Her pathways move through the events and intimacies of her everyday life, and insofar as there can be a temporal movement in a poem of retreat, the temporality described here is made up of the moments of interaction, reflection or discussion embedded in those intimacies.

Here, Winchilsea initially wants “each Moment [to] be improv’d” (127), so that every observation of, or reflection upon, nature not only gives pleasure in itself, but leads to thoughts of “Eternity at last” (133). In her use of the georgically influenced word “improv’d” here, she

implies a sense of a georgic teleology, a description of life as a linear progression to a transcendent consummation. But Winchilsea's first act of contemplation following this expressed desire is not a reflection upon eternity but an act of memory recalling the personal and political disaster that once nearly destroyed her. This memory leads to thoughts of Arminda and the ways in which Arminda had proved to be a true friend to her. Thus the linear or progressive movement of her personal teleology is immediately disrupted and turned back on itself. When Winchilsea again refers to her contemplative desires at the end of the poem, eternity is no longer characterised as the end of time, but as a geographic site, "a Height" (277), a country to be "survey'd" (292) from "those Windings and that Shade" (293). Winchilsea continues to claim that the natural world should be used as an aid to contemplation, but instead of invoking the idea of a progressive purpose to that contemplation, she now argues that each "present Moment" (266) should be lived both for itself and as a means to "lift [the] Eyes" (272) to "Paradise" (278), as astronomers use "some Engine" (272) to explore "the outward, glorious Skies" (273).

The purposes of both expressions of contemplation are identical, but in discursively moving from one expression to another through an act of memory, Winchilsea privileges the present moment. Using nature to contemplate heaven as the end of a temporal journey can just as easily stimulate memory, she seems to claim, as thoughts of a future eternity. Indeed, such thoughts first lead her to a bleak and hopeless vision of old age as a lonely, distorted oak tree, "Sapless Limbs all bent, and shrunk" (149), before similarly dark thoughts of a "Helpless Vine . . . found, / Unsupported on the Ground" (152 - 153) lead her backwards into memories of her own sad history. This operation of *memento mori* is not unusual, of course, in seventeenth-century verse, and, as Reuben Brower points out, some of Winchilsea's poems are strongly influenced by

the Metaphysicals.¹³¹ But when we compare her dark vision of the shattered oak and collapsed vine with the joy she expresses at the end of the poem, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Winchilsea chooses to celebrate the present moment instead of considering her life as a temporal journey. Using each present moment as an access to the divine that is equally present, but divided in kind, as stars are from the earth allows her not only the “Joys” (268) of the present moment, but the “extensive Joy” (291) of surveying “All Heaven . . . / From those Windings and that Shade” (293). Circling through the shadowed pathways of her idealised garden with her husband and friend the present moment, repeated through intimate windings, becomes an intimation of the divine: the poem itself providing “a kind of topography . . . of the ideal life in its completeness.”

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The same kind of topography is evident in Winchilsea’s most famous poem, “A Nocturnal Reverie,” first published in her 1713 *Miscellany*. As Douglas Patey argues, the poem is a georgic survey “in the same manner as ‘Grongar Hill’ but instead of climbing a hill to achieve that clarity of vision and point of view which reveals form, the poet chooses a time of day, a warm moonlit evening.”¹³³ As in all of Winchilsea’s poems in the georgic mode, clarity of vision is not only achieved here in a shadowed light, but from within the intimate relationships revealed in moments of time. She achieves this with a variety of strategies which distinguish this poem from

¹³¹ Reuben Brower, “Lady Winchilsea and the Poetic Tradition of the Seventeenth Cenury,” *Studies in Philology* 42 (1945), 61 - 80.

¹³² Mallinson 65.

¹³³ Douglas Lane Patey, “Anne Finch, John Dyer and the Georgic Syntax of Nature.” *Augustan Subjects: Essays in Honour of Martin C. Battestin*, ed., Albert J. Rivero, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1997), 29 - 46.

the traditional georgic survey. Although several commentators have noticed the poem's similarity, in miniature, to Thomson's *The Seasons*, particularly in its close observation of the natural world, the differences emphasise the sense of intimacy and personal response that Winchilsea explores which is almost wholly absent in Thomson. Katherine Rogers argues that in Thomson, "the public tone predominates. [He] is not communicating his personal response to the seasons, but the sensations and thoughts they inspire in everyman. [His] exhaustive descriptions aim at scientific completeness and are elevated by inflated diction and moralizing set pieces."¹³⁴ This is very different from Winchilsea who always conveys a deeply personal response to the natural world around her. Indeed, this is a poem that fully supports Margaret Anne Doody's contention that eighteenth-century women's poetry is inherently more sensual than men's.¹³⁵ Winchilsea makes an appeal to every physical sense: the sense of sight in the "trembling" (10) reflection of the moon and trees in the river; the sense of smell, when flowers release their "Odours, which declin'd repelling Day" (21); the sense of hearing when the owl "Hollowing clear, directs the Wand'rer right" (6); the sense of touch as "When freshen'd Grass . . . / Makes cool Banks to pleasing Rest invite" (11 - 12). This intense sensuality informs most of the poem and emphasises a final and unexpressed sense: the sense of intimacy between Winchilsea and the elements of the landscape she describes.

This intimacy is further emphasised by another strategy described by Patey. Here, every element of the natural world is structured into an hierarchical organisation, each element

¹³⁴ Katherine Rogers 238.

¹³⁵ Margaret Anne Doody, "Sensuousness in the Poetry of Eighteenth-Century Women Poets," *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730 - 1820*, eds., Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), 3 - 31.

connected to another “through appropriate relations to other things.”¹³⁶ Thus, the poem “moves from lower nature to higher up the scale of being, from inanimate nature through plants and lower animals to higher animals, man, and finally, man’s soul.”¹³⁷ However, Winchilsea prevents this hierarchical interconnection from becoming too rigid and deterministic by repeating the movement in a variety of form three times. The first six lines give a basic overview of the hierarchical movement of the poem: the gentle west wind, the nightingale singing, the tree, and the owl, whose “hollowing clear, directs the Wand’rer right” (6). There is no empirical connection between the owl and the lost wanderer, but Winchilsea’s assumption of a mutual, if unconscious, cooperation between elements in nature makes such a connection inevitable. The owl and the human might be separated from each other on an hierarchic chain, but here, on “such a *Night*” (1) they are intimately connected. The movement begins again on line seven, this time with more elaborate detail, more sensual and personal stress, and a greater emphasis on the interconnection between elements in nature. Here the “gentle Zephyr” (3) does not merely fan “his Wings” (3) but blows clouds across “the Heav’n’s mysterious Face” (8). Descriptive force is added as the “Heav’ns” and the trees are shown to be reflected in “some River, overhung with Green” (9). The banks of the river are then shown to be covered with “freshe’n’d Grass” (11), and a variety of flowers, which in turn offer shelter to the “*Glow-worms*” (17); these small creatures who exhibit “trivial Beauties” (18) in the twilight, are waiting for full night and “their Hour to shine” (18). Winchilsea’s reflection upon the glow-worms leads to another of far greater significance, but still linked to the former. Whereas the glow-worms need a special time of night

¹³⁶ Patey 37.

¹³⁷ Patey 38.

to shine, Winchilsea's friend, Anne Tufton, the Countess of "Salisb'ry stands the Test of every Light" (19). She is "as bright in 'charms' (more personal or private qualities) as in 'virtue.'" ¹³⁸ Here, Winchilsea has carefully established a close connection between the wind, clouds, moon, trees, river, grass, flowers and glow-worms, but there seems less of a connection between the glow-worms and the countess than there is between the owl and the wanderer. In fact, because the countess glows with a perfection that is not dependent upon the natural world or the time of day, but upon virtues that animate her soul, she stands as a contrast to the glow-worms. Yet, Winchilsea places her there in that special night, her beauties highlighted by the lesser beauties around her, and thus constructs her as an integral part of the natural beauties with which she is compared. Like the wanderer and the owl, Salisbury is distanced from the trees and the glow-worms on the hierarchical chain, but Winchilsea's evocative observations bring her into intimacy with them.

The final section of the poem reintroduces the hierarchic structure outlined by Patey, this time with even more intensity, descriptive force and sensual power. Every element of the natural world gains in beauty and sensuality from being experienced at night: the flowers' "Odours, which declin'd repelling Day" (20), for example, "thro' the temp'rate Air uninterrupted Stray" (21) at night, while hills which are "Sunburnt" and "swarthy" in the day, convey a sense of burgeoning fertility at night when "swelling Haycocks thicken up the Vale" (28). The animals who are a natural part of this environment become even more so at night: the horse is "loos'd" (29) in his pasture, the sheep are "at large" (33), the cattle are "unmolested" (34), while the curlews and partridges, both game-birds, feel safe enough to "cry beneath the Village-walls" (35).

¹³⁸ Patey 39.

Winchilsea's use of largely female and domestic animals here gives emotional force to her argument that the night offers them a "shortliv'd Jubilee" (37) which it also offers her. The Jubilee is a Jewish celebration recorded in the Old Testament when slaves were freed and no agricultural work was done. Thus, it is not only the animals who are free at night, "whilst Tyrant-*Man* do's sleep" (38), but Winchilsea herself who feels a "sedate Content" (39), while "Silent Musings urge the Mind to seek / Something, too high for Syllables to speak" (41- 42). Where the connections between the owl and the wanderer, and between the glow-worms and Salisbury are left to the reader to make, Winchilsea articulates the relationship between herself and nature: her soul "Joys in th'inferior World, and thinks it like her Own" (46). As Patey points out, Winchilsea is not claiming that the world of the soul is the world of nature, but that to "fallen human vision"¹³⁹ it both feels like it is, and acts as a conduit to an apprehension of the divine. On the hierarchical chain, nature is inferior to the soul, but Winchilsea, while acknowledging that hierarchy, constantly iterates the intimate connections within them. At the same time, through the increasing intensification and detail that develop through the poem, Finch ensures that the reader is not considering an abstract soul or a universal understanding of nature. She moves from the everyman figure of the wanderer, to the particular virtues of her friend Salisbury, to herself and her own relationship to the closely described world of the estate that surrounds her. Unlike the traditional georgic survey, which moves from the particular to its universal analogy, Finch moves from the general to the personal, a movement emphasised by the triple repetition of a hierarchy that, in this poem, is not so much linear as spatial: Finch and Salisbury are not only connected to the higher echelons of nature, but to all elements of nature at all moments.

¹³⁹ Patey 40.

The circularity of this structure highlights Winchilsea's use of time here. Again, she does not evoke the circularity of the seasons, but a circling movement through moments of quotidian time. Winchilsea consistently invokes the idea of quotidian movement both with her repetition of hierarchic connection, and, more significantly, with the repeated phrase: "in such a night" (lines 1, 6 and 47). The phrase gives temporal movement to the night that Finch describes because of the emphasis upon repetition. It is not repeated in a seasonal movement, but in a movement that is regularly interrupted by the morning when "All's confus'd again; / Our Cares, our Toils, our Clamours are renew'd, / Or Pleasures, seldom reach'd, again pursu'd" (48 - 50). The emphasis upon "again" and "renew'd" highlights the quotidian nature of this movement, as well as the interruptive power of the daylight world. Winchilsea does not merely portray one particular night, but an exemplary night, as the day in "An Invitation to Dafnis" was an exemplary day. It is typical of the nights in which connection can be felt, and in its typicality it is repetitive. In its repetitive circling movements Winchilsea can immerse herself in the repeated experience of connection with the nature that surrounds her.

Here Winchilsea introduces a secondary connotation of quotidian: that which has a commonplace or everyday quality. The phrase "In such a night" calls up images from the end of *The Merchant of Venice* from which the line is taken. Here, the protagonists experience a magical and significant night which calls to their minds other magical and significant nights in legend or history. In using this phrase from the play, Winchilsea emphasises the sense of magic which the intertextual allusion and the sensual quality of her own imagery provides. But, at the same time, the images she draws up are of the everyday commonplace world of domestic animals and common wildflowers: owls and glow-worms, rivers and cowslips, friends and houses, smells

and shadows, horses and cows, birds and sheep. It is the commonplace invested with glamour, as Finch describes in “An Invitation to Dafnis.”

This temporal movement in “A Nocturnal Reverie” is emphasised by Finch’s syntactical construction in the poem. As has been widely recognised, the entire poem is one sentence with one main clause broken down into a series of extensive subordinate clauses. The main clause gives us the argument of the poem, the desire to stay abroad on such a night because the day inevitably takes us into troubles that can never be solved and desires that can never be fulfilled. The body of the poem, the subordinate clauses, expands upon the delights and rewards of the night-time world. Significantly, as Hinnant notes, the images used within the subordinate clauses are subject to a “temporalising process” imposed by the inevitable and necessary renewal of the day’s ‘cares’ at the end of the main clause.¹⁴⁰ The effect of containing this kind of complex development within a complex-compound sentence is to privilege the self-limiting scale of the structure itself. Whatever complexity and information a sentence contains, it remains the smallest complete component of written organisation. In this, it is analogous to a moment of time: not perhaps the smallest moment of time, but, certainly in the eighteenth century, the smallest that was commonly used to define such a unit. Thus, the structure of the poem encourages the reader to reflect not just upon the night, but upon the moments in the night in which the speaker voices her desires. This emphasis is supported by the introduction to each subordinate clause. Nearly every introductory word or phrase interjects a temporal moment: “*whilst now* a paler hue the foxglove takes” (14), or “*when* Haycocks thicken up the Vale” (28) (my emphases). It is almost impossible to read this poem without being reminded at the beginning of every subordinate

¹⁴⁰ Hinnant 157.

clause, and by the combination of clauses within the sentence, of moments of time. Hinnant argues that Winchilsea's employment of syntax "conveys the impression of a repetitive pattern in which items recur, rather than a metaphoric, unifying pattern in which things achieve oneness through resemblance," and it seems to me that this repetitive pattern operates temporally within the poem as well as syntactically.¹⁴¹ Winchilsea does not place her experiences within the context of the seasons, or of one season or of the progression of her life, but within the context of one exemplary night, amid an assumed multiplicity of such nights, and within the context of the repeated moments that construct such nights.

When we look at the body of Winchilsea's work in the georgic mode, we can see that she reconstructs genre to reflect her own understanding of how differing georgic elements operate in the female world. She does not, however, claim to speak for other women. Apart from her complaint that as a woman she is forbidden to write freely, her approach is always profoundly personal. Katherine Rogers believes that "this distinctively personal tone in Winchilsea's poetry results in a large part . . . from her being a woman — one who could not see herself as a public spokesman. Women would not feel it appropriate to voice institutional attitudes, because they were excluded from institutional activity."¹⁴² Nevertheless, I have examined Winchilsea's poetry in some detail because, despite her insistence upon the portrayal of purely personal experience, she seems to me an exemplar of how women poets expressed themselves in the georgic tradition throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, her construction of a distinct ideal of a *beata femina* of intimate connections to other women and to nature which invests not only her poetry of retreat

¹⁴¹ Hinnant 156.

¹⁴² Katherine Rogers 239.

but all her georgically inflected poetry is a construction that we see repeated again and again in women's poetry.

Winchilsea's most significant construction within her *beata femina* tradition is in the approach to time in her work. Because of her privileging of women's activities in what she portrays as a female environment, she avoids any application of a traditional understanding of temporal movement. What concerns her are the intimate activities and interactions of small accretions of time, sometimes in a day or night, sometimes in an hour, and often in a moment. "This Moment is thy Time to sing / This Moment I attend to Praise" (2 -3) she writes in "To The Nightingale." a poem about the construction of poetry which employs an image commonly identified both as poetic muse and as female. The present moment was her essential temporal unit, and while she was not unique in invoking it, her consistent refusal to place it in any time frame longer than a day or night signifies her use of it in the georgic tradition as particularly female. This is not the "Women's Time" of Julia Kristeva who argues for an essentialist understanding of women and time, but a women's time developed in particular circumstances and contexts. Excluded from the institutions that give progression meaning, Winchilsea sidesteps teleological or cyclical understanding: seasonal and teleological temporality are disrupted, and both the past and the future are brought into the present moment or reordered as geographic space being surveyed in the present moment.

Chapter Three

Three Early Eighteenth-Century Poets in the Beatus Vir Tradition.

There were several women writers in the early eighteenth century who can be associated with the ideal of a female retreat as it was articulated by Lady Winchilsea. The three women I examine in this chapter, Sarah Fyge, Mary Lady Chudleigh and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, write, like her, about the virtues of retirement and solitude. Like her, they associate these virtues with a sense of female community, with a distinctive concept of time and with a particular ability to envision transcendent experiences as well as more everyday joys. This kind of reflective poetry was not the only work they published, of course. Chudleigh and Fyge had both achieved a certain level of fame with lengthy didactic poems refuting attacks upon women by misogynistic authors and both included shorter poems of protest within their books of occasional verse. Singer Rowe enjoyed what amounted to two careers. As the "Pindaric Lady" or "Philomela" she anonymously published a mixture of pastorals and Pindaric odes in *The Athenian Mercury*. Following her marriage, early widowhood and acceptance into the literary circle surrounding Lady Hertford at Longleat, she changed from publication to manuscript circulation of religious verse within that circle. This later poetry was not published until after her death. Nevertheless, despite the fact that none of the three women wrote exclusively of a female retreat, they all developed ideas concerning it in a variety of works and, to a certain extent, employed elements of it even within poetry not obviously reflective or visionary. Significantly, despite their differing social backgrounds, the ideal of the female life of retreat they describe is expressed with notable similarity.

This similarity is at least partly a function of their employment of the *beatus vir* tradition. Valerie Edden points out that the *beatus vir* theme had “an enormous popularity in the seventeenth century”¹⁴³ and it is, perhaps, significant that all three women began writing in that period. The *beatus vir* or retirement tradition was already well established before the seventeenth century, of course. In her monumental two-volume study, *The Happy Man*, Maren-Sofie Rostvig describes the development of this convention in England from the late Renaissance to the late eighteenth century, locating its classical ancestry in the second *Epode* of Horace and in the second book of Virgil’s *Georgics*. Both Horace and Virgil praise the “happy man” who is content with his own small estate in the country and who rejects the ambitions and temptations of the city for the simplicities of rural retirement.. By the late seventeenth century this basic model of the *beatus vir* convention had metamorphised into several different forms based on Stoic and Epicurean philosophies. Thus “the happy man” might be characterised as a gentleman enjoying a modest life in the country, as in Pomfret’s *The Choice*, or he might be characterised as what Rostvig calls a “serene contemplator,” exploring the heavens or his own soul. Rostvig refers to Milton’s “Il Penseroso” as a work in this tradition.¹⁴⁴

Despite the complex development of the *beatus vir* convention, which saw the original conception diversify into several variants, all expressions of this form emphasise the virtue to be gained from living in rural solitude. In his *A Moral Essay Preferring Solitude to Publick*

¹⁴³ Valerie Edden, “Pastoral and the Literature of Rural Retreat,” *Durham University Journal* 72 (1979) New Series Vol. XLI, 20.

¹⁴⁴ Maren-Sofie Rostvig. *The Happy Man: Studies in the Metamorphoses of a Classical Ideal*. 2 Vols. Second edition, (Trondheim: Norwegian UP, 1962), Vol. 1, 19 - 28, 31 - 34, 41 and 304.

Employment (1665), Sir George Mackenzie sums up the late seventeenth-century response to the ideal of the *beatus vir* with his assertion that rural solitude is the best way to approach the perfections of the divine presence.¹⁴⁵ *A Moral Essay* was so popular that John Evelyn felt compelled to respond in *Publick Employment and an Active Life Preferr'd to Solitude* (1667).¹⁴⁶ But, despite Evelyn's objections, the ideals of rural solitude remained a compelling theme of poets and moral philosophers throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. J.G. Zimmermann's *Solitude: Or the Influence of Occasional Retirement Upon the Mind and Heart* (1798), for example, is an influential book of the late eighteenth century that repeats Mackenzie's thesis. Rural solitude is the only place where real virtue can be instilled and the true life of Christian benevolence followed.¹⁴⁷

Although Rostvig briefly discusses the work of a few women writers in this tradition, she does not address the reason why so many women poets employed this element of the georgic mode in preference to almost any other, nor does she explore the ways in which women ventriloquised the mode in order to make it relevant to their lives. Retirement is, of course, a convention that speaks with particular relevance to the domestic retreat that eighteenth-century *mores* imposed upon women. Poetry that celebrates rural retirement could be published by women poets without controversy. Indeed, the religious element of much retirement poetry

¹⁴⁵ David Allan, "'In the Bosome of a Shaddowie Grove': Sir George Mackenzie and the Consolations of Retirement," *History of European Ideas* 25 (1999), 264.

¹⁴⁶ Allan 262.

¹⁴⁷ J. G. Zimmermann, *Solitude: Or the Influence of Occasional Retirement Upon the Mind and Heart*, (London: Vernor and Hood, 1798), 30. I am indebted to Elaine Bailey for drawing my attention to this text.

ensured that it was considered to be a particularly suitable genre for women writers. More significantly, in the early eighteenth century when the domestic life of women was not highly regarded, the *beatus vir* tradition offered women poets a means to invest their restricted lives with moral and spiritual validity. The variation of the *beatus vir* tradition that emphasises metaphysical contemplation, for example, allowed intellectual women such as Fyge and Chudleigh to assert that women living in retirement were not immersed in domestic trivia but could equal men in rational reflection.

But perhaps the most significant component of these women's employment of the *beatus vir* tradition is to be found in the ways they reconfigure certain of its elements to reflect their own experiences and desires. They already had a model in the recent past of how the poetry of retreat could be used to express a subversive subtext or dissenting views. Both Earl Miner and Rostvig show that Cavalier poets often employed the *beatus vir* tradition in response to the political disorder and alienation of the Civil War and Interregnum.¹⁴⁸ At the other end of the political spectrum, Mackenzie's *Moral Essay* can be understood, argues David Allan, as "a thinly veiled and intentional critique" of Restoration politics.¹⁴⁹ Katherine Philips's seventeenth-century poem, "A Countrey Life," for example, needs to be read in light of this contextual understanding.¹⁵⁰ Thus, early eighteenth-century female poets, many of whom revered Katherine Philips, had access to a recent and compelling model showing how an established form might be

¹⁴⁸ Earl Miner, "Order and Disorder," *The Cavalier Mode from Jonson to Cotton*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971), 156 - 249. See also, Rostvig 48 - 49.

¹⁴⁹ Mackenzie 263.

¹⁵⁰ McDowell 233 - 234.

safely rewritten to express views that transgress or oppose established cultural authority.

One of the most interesting ventriloquisms undertaken by the three women I examine is their reconfiguration of the act of choice involved in living in rural retreat. Male poets writing in the *beatus vir* mode most often employ the motif of retreat to articulate a choice in their removal from the corruptions of the city or court, unless they are writing as “serene contemplators” who articulate, rather than enact, a desire to live a life of meditation. Although women writers also employ a sense of opposition between city and country, they emphasise to a far greater degree that retreat is an escape from their everyday lives, rather than a choice. They are cautious about expressing their vision in precisely these terms and they also, perhaps paradoxically, celebrate their lives within retirement. But it is worth noting that, despite a few conventional poems concerning the purity of the country as opposed to the corruption of the city, they are often more interested in escape into an imaginative or spiritual world.

Fyge uses the opposition between the city and the country more than the other women, but she uses it in ways that emphasise her lack of choice between the two. Significantly, in one of her more important poems, she describes a temporary escape from the earth which ends in a return to rural solitude only because that appears to be the least unpleasant of several options. Chudleigh rarely places her retreat in a geographic space at all but emphasises in several poems that it is, above all, a retreat of the mind. Singer Rowe began her poetic career with several fairly conventional retreat poems, but her later poetry expresses an ardent desire to escape, not from the city, but from life into death. Their reluctance to define retreat in the conventional terms of country versus court and city may be connected to the fact that women possessed almost no autonomy in their choice of abode. Most women were financially and legally dependent upon a

husband or male kinsman who determined their mode of life. Very few women were financially independent. Even those single women who had been left private fortunes in wills were socially debarred from living independently and, in any case, were rarely left with sufficient means to allow them the choice of living where and how they pleased.¹⁵¹ Fyge acknowledges these compulsions openly in her poetry but they are an unstated assumption lying beneath the desire for escape most women express in retirement poetry.

It can be risky to read too much of the lives of poets into their texts, of course, although both Fyge and Singer Rowe seem to encourage their readers to do so. We find not only a desire for escape in this poetry but also a strong sense in which these three poets, like Winchilsea, employ the *beatus vir* tradition to explore and examine their individual lives. Contemporary male poets did place themselves as subjects within their retirement poems, of course, and the *beatus vir* tradition, based as it is upon an expressed desire for a life not yet lived, encourages them to feature their own aspirations. Thus, Abraham Cowley asks in "The Wish," that:

... ere I descend to th'grave
 May I a small house and a large garden have!
 And a few friends, and many books, both true,
 Both wise, and both delightful too! 9 - 12¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Betty Rizzo, *Companions Without Vows: Relationships Among Eighteenth-Century British Women*, (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1994), 33 - 34. After examining the finances of several well-connected eighteenth-century women and the wills under which they inherited, Rizzo concludes that, "it was never intended that women should be provided with money sufficient to allow them to live independently; they were always intended to be dependent on father, husband, brother or son."

¹⁵² Abraham Cowley, "The Wish," Vol II. *The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Abraham Cowley*, ed., Alexander Grosart, (New York: AMS Press, 1967).

Yet, however personal this sounds, Cowley is expressing an idealised and conventional desire here. He is not revealing much of his personal thoughts in these sentiments. Pope's *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, and his "Ode on Solitude" convey more of his personal relationship with Arbuthnot and with the desire for retreat than other male poets in this period. Indeed, female poets may have taken their emphasis upon their personal lives from poems like these. Other male writers in the *beatus vir* mode were generally more conventional in their use of the mode, particularly in their association of public and civic virtues with the life of retreat. Allan argues that for writers like Mackenzie, "a situation of seclusion held out the best prospects of nurturing the peculiar moral qualities which political life especially required."¹⁵³ Later in the eighteenth century, Zimmermann would make equally strong connections between solitude and civic responsibility. Women poets in this early period, in contrast, highlighted individual biographical details, as well as intimate responses to their life of retirement.

Despite the personal nature of the escape that women sought in their construction of a women's retreat, another distinctive element of that retreat is their desire for connection to other women. This desire is stronger with some poets than with others. Sometimes the desire is for an intimate friendship within the retreat. Sometimes, the poet's desire to reach other women through her poetry becomes an integral part of the description of retirement. But overall we find an intimate and personal appeal to a community of women that is very different to the more public and civic connections expressed in the authoritative versions of retirement poetry. This difference is probably a reflection of the different lives that women led. Men's economic and

¹⁵³ Allan 265.

social lives were publicly organised. They met in coffee-houses and clubs, as well as through professional connections such as politics, the military or the church. These avenues were forbidden to women whose connections with each other were, of necessity, more intimate and personal, based largely on family relationships. The nearest approach most women of this period had to the public life of men was through literary coteries. These were often loosely organised and relied more on epistolary than direct interaction. All of the women in this study, except for the two labouring class writers, were members of one or more literary coteries. It is obvious from the poetic dedications at the beginning of Fyge's book that she belonged to a female circle of poets. Chudleigh too was the centre of an admiring coterie. She and Fyge were also connected through Delariviere Manley, who knew them both. Singer Rowe was associated with Winchilsea through the literary circle surrounding Lady Hertford, to which they were both attached. These literary connections, however, did not trump the ideal of the personal and the intimate in women's poetry. The supportive and affectionate nature of most coteries, indeed, seemed to emphasise the private nature of the connections amongst the members.

This emphasis upon the particular and the individual in women's retirement poetry also affected their construction of place, which, as I have noted, tends to diminish geographic specificity and privilege the self-conscious and the imaginary. When women poets do specify place they emphasise subjective responses rather than the sense of entitlement that we customarily find in men's poetry in this mode. When Fyge writes about her life in Shenley, for example, she is interested in describing her emotional experience within that place. In contrast, most male writers of retreat would tend to describe the place as a site where they confirm their sense of ownership of a tract of country property. This is sometimes described as a small estate

and sometimes as a cottage with land, but is always identified as the narrator's own property. It is usually staffed with devoted servants and stocked with productive farm animals and fields of grain. These kinds of social and economic details, often used to highlight the pastoral simplicity and sentimental traditionalism of the retreat, nevertheless focus the reader's attention upon the means by which this retreat is financed. Of course, what is being celebrated in these poems is not the ability of the narrator to finance his retreat, but the peace and virtue available there. However, the narrator himself often seems unable to imagine the retreat without an assumption of ownership and of private income. Pomfret's desire in *The Choice*, for "a clear and competent estate," for example, is expressed in the discourse of property and profitability.¹⁵⁴ Even Pope's more modest desire for a "few paternal acres" (2) to supply him with all his bodily and spiritual needs depends upon a sense of ownership that is very different from women writing in the same tradition.¹⁵⁵

All these differences between men's and women's conceptions of the retreat are most evocatively signaled in the different philosophies of time that animate the poetry. The kind of temporal movements associated with the georgic mode such as seasonal cycles or historic progression are not normally emphasised in retirement poetry. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which the *beatus vir* tradition is affected by these authorised temporalities. The concern with ancestral estates and with a cosmic sense of order that lies at the heart of much of this poetry suggests the eternal circling of the seasons. The variant emphasis upon a life of meditation

¹⁵⁴ John Pomfret, *The Choice. Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed., Roger Lonsdale., (Oxford and New York: OUP, 1984), 1 - 4 (line 33).

¹⁵⁵ Pope, "Ode on Solitude," *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, 265.

leading to a virtuous life suggests a more progressive movement. In contrast, women's poetry in the *beatus vir* mode tends more to eschew seasonal cycles or historic teleologies in order to concentrate upon the ability to access the transcendent world from the present moment or hour of contemplation. This is somewhat similar to Marvell's claim in "The Garden" that in retreat his mind "withdraws into his happiness" (42), creating "Far other worlds and other seas, / Annihilating all that's made / To a green thought in a green shade" (46 - 48).¹⁵⁶ Yet, Marvell's garden contains a clock, albeit a floral clock, which invests his retreat with a sense of investment with the forward movement of time. The "green thought in a green shade" may have been adopted as a motif in the retirement poetry of women but, in women's poetry, that "green thought" and retreat into the landscape of the mind arises from a sense of escape from the temporal world through the present moment or hour to an experience outside of time.

The differences between the retirement poetry of men and women are, as we have seen, subtle but, I would argue, are also significant. We have seen how Jean Mallinson has coined the phrase "*beata femina*" to describe Winchilsea's ventriloquism of the *beatus vir* motif. The reconfigurations undertaken by other women writers of the early eighteenth century follow broadly in the same pattern, which prompts me to employ the phrase "*beata femina*" to describe a seemingly paradoxical notion of retreat in which women writers attempt to privilege their lives as well as express an idea of escape into a transcendent world. The nature of the *beata femina* changed as the eighteenth century progressed, but these features introduced by early women writers of retreat remained important to it.

¹⁵⁶ Andrew Marvell, "The Garden," *The Complete Poems*, ed., Elizabeth Story Donno. (London: Penguin, 1985), 100 - 102.

I. Sarah Fyge

The poetry of Sarah Fyge is characterised by a less cautious challenge to male authority than we find in the poetry of Lady Winchilsea. Fyge was the daughter of a wealthy London apothecary and was presumably well-educated, because she was only fourteen when she began to compose a poetic rebuttal, *The Female Advocate*, to Robert Gould's misogynistic *Love Given O'er: Or a Satyr Against the Pride, Lust and Inconstancy &c. Of Woman* (1682). *The Female Advocate* was published in 1686, apparently without her permission, when she was sixteen and it was an immediate success. Despite her father's anger at this evidence of independence which saw her banished to relatives in rural Buckinghamshire, she oversaw a revision and new edition in 1687. She agreed to an arranged marriage to Edward Field, a London lawyer, in 1687, perhaps in response to the notoriety attached to *The Female Advocate* and to her family's enduring anger, but she continued to write and circulate verse. Some of this, such as "The Emulation" expresses anger at the restricted lives of women. It was during this period that she became part of a female literary circle and was invited to contribute to Delariviere Manley's anthology eulogising Dryden. After her husband's death, she returned to the country to marry a much older cousin, the Reverend Thomas Egerton, in 1700. There has been some speculation, partly based on a series of poems praising the charms of "lovely" Alexis, that she fell in love with a young neighbour during her second marriage.¹⁵⁷ It was certainly unhappy. Within three years of the wedding, Egerton was petitioning for divorce because of his wife's adultery and she was counter-suing because of his cruelty. Both petitions failed. In the same year, perhaps as a response to the unhappiness of her personal life, Fyge collected her poetry into one volume and published it as

¹⁵⁷ Fyge, "The Vision." (Line 34), *Poems*.

Poems on Several Occasions.

Interestingly, despite Fyge's own history and the inclusion of poems clearly illustrating her wide-ranging intellectual interests along with others hinting at her romantic obsession for Alexis, Fyge felt compelled to write a dedication claiming a kind of virginal innocence for herself and her poems. Of course, writers would often make modest prefatory disclaimers about their work, a standard rhetorical topos of humility, particularly in this early period when publication remained suspect. Women writers felt an even stronger necessity than men to assert their own moral virtue and the unthreatening nature of their verse. In including this preface, Fyge appears to be merely following convention, except that there is almost something ironic in her tone. Addressing her patron, Lord Halifax, she claims that only an "unlucky Accident" took her poems into print.¹⁵⁸ Implying that *Poems* contains only minor pastoral poetry, she also apologises for the limited range of her work and describes her poems as if they were unsophisticated young ladies needing the protection of male authority:

Our Sex is confin'd to so narrow a Sphere of Action, that things of greater consequence seldom fall within our Notices; so that Love seems the only proper Theme (if any can be so) for a Woman's pen. . . . These Poems . . . I offer to your Lordship with all their Pristine Bloom, unsully'd by a vulgar touch, not handed round the Town for Opinion and Amendments; but just snatcht from their Recluse in all their native Rudeness and Simplicity, presume for Shelter from your hospitable Hand. They never were abroad before, nor e'er seen but by my own Sex, some of which have favour'd me with their

¹⁵⁸ Fyge, "Dedication to Charles, Lord Halifax.," *Poems*, A2.

Complements, and I was too much a Woman to refuse them.¹⁵⁹

Yet, despite these conventional apologies, Fyge does not, like Winchilsea, publish only her most innocuous work, retaining her more transgressive verse for manuscript circulation within a sympathetic coterie. *Poems* contains works which angrily describe women as slaves, as well as poems which elaborate upon her erotic obsession with a young man, and others which reflect upon scientific or religious subjects.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when we examine Fyge's poetry of retreat, we find a far more transgressive approach to the genre than we see with most other female writers. Nevertheless, there are some distinctive similarities between Fyge and her female contemporaries. One of the most significant similarities is her approach to the employment of time. Fyge, like Winchilsea, was, of course, aware of the authoritative movements of time that usually animated poetry in this tradition but privileges instead an emphasis upon the meditations of the present moment. "The Advice" is more of a reflective than a retirement poem, but it indicates how she envisions time within her ideal of retreat. In this poem Fyge addresses her soul as if she were a female friend. She tells her "busie Soul" (1) to "let distant Things alone" (1) because "only the present Time's thy own" (2). Both the past and the future are phantasms which cause us to either "dread or grieve" (6). In contrast, the "present Hour" (90) and the "present Day" (82) are described as "Useful Estates" (92) given by Heaven (81) to benefit our souls. Thus Fyge teaches her soul to "enjoy each Moment then" (84), without regard to other temporal considerations, and to remember that in each day "the fleeting Moments post away" (83). These "fleeting moments," of course, point to the fact that whereas male philosophers have hours each

¹⁵⁹ Fyge, "Dedication," A3- A4.

day in which to meditate, women have only present, stolen moments for self-reflection. At the same time, there is a georgic inflection to this poem, in which a busy or working soul is urged to take care of its estate, because those who overly concern themselves with the future are like city speculators, “always creditors to Fate” (94). This is a fascinating way to present the retirement convention of opposition between the virtuous country and the corrupt city, particularly as Fyge is not describing a country estate but the response of her soul to the passing of time. Her soul is envisioned as a place of retreat here, and her emphasis on the present moment is part of her conception of the life of the *beata femina*

Of course, many male writers also wrote of the importance and evanescence of the present moment, but they did so in ways that distinguish their emphases from those of women. The *carpe diem* motif of the early seventeenth-century poets, for example, found most notably in Herrick’s “To the Virgins to Make Much of Time” and Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress,” is employed as a cynical reminder that the human body does not have much time in which to experience sensual delight. This emphasis is different from the poetry of Fyge and many other women writers, in which the present moment and the everyday life of work and pleasure in the natural world offer an enrichment to the soul. This evocation of the importance of the moment is, in fact, more closely echoed in Isaac Watts’s short poem, “On a Ceiling Dial”:

Little sun upon the ceiling,
 Ever moving, ever stealing
 Moments, minutes, hours away;
 May no shade forbid thy shining,
 While the heav’nly sun declining

Calls us to improve the day.¹⁶⁰

It is, perhaps, worth noting that Watts, a dissenting clergyman, was a close friend and mentor of several women poets, including Lady Hertford, Lady Winchilsea and Elizabeth Singer Rowe, some of whose published works he edited. Significantly, Watts also acknowledged that at least one woman poet, Singer Rowe, had influenced his own work, inspiring him to abandon secular verse for sacred poetry.¹⁶¹ It is clear that Watts participated as an active and sympathetic supporter of women's writing and might be expected to share in some of their interests and traditions. Indeed, many women writers may have been influenced by Watts's beliefs in the importance of employing every moment of every day for the purposes of redemption. Nevertheless, in the body of his work Watts remains committed to a progressive rather than a quotidian concept of temporal movement. His readers are constantly exhorted to "improve" the hour by considering past behaviour and future intentions in the light of a salvation placed at the end of a temporal journey marked by months that "whirl[] about the year."¹⁶² This philosophy is somewhat different from Fyge's emphasis upon a present moment which is given by heaven as a place of georgic labour for the soul, or from Finch's portrayal of the present moment as time where heaven can be surveyed as a geographic site. While neither of them, I believe, would deny

¹⁶⁰ Isaac Watts, "On a Ceiling Dial, Usually called a Spot-Dial made at a Western Window at Theobalds," *Reliquiae Juveniles: Miscellaneous Thoughts in Prose and Verse on Natural, Moral and Divine Subjects; Written Chiefly in Younger Years. The Works of the Late, Reverend and Learned Isaac Watts D.D. Vol.I.* (London: Printed for T. and T. Longman etc, 1753).

¹⁶¹ Isaac Watts, "To Mrs Singer (Now Mrs Rowe) on the Sight of some of her divine Poems never Printed. July 1706," *Vol II. Horae Lyricae: Poems Chiefly of the Lyric Kind in Three Books*, Eleventh edition, (London: T. Longman etc, 1764).

¹⁶² Watts., "To John Hartopp Esq." (2), *Book II. Horae Lyricae*.

Watts's belief that the present moment should be understood as part of a cumulative temporal movement to salvation, their own emphasis upon the quotidian is not as reliant as his upon ideas of teleological movement.

Interestingly, Fyge not only appears to resist the forward temporal movement of historical progression but also appears to reject the motiveless succession of mechanical time. Those who would try to determine what might happen in the future, she states in "The Advice," become "Links in th'inevitable Chain" (37), which takes them on a relentless forward movement into potential disaster. Her use of the phrase "inevitable chain" here seems to refer to the working of clocks and watches. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the inevitable forward momentum of clockwork was driven by the working of "chains." This use of a clockwork metaphor is emphasised by her use of a simile in which she compares a man attempting to determine his future with "some unlucky Engineer" (41). The word "clock" was interchangeable with "engine," and "clockmaker" with "engineer" or "mechanic" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although Fyge's engineer is brought to disaster through the construction of fireworks which bring the world into confusion "with one afrighting Blaze" (51) rather than with clockwork, the poem continues to convey a sense that the mechanical world of which clockwork chains and clockmaking engineers are a part, is a world of unforeseen disasters. Fyge, of course, is warning her readers that it is pointless to concern the self with the future because it is impossible, even in the apparently deterministic world of mechanics, to foresee what might happen. But the fact that she voices this warning through an extended simile involving images of technology and clockmaking is a useful reminder that women's interest in the momentary and the quotidian did not originate in an admiration of mechanical time, but in the circumstances of their

lives.

In Fyge's retirement poetry, an emphasis upon the circumstances of her life reflects her interest in conveying a quotidian temporality. Retirement for Fyge, as we have noted, was not a matter of choice, and her representation of retirement ventriloquises the convention to underscore this sense of compulsion. This compulsion is particularly evident in a poem written in response to her banishment to the country. In "On my leaving London, June the 29th" she describes the way that a malevolent Fate denies her any choices in her life. Fate is an ever present but rather ambiguous figure in Fyge's poetry. Here, it is tempting to associate Fate with her father who banishes her from the city, except that she blames Fate for taking her "Father's love away" (19). As Fyge claimed that her offending poem was published without permission, she may well have felt that Fate was an uncaring and unpredictable force in the world, and her reference to the "sad Accidents" (35) that sent her into the country seems to support this reading. However, more compelling is her description of her banishment in terms of a gambler forced to leave the table when her "Gold was gone" (22) and she was "Plunder'd of all" (23). This seems to describe a risky undertaking for which she is now being punished. I would argue that Fate, for Fyge, is that element of social and cultural control that restricts women to certain types of conduct and punishes them when they transgress.

In response to her bitterness at this unjust operation of Fate, Fyge writes an anti-retirement poem that emphasises women's alienation from the kind of behaviour admired in men and that eschews authorised poetic conventions. She reverses the conventions normally associated with the *beatus vir* mode. The city is not a site of corruption, but a place that contains "all [her] Joys, and all [her] Treasure" (24). The country is merely a "lonely Village" (27) where "Man and Beast

are both of equal Sense” (29). Fate, which “doth act the Tyrant’s part” (5) has sent her into “this Retreat” (36), and all she can hope for is to be allowed to live quietly “in this humble Seat” (37). She even refuses the conventional retirement desire for visiting friends, because her visitors would remind her of her exclusion from the world of civilised manners. This poem is interesting not only because of its reversal of established conventions, but because of her insertion of the personal and particular into what is usually a generalised or universalising mode.

In other retirement poems, Fyge ventriloquises rather than transgresses the established conventions, recreating the genre in its accepted form but subtly reorganising it to reflect her belief that, as a woman, she is subject to Fate, in contrast to the retired man who is usually presented as someone in control of his life, his mind and his passions. Fyge combines the two characterisations in “The Retreat” so that the conventions of the standard retreat poem stand in opposition to her unconventional stance within the poem. The city is thus conventionally drawn as a “gaudy Sphear” (7), and the pleasures she had enjoyed there are dismissed as “the Follies of my former State”(5). The life of the countryside, in contrast, is described as “the Copy of lost Paradise” (23) where “renowned Poets had their Birth” (32). Here, Virgil, “the *Mantuan* Swain gain’d all his Bays” (40) and “Monarchs, weary of their state” (43) have “thought that silent Shades far happier than Thrones” (46). But, in spite of these conventional sentiments, the reason that Fyge gives for abandoning the city for the country is to escape Fate. She will disappear from the “glittering Seat” (9) so silently that “Not the softest Sigh shall sound retreat, / Lest Fate should over-hear, . . . / Pursue me now and so undo me quite” (10 - 12). The pun on “retreat” both here and in the poem’s title compromise the conventionality of this poem in a way that is pure ventriloquism. Most poems in the *beatus vir* tradition emphasise choice. One of the

most well-known poems in the tradition is called “The Choice,” and retirement poems by Cavalier writers who were forced into rural exile imply that a free choice was made. Fyge’s use of the word “retreat” in an image that calls up the retreat of an army before a victorious enemy calls into question this convention. Fyge is in the country, not because she chose to live the life of the *beatus vir*, but in order to escape the misfortunes of Fate. She will no longer “move” like a star in the firmament of the city (7) but rather hide in the “Silent Shades” (45) which “know no surprizing Strife” (29). This is not so much choice as compulsion, and, while she finds rewards in that compulsion, she has nevertheless significantly altered the *beatus vir* concept to reflect the lack of choice that she and most women in the eighteenth century experienced.

Lack of choice is emphasised again in “On my leaving S[henle]y.” This poem was probably written originally in response to her unwilling marriage to Edward Field. Field lived in London, so after a year’s enforced rural retirement, Fyge was required to return to the city. The marriage was eventually a happy one, as evidenced by her poem “On my Wedding-day,” but at the time the poem is set Fyge, who would then have been seventeen, could not have known that. Whether the poem was written in response to her first marriage or not, the emphasis, as in her earlier poem, is upon enforced leaving and her lack of control in her own life. In order to emphasise this lack of control the retreat to Shenley, which was described as “a place which doth poor Pleasures yield” (19) in “The Retreat” is here characterised as a “safe Harbour” which “kindly did receive, / My shipwrack’d Vessel” (3 -4). Caught in a storm and “Left to the Mercy of the faithless Winds” (17), she is eventually led by “some kind Star” (19) to her “repairer and security” (20). In other words, it is not choice that has taken her to Shenley but the operations of Fate. A disastrous Fate has followed from her “persuit of Passion and Renown” (28) in the city,

and a benevolent Fate has taken her to Shenley. The life of the *beata femina* in Shenley, while it nevertheless offers “those solid Joys [she] elsewhere sought in vain” (32) cannot restore the damage a malevolent Fate has wrought on Fyge’s “tatter’d Bark” (18). A ship that has lost “Masts and Tackling” (22) has lost propulsion and cannot be steered. Developing the nautical imagery further, Fyge describes herself as “a Pleasure-Boat in [Shenley’s] smooth streams, / . . . / Where no rough Winds but a safe Oar commands” (23 - 25). Without sails and equipped only with oars, she cannot move of her own volition away from the countryside. She is happy there and believes she has learnt greater wisdom than when “With Gilded Stern and Gaudy Sails [she] mov’d, / Fraught with this Wish, be Great and be Belov’d” (5 - 6). But she cannot leave until “the Fates again do summon” (33) her back to the city. Again, she has no choice in this movement. She trembles at leaving Shenley (2) for the “loath’d Ocean Popularity” (34), but she appears to lack the ability to refuse.

As we can see, Fyge displays a somewhat ambivalent attitude towards the country and towards the conventions of the *beatus vir* tradition. She strongly implies that choice is rarely present for women in retirement to a rural retreat. Nevertheless, she also seems to argue that the only escape from the consequences of a potentially hostile Fate which punishes women for attempting to leave their restricted lives is, ironically, retirement to the country where it is possible to free oneself in the world of imagination and art. Retirement to the country is not always portrayed by her with Virgilian or Horatian fervour but she does imply that only in the quietness and innocence of the country can art be created and the visionary experience enjoyed. Thus, even in “On my leaving London” she claims she will try to be “content” in her “lonely Village” (27), while in “The Retreat” she associates rural “Solitude” (41) with “Paradice”(23)

despite her lack of choice in being there. It offers her a “Pure and spotless Quintessence of Blis” (24) in which she can “live, whilst others spend a Life” (30). In other words, instead of wasting her life, like her erstwhile friends in the city, she can now live for the contentment and serenity of the day and find some kind of transcendence in “The calm Conceptions of a studious Breast” (39).

Unlike other women writers in this tradition, Fyge does not overtly associate these “calm Conceptions” with named intimates. However, there is an underlying and prevalent sense of a female community throughout the text. The dedicatory poems by female poets which introduce *Poems* situate Fyge, as we have seen, at the centre of a female literary community, to which, despite her dedication to Lord Halifax, her text is obviously addressed. When she tells Lord Halifax that her poems have only ever been seen by other women, she hints at female friends who have, perhaps, edited, as well as read, her manuscript work.¹⁶³ It is also worth noting that several of the poems are addressed to her female friends. One of these, “To Clarona,” hints that her passion for Alexis was known to her female intimates.

If this female community was so important to her, why does it not find greater expression in her retreat poetry? I would argue that one of the losses she had to come to terms with in her banishment was the loss of her female circle. In “On my leaving London,” for example, she complains of being forced to “bid Mother, Sisters, sad adieu” (31) as well as “all I knew in Town” (32). Later, she begs Fate not to allow her friends to “know where to send to me” (38), because their “Civility” (39) will upset the equilibrium of being “not pleas’d nor cross’d” (40) but

¹⁶³ Margaret Ezell notes the practice of mutual editorial work being undertaken by the members of literary coteries.

“to all the busy World as lost” (41). This desire for isolation even from her friends is, as we have seen, a final reversal of convention, in a poem which reverses all conventions. Yet Fyge’s emphasis upon the loss of community, which seems to be the “joys, and . . . Treasure” (24) she has lost, lends significance to that community. In “The Retreat,” she continues to suggest the significance of friendship when she concludes that “Joy[]” (49) can only be found “in a Friend, and well-chose Solitude” (52). However, in “On my leaving S[henle]y,” no friends are introduced into the catalogue of consolations that Shenley has offered her. This ambivalent response to friendship seems to echo the ambivalence with which she approaches all the conventions of rural retirement. Yet, in the context of the body of her work female friendships are obviously important. It seems to me that in her retreat poems, she struggles to situate a sense of the life of *beata femina* within the conventions of the “happy husbandman.” Her community of family and friends are in the city and, despite her eventual acceptance of the joys of rural retirement, her representation of it never seems free of her resentment of the compulsion that took her there.

When Fyge turns in “The Extacie” to a variation of retirement poetry that Rostvig has associated with what she calls “the serene contemplator” we gain a much stronger sense of the freedom from compulsion Fyge seems to long for.¹⁶⁴ She also seems to have resolved the question of where to situate the presence of a female companion through a strategy, already seen in “The Advice,” of addressing her own soul as if she were an intimate friend. Fyge appears to have adapted “The Extacie” from Abraham Cowley’s, “The Extasie,” published as one of his *Pindaric Odes* in 1656. Although Cowley’s “Extasie” takes the reader on a voyage through the

¹⁶⁴ Rostvig 304.

universe, rather than through a survey of an earthly landscape, it is nonetheless to be considered part of the *beatus vir* tradition because it draws, as Rostvig has demonstrated, on the georgic ideal of the philosopher-poet “whose courage from the Deeps of knowledge springs.”¹⁶⁵ In the mid to late seventeenth century, in particular, the *beatus vir* was more often portrayed as a Virgilian searcher after truth than as a Horatian “happy husbandman.” Virgil’s country philosopher assumes a Christian guise, viewing “Nature as a divine hieroglyph which, when properly studied, bespeaks a secret spiritual connection with the Deity.”¹⁶⁶

Fyge, with her somewhat conflicted approach to the *beatus vir* tradition, would have found much to interest her in Cowley’s intellectual and spiritual portrayal of the virtues of retirement, which draws on the ideals of the new science, as well as Christian revelation, rather than on a classical Stoic or Epicurean conception of retirement. From the internal evidence of her *Poems* we can assume that she was well-read in both religious and natural philosophy, with poems on the works of Robert Boyle and on subjects as diverse as geography and atheism forming part of the collection. One can be certain that such a literate woman would have read a popular writer like Cowley, and the points of comparison between the two poems are strong enough to suggest that she had Cowley in mind as she wrote her poem. The adaptation she undertakes offers an interesting female commentary on his conception of the activities of the life of the *beatus vir*.

One of the main differences between the two poems is that while Cowley’s tone is

¹⁶⁵ Virgil, *The Georgics. Book II.* Lines 490 - 512.
See also, Rostvig, 25 - 7 and 305 - 6.

¹⁶⁶ Rostvig 304.

elevated and aloof, Fyge introduces particularity and intimacy at every level. Thus, as Cowley leaves “*Mortality* and things below” (1) to mount higher and higher through the heavens where “th’arched *Magazines* . . . hold / Th’eternal Stores of *Frost*, and *Rain*, and *Snow*” (17 - 18),¹⁶⁷ he adopts an impersonal third person perspective. Fyge begins with the same upward motion “into the Sacred Magazine of Light” (8), but, unlike Cowley, she creates an intimate sense of one person talking to another by addressing her reflections to her soul who is making the journey. Another change that Fyge introduces in contrast to Cowley’s journey upward and outward, is to move immediately back down to earth, so that the scenes Cowley describes as he leaves the planet are described by Fyge as she returns. Again, the effect is to bring the visionary experience closer to the reader, rather than to distance the reader from the disappearing narrator as Cowley’s poem does. This distancing in Cowley’s poem is emphasised by his deployment of a five-stanza extended simile comparing his own ascent with that of Elijah the Hebrew prophet in a way that seems to apotheosise his soul:

The Mighty *Elijah* mounted so on high

....

(As Conquering *Kings* in *Triumph* go)

....

And wondrous was his *Way*, and wondrous was his *Coach*.

....

The *Horses* were of temper’d Lightning made.

....

He past by th’*Moon* and *Planets*, and did fright

All the *Worlds* there which at this *Meteor* gaz’d. 49, 54, 56, 65, 68, 81- 2.

Cowley’s concern here is to make his own experience like Elijah’s, transcendent, triumphant and

¹⁶⁷ Abraham Cowley, “The Extasie.” *Vol. II. The Complete Works in Verse and Prose of Abraham Cowley*, ed., Alexander Grosart, (New York: AMS Press, 1967).

exalted. Fyge's version rejects the comparison to Elijah and brings all of Cowley's sentiments down to earth, quite literally:

Descend thou daring Spirit, think 'tis fair
If thou may'st traverse the inferior Air

....

Mount *Charles's Wain*

Drive over all the Etherial Plain,
And to augment thy Speed,
With blazing Comets lash the Restive Steeds
Make them neigh aloud and foam,
Till all the Sky a milky way become;
What tho' they Fret and Rage,
To pass their wonted Stage.

....

And as ye go, see what Inhabitants there are
In every world, of every Star
Their Shape, their Manners and their State,
Write in a Journal as ye go,
And to the inquireing Earth relate;
By dropping it below.

18 - 19, 28 - 35, 38 - 43.

Cowley's noble breed of horses made of tempered lightning are portrayed as supernatural beings, but Fyge's restive carthorses pulling an astral haywain have an earthy reality that draws the reader in more intimately. Even Fyge's use of the folk name "Charles's Wain," as opposed to the more scholarly "*Ursa Major*," brings this fantastical adventure into the sphere of the domestic and the intimate. Similarly, while Cowley's meteor-like chariot is viewed by alien astronomers with astonishment before it disappears into the unknown (81 - 88), Fyge instructs her soul to take the

time to observe all the beings she encounters and to write about them in a journal on her way back to earth, investing this strange experience with a personal and intimate response.

Significantly, women were encouraged in this period to reflect upon religious experiences in journals: it was one of the few forms of literary activity that was not prohibited to them. In asking her soul to write of this cosmic experience, Fyge emphasises the female nature of her soul and of the female character of the meditation that has enabled this journey. The journal is also a private, reflective, prosaic form, and thus associated with the female sphere, as opposed to the formal, Pindaric, public and heroic mode of Cowley's traveller.

When Fyge returns to Earth the two poems diverge even more drastically. Cowley allows only one stanza for his description of the Earth, and his tone of despair at the evils of men as they fight a civil war over the speck of dust that is England (as viewed from high above) probably coloured Fyge's version. Her detailed and lengthy survey is original with her, however, and it emphasises still further the tone of intimacy and particularity with which she invests this dream-vision. She also introduces the same element of Fate that colours her other retirement poetry. Human beings on the earth, whether they are peasants on their farms (140 - 160), soldiers at war (161 - 173), or aristocrats and wealthy men in courts and cities (174 - 185), are all characterised as slaves. This is a much wider application of the condition of servitude than we find in Fyge's other poems, which suggest simply that slavery to Fate is a condition peculiar to women. Here, perhaps inspired by her visionary experience, she acknowledges that no human being is truly free.

As she undertakes this characterisation, her mode of address alters from offering instructions to her soul to giving the reader a survey of the Earth and the people who inhabit it. This change in address underscores the move from the visionary world to an empirical description of the earth. The possibilities of the universe may have been described by her with intimacy and familiarity, but they remain amazing possibilities, whereas the return to earth involves a closing down of possibility and wonder. There might be "vast variety" in "this small Plat" (53), but all

this variety ends in darkness and violence. At sea, British ships, “the stately Trophies of *Britannia’s Pride*” (62) sail to the East Indies where “The Frighted Natives do our Traffick fear / And doubt we will invade” (68 - 69); on land, the “vast scorcht Desert” contains “untamed Beasts and Monsters” (88 - 89), while mountains either “belch with Terror forth” (92) or are “congeal’d as hard” by “restringent air” as if “with Adamantine barr’d” (99 - 100). Her use of the prospect survey and her Latinate diction seem to claim a privilege for the female voice which foreshadows Anna Laetitia Barbauld in poems such as “The Invitation” and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*. Fyge’s female soul has soared into the cosmos and reflected upon what she has experienced there. That experience now enables her to undertake a survey of the earth and its political systems, assuming a more public voice normally restricted to male commentators. At the same time, her sense of discomfort with military action seems to reflect the position of other female writers, again, notably, Barbauld.

Significantly, Fyge’s return to earth after this experience allows her to choose to live in rural retirement in a way that is free from compulsion. This is still a world in which human beings are slaves, but she can now decide to live where slavery is least burdensome. Her survey of the English countryside describes “flowry Meads” (134), “ancient Woods” (136), “purling Streams” (138) and verdant plains covered with “bleating Flocks and Herds” (142). The “joyful Peasants” (143) are “Innocent Slaves” (150), only “Happy because too mean to be undone” (160). They have as little choice in their fate as the “Troops of shining men” (162) who are “poor mercenary Slaves” (165) or as the wealthy and aristocratic men who are “little less ensnar’d” (175) than any. At the end of the poem Fyge recalls that she must make a return to one of these realities, and begs the “bless’d Powers” (190) that she will be allowed to live with the “harmless Nymph and humble Swain” (193) as the best life possible in a world controlled by Fate. Only in this kind of retreat can she hope to live “undisturb’d” (194).

It seems to me that Fyge’s conception of Fate and of the nature of retirement is closely intertwined with her desire to be immersed in the present moment. One of the most interesting

elements in her poetry of retreat is her refusal to address any kind of extended temporal movement. Even in those poems where she reflects upon the rural scene, she avoids any suggestion of season or month. In "The Extacie" she removes the temporal elements that are present in Cowley's original. In "The Advice," she tells her soul to concentrate only on the present moment because the past and future pollute the present with regrets, plans and fears that can never be resolved. In particular, the desire to look into the future is portrayed as a disastrous undertaking leading only to confusion and disorder. For Fyge, looking into the future is thus, quite literally, tempting Fate, which is elsewhere described as a bearer of disaster. Only in retirement in the country can she hope to hide from Fate because in the country there is no activity or reaching forward into the future to catch Fate's attention. Her ship in "On my leaving S[henle]y" does not go anywhere: it simply describes a circle from one bank to another. When she is asked to make a choice at the end of "The Extacie," she chooses a life with the least movement possible, in which she will not be disturbed by the activity of the wider world. In contrast, in those poems that describe the trauma of events in London, she uses the word "move" or "movement" to illustrate her own disastrous course.

Although Fyge's retirement poems are all considerably darker than those of Anne Finch, they share a number of interesting similarities. Perhaps the most obvious is the intimacy and particularity with which both authors infuse this tradition. They insert themselves and their personal histories into georgically inflected poems that were commonly employed to express conventionalised pleasures and moral lessons. Thus, even visionary experiences are infused with a quotidian quality. Both authors turn the *beatus vir* tradition to a *beata femina* trope in which georgic retirement is not only an escape from the evils of the city, but an escape which is profoundly different for them because of their gender. Fyge's approach to temporal experience also bears similarities to that of Finch. For both, the momentary is more important than the teleological or even the cyclical. The momentary offers them a spiritual and intellectual freedom lacking in the authorised temporal movements of cycles or historical progression.

II. Mary, Lady Chudleigh.

The retirement poetry of their contemporary, Mary, Lady Chudleigh echoes this concern with personal intimacies and constricted time scales. In some ways Chudleigh had more in common with Winchilsea than with Fyge. She came from a background of landed gentry and married into a family who were also of the landed gentry. She spent most of her life on a west country estate and, unlike Fyge, she instigated no public scandals. It has often been assumed, on the basis of some of her writings, that she was unhappily married. However, the belief that an unhappy marriage was at the root of her literary ambitions has been questioned by recent scholarship.¹⁶⁸ As many commentators have noted, in an age when it would have been difficult for a married woman to publish without her husband's permission, Chudleigh's husband raised no public objection to the most radical of her poetry, even giving permission for it to be published after her death. Nevertheless, despite her genteel background, Chudleigh, like Fyge, embarked upon publication with a response to a misogynistic text. Her poem *The Ladies Defense, or the Bride-Woman's Counselor Answer'd*, published in 1701, went into four editions and made her, as her editor Margaret Ezell has noted, "a public figure, a poet whom strangers read; they sought her friendship and they sent their own verses to her for comment." Like Fyge and Finch, she was part of a literary circle whose members, mainly female, celebrated Chudleigh in their own poetry as "Marissa."¹⁶⁹ Like other female poets of this period, she was also extremely cautious about print publication.¹⁷⁰ Thus her preface to *Poems on Several Occasions* claims that her poems are

¹⁶⁸ Ezell, "Introduction," *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed., Margaret Ezell, (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1993), xxiii - xxv.

¹⁶⁹ Ezell, "Introduction," xxxi.

¹⁷⁰ Janine Barchas, "Before Print Culture: Mary, Lady Chudleigh, and the Assimilation of the Book," *Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture: Serious Reflections on Occasional Forms: Essays in Honour of Paul J. Hunter*, ed., Dennis Todd and Cynthia Wall, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2001), 18 - 19 and 29 - 30.

designed for “the Ladies . . . to whose Service they are intirely devoted.”¹⁷¹ This claim to a respectable audience is underscored by her dedication of her book to Queen Anne. As well as claiming a respectable audience, Chudleigh emphasises the moral and intellectual tone of her text. It is not to be read merely for pleasure, she implies, but for the opportunities it offers for meditation. In this way Chudleigh hoped to differentiate the serious nature of her work from the trivial romantic lyrics that she believed were associated with published works for women and which, as Janine Barchas argues, she felt kept women contented with their restricted position.¹⁷² Barchas notes that Chudleigh saw print as a means of educating women and rejected its potential function as mere entertainment.¹⁷³ Accordingly, a strong didactic element runs through her poems. She attempts to teach women to “retire into [them]selves [and] to live upon [their] own Stock.”¹⁷⁴ Her retirement poetry, therefore, while it employs the conventions more faithfully in some ways than Fyge’s, is nevertheless self-consciously adapted for this female constituency she has constructed as a privileged readership of her verse.

This manifesto in Chudleigh’s preface is illustrated by the first poem in her collection, “On the Death of his Highness the Duke of Glocester,” which is an odd mixture of public, heroic commentary and private, personal reflection upon the virtues of retirement. The Duke of Gloucester, who died of smallpox at the age of eleven in 1700, was the only child of Queen Anne to survive infancy. Because of this, his death had significant political implications, and Chudleigh addresses these in the elaborate manifestations of despair expressed by the narrator and

¹⁷¹ Mary, Lady Chudleigh, *Poems on Several Occasions*. (1703), *The Poems and Prose of Mary, Lady Chudleigh*, ed., Margaret Ezell, (New York and Oxford: OUP, 1993). All citations of Chudleigh’s work are from this edition and are identified by title and line number. See also her “Preface,” 44.

¹⁷² Barchas 27.

¹⁷³ Barchas 29.

¹⁷⁴ Chudleigh, “Preface,” 45.

by various mythological figures. The reader encounters a lengthy eulogy for the child (114 - 148) given by the "British Genius" (108), a description of the despair of the poet (234 - 254), an account of the sorrow of the nation represented by various gods and spirits (97 - 113, and 203 - 232), and of a lengthy assurance by St. George that the young prince has been received into Heaven by his illustrious ancestors (255 - 358). But within this rather stiff and formal portrayal, three sections stand out. At the literal centre of the poem is a strikingly intimate portrait of the suffering of the queen and her husband. There is something very poignant in Chudleigh's image of the royal couple standing helplessly by the bed of their dying child (153 - 172) that is at odds with the formality of the rest of this section. The queen, who had been addressed in the most deferential terms in Chudleigh's dedication, is here stripped of majestic trappings to become simply a mother who "lives only to lament" (192) and who can speak of "nothing but her mighty loss" (194). This sense of intimacy is revived at the end of the poem as the poet refuses to be comforted by the images of heaven St. George has constructed because the queen still grieves. While her "lov'd Princess" (366) continues to weep, the poet herself "ne'er can cease to mourn" (378).

At the beginning of the poem, sitting even more oddly than these two sections, is what Rostvig has described as "a confession of the personal faith of the poetess."¹⁷⁵ In a series of stanzas that appear to have nothing at all to do with the death of the Duke of Gloucester, Chudleigh has constructed what is almost a free-standing poem of retreat. In an image reminiscent of Fyge's "On leaving S[henle]y," Chudleigh describes herself as a being lost at sea. Unlike Fyge, however, she is not shipwrecked but makes a conscious choice to reject "the gaudy Poms of Life" (15), and begs for "some little safe Retreat" (11) where she will give her time "to nobler Uses . . . / And to [her] Books and Thoughts entirely live" (24 - 25). The Muse "well pleas'd" (29) approves her choice and leads Chudleigh "to the Shades she lov'd" (30) where the

¹⁷⁵ Rostvig, Vol. I, 301.

poet experiences “Raptures not to be express’d” (57). As Rostvig points out, this is “a highly intellectual existence”¹⁷⁶ which Chudleigh nevertheless compares to “those first fam’d Abodes / Of happy Men and rural Gods” (31 - 32). It is, in fact, not a portrait of a Virgilian or Horatian Golden Age, nor a description of a place, but a poetic rendering of her description in her preface of the good life for women: to retire within themselves and, through serious study and reflection, acquire wisdom and serenity.¹⁷⁷ For Chudleigh, geographic place does not matter in the *beata femina*. The “Shades she loves” are not specified as a particular rural landscape but as a place of escape within her own mind.

The only obvious link between this portrait of the *beata femina* and the rest of the poem is that Chudleigh’s studies within her retreat are interrupted by the news of the young duke’s death. Yet, although there is no truly thematic link between these sections, Chudleigh obviously had a purpose for constructing her initial poem in the collection in this way. The preface gives us a clue to that purpose. Here, she posits a community of women readers for whom she will be a loving mentor. Part of what she hopes they will learn in the retreat of the mind that she advocates is the ability to accept with grace the death of those they love.¹⁷⁸ Although Chudleigh does not specify the death of children in the preface, almost nothing in the eighteenth century could represent a more universal experience for women as the loss of a child: the mortality rate for children was extraordinarily high. Even if a woman was childless herself or was lucky enough to see all her children become adults, she would most probably be only at one remove from the death of some loved child. In “On the Death of his Highness” the queen is recreated as a member of this female community: a suffering mother rather than a sovereign. Men also suffered from the deaths of children, of course, but the poem makes it clear that Chudleigh believes they are not affected by

¹⁷⁶ Rostvig, Vol. I, 302.

¹⁷⁷ Chudleigh, “Preface,” 44.

¹⁷⁸ Chudleigh, “Preface” 45.

the experience with the degree of despair women feel. The queen's husband is "calmer, more resign'd, / And had the stronger, more Majestic Mind" (179 -180). In contrast, the queen gives way to her grief because, states Chudleigh, "Maternal Kindness still does preference claim, / And always burns with a more ardent Flame" (186 - 187).

If the queen is indeed repositioned as a member of the community of women Chudleigh addresses, then the retreat described at the beginning of the poem can be understood as something she offers the queen as solace for her grief. Significantly, when Chudleigh refuses the comfort offered by St. George, she begs the same muse who had led her into retirement to "strive by [her] Charms to calm [the queen's] troubled Mind" (373). For Chudleigh, as her preface and the first four stanzas of the poem make clear, this retirement is as much a state of mind as a physical place. In this retreat of books and contemplation the muse could, through the "Magick of [her] Verse" (375), not only restore the queen's "former Peace" but "add Delights unknown before" (376). The muse is never identified, and as readers we are led by this lack of identification to associate her with a spirit of poetry, and thus with Chudleigh herself. In begging her own muse to lead the queen to serenity, Chudleigh positions herself with regard to the queen just as she has already positioned herself with regard to her other women readers: as a mentor who will teach her how to retreat into the pleasures of the intellect.

The fact that the end of Chudleigh's poem shows her and the queen still grieving does not devalue the consolation she offers. On a purely practical level, Chudleigh, who had previously claimed the queen's patronage in her dedication, would, of course, wish to be associated with her grief, and could not appear to be too overtly offering her advice. Nevertheless, in terms of the integrity of the poem, Chudleigh's refusal to abandon the queen also emphasises the concept of the interdependence of women that is an integral part of Chudleigh's portrayal of a female retreat. As another of her poems of retreat, "To *Clorissa*," makes plain, Chudleigh shares with Finch and Philips the belief that even "Alone in some belov'd Retreat" (20) the companionship of a close female friend "Enlarge[s] each Pleasure, lessen[s] ev'ry Care" (69). This is something of a

paradox, of course, but it is one common to the *beata femina* tradition. This is a particularly female world to which Chudleigh would lead the queen, one in which shared feelings and intimate friendships have more meaning than political teleologies or authorised conventionalities.

In this female world, the death of the duke is not understood primarily as a public event but as a personal tragedy. Chudleigh has ensured that we link this personal understanding to a female conception of the world by attaching extreme manifestations of grief to female characters. In contrast, in what may be termed a public understanding of the same event, the duke's death is constructed as a political tragedy for the nation which has lost so promising a young prince. The duke himself is then placed within the pantheon of his ancestors by the nation's patron saint, and comfort is offered to the nation by the sense of continuity this sequence contains. Princes and sovereigns have died, often in tragic circumstances, but the country, represented here by St. George and Britannia, continues to thrive. That Chudleigh associates this public understanding with a male point of view is evidenced by her descriptions of Prince George and St. George. Prince George remains "Majestic" even in his sorrow. St. George smiles consolingly, but actually berates Britannia and the national spirits for mourning too deeply now that the duke has joined his ancestors. "No more / Your time in useless Sorrow spend" (264 - 265) he states, as he sends every mourner back to their appointed tasks.

In contrasting these two ways of understanding the duke's death, Chudleigh also contrasts two kinds of temporality. In the stanzas in which she describes the world of retreat she acknowledges only "hours in Extasies employ'd" (69), rather than weeks, months or years. At the same time, she also conveys a sense that a considerable duration has passed since she entered that world: she has lived "serene and calm from every Pressure free" (71), and the past is "forgot, as if in *Lethe's* Stream" (77). A similar construction informs "To *Clorissa*" in which the two women "talk the flying Hours away" (72) until they are "summon'd to a higher State" (75) and "meet again in the blest Realms of Light" (76). In these constricted time scales, which nevertheless appear to encompass years of experience, Chudleigh and her female companions are

immersed in a life which takes little account of external temporalities.

In contrast, when the young duke enters heaven, he enters a hierarchy and a movement of historical progression that is remarkably similar to the one he left on earth. In describing the line of ancestors who greet the prince, from “the *Danish* Heroes . . . who long had ancient Kingdoms sway’d” (280) to his aunt, Queen Mary, “who lately grac’d the *British* Throne” (305), Chudleigh emphasises an authorised and teleological progression that she associates, through her narrator St. George, with the public world of men. She does not overtly dismiss this temporal construction, even though it stands in contrast to the temporality of her retreat in which “Joy . . . Hope . . . Love” (68) are confined to the “soft Hour” (58) of solitude, and in which “the past was all a Dream” (78). Indeed, the British Genius, Britannia and the whole concourse of nature celebrate St. George’s vision of heaven (329 - 358). Even Chudleigh’s muse urges her to “rejoice” (342) with the rest of the nation. Chudleigh accepts the necessity of publicly authorised understandings of history and teleology. But her inability to acquiesce in St. George’s vision does signal a personal scepticism about the temporal understanding privileged in that vision. When comfort is found, she implies at the end of her poem, it will be found in the “Shades . . . in Love” (372) where the past disappears in the serenity of the soft hours.

Chudleigh did not reject male authority or male models. She lived the accepted life for a woman, quietly in the country with her husband. Her first printed text certainly challenges misogynistic attitudes to women, but she was an admirer of many male authors. Her *Poems on Several Occasions* includes a eulogy to Dryden, “On his excellent Translation of *Virgil*,” and an imitation of Horace in “the happy man.” Many of the other poems in the collection are written in the Pindaric form as it was championed by Cowley. But her ventriloquism of established forms, as we have seen, does privilege a female understanding of retreat in which brief periods of time expand to include an eternity of experience. Thus her Pindaric ode “To Solitude,” while it owes a significant debt to Cowley and “many others” in its generic form and in its assertion that only

intellectuals have “the ability to enjoy solitude,”¹⁷⁹ nevertheless seems to reflect the beliefs of her female contemporary, Sarah Fyge, that an obsession with the past or the future is inimical to a sense of personal order and serenity.

In “To Solitude,” Chudleigh once again organises the world into two orders of being. The first are those intellectuals “Who to their Thoughts are so familiar grown, / That with Delight in some obscure Recess, / They cou’d with silent Joy think all their Hours away” (3 -5). As we have seen before with Chudleigh, these hours of joy make up a life, for she claims that when “the confining Clay / Fall[s] off” (6 - 7), these “glorious Beings” (10) ascend easily to Heaven where “They bask with Pleasure in eternal Day” (20). But, as she points out, “few are for retirement fit” (22), and a second order of beings “chuse in Crouds their time to waste” (25). Wasting time, according to Chudleigh, is a matter not only of immersing oneself in the active world, but of concerning oneself excessively with past and future. We labour to gain “some distant Good” (50), which, when it has been obtained, becomes part of a past for which we “Sigh, and grieve, and still repine, / Curse Heav’n, our selves, our Friends, our Fate” (59 - 60), until a new temptation arises. Then we strain towards a new future, so that “In laborious Nothings [we] waste our Short Remains of Day” (69). Or, “when distant Ills we see, / The dismal Prospect us affrights” (70 - 71) and afflicts us with “a mean dishonourable Dread” (74). Maintaining the metaphor of a geographic survey, Chudleigh describes the raging passions such a dread can create as a “mighty Torrent” (85) which “Destroys the snowy Flocks, and lays Majestick Structures low” (87). Whether we are cast down because we feel sorrow for our previous losses or dread for the future, or whether we are elevated because our fears have been proved baseless or we have some future desire to pursue, we carry within ourselves “a second *Chaos*” (42) in which “the earthly Particles”(34) are forced upwards or downwards in meaningless movement.

Like Fyge, Chudleigh appears to visualise the soul as a site of georgic labour, an estate

¹⁷⁹ Rostvig. Vol.I: p. 303.

with flocks and buildings, that must be nurtured if it is not to be thrown into "Anarchy" (98). Chudleigh does not deny that things like crops indeed grow over time and in cycles. But the shape of human growth is determined, according to Chudleigh, by attending to our health and our outlook *today*. She privileges, therefore, the primacy of the present moment within longer historical and life cycles. The future, she implies, will take care of itself if we pay proper attention to the here and *now*. Indeed, any obsessive concentration upon the past and the future and the fears and desires associated with them, is likely to overthrow the fragile order of the soul. Only by conceiving of life as one day at a time, and then committing ourselves in retirement to hours of study and contemplation, can we establish order and serenity. This is not, however, simply the solitary retirement of the "serene contemplator," although, as Rostvig has shown, Chudleigh was influenced by this model. Chudleigh's concentration upon quotidian temporalities and named relationships, in which hours of talk with particular friends is seen as an essential part of the pleasures of retirement, marks her vision of retreat as an essentially female one. Like Winchelsea and Fyge, she makes a virtue of present moments that can be stolen from one's other responsibilities. Restricted to a domestic life in the country, she creates a retreat of freedom from the restraint the stereotypical life in which "women . . . could cultivate themselves."¹⁸⁰

III. Elizabeth Singer Rowe.

Elizabeth Singer Rowe was one of the most popular and critically acclaimed authors of either sex in the eighteenth century. Born into a middle-ranking dissenting family in the provincial town of Ilchester in Somerset, she gained early popularity when she sent her first poems anonymously to the *Athenian Mercury* without her father's knowledge when she was only nineteen. She achieved such a success with them that, as Sarah Prescott has shown, the journal's

¹⁸⁰ Williamson, 299.

“commercial survival . . . owed a great deal to Rowe’s contributions.”¹⁸¹ As well as individual works in journals and miscellanies, her work was often collected into books of poetry, prose and letters that went into eighty nine editions between 1696 and 1840. Her works were also popular on the continent, where they were translated into French and German. As I have already noted, she became a celebrated member of the literary circle that surrounded Lady Hertford, which included such luminaries as Isaac Watts, James Prior, (both of whom proposed marriage), John Dyer, James Thomson and Lady Winchilsea. Her elegy for her husband, “On the Death of Mr. Thomas Rowe,” was so highly regarded by Alexander Pope that he included it in his miscellany, *Poems on Several Occasions* (also known as *Pope’s Own Miscellany*) in 1717, and again in his second edition of *Eloisa to Abelard* in 1720. Madeleine Forell Marshall even argues that *Eloisa to Abelard* is inspired by Rowe’s elegy and forms “a critical response” to it.¹⁸² Marshall makes a compelling argument, but whether Pope was influenced by Rowe’s elegy or not, the fact that he included her work with his own indicates his critical approval of it and confirms Rowe’s position as a widely admired poet in the early eighteenth century.

Singer Rowe sustained without criticism this remarkably public position for a woman by projecting a persona in her writings that embodies the idealised female figure. In her life and work she emphasised her extreme piety, her chastity, her immersion in rural solitude in Frome, and above all, her submission to male authority in the figures of her husband and father. This conventionalised persona has led many scholars to assume that her work is highly conventional and derivative. Marlene Hansen, for example, finds only a few hints of radical feminine beliefs in her early works. According to Hansen, those hints can be found in passionate poetic epistles to

¹⁸¹ Sarah Prescott, “Provincial Networks, Dissenting Connections, and Noble Friends: Elizabeth Singer Rowe and Female Authorship in Early Eighteenth-Century England,” *Eighteenth-Century Life* 25:1 (Winter 2001), 31.

¹⁸² Madeleine Forell Marshall, *The Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674 - 1737)*, (Lewiston / Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1989), 28.

other women, and in Elizabeth Thomas's politically radical preface to her edition of collected poems in 1696.¹⁸³ However, Marshall argues that Rowe used her exemplary persona to find a female voice that could speak "with authority but without indecorous presumption."¹⁸⁴ She struck this balance, according to Marshall, by investing her poetry both with the conscious virtue to be found in the poetry of an increasing number of women writers and with a sensuous and affective expression of pious adoration.

Her particular use of "the imagery of divine love" was not original with her, as it looked back to the poetry of John Donne and Richard Crashaw, but it was no longer a literary commonplace by the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁵ Isaac Watts, for example, was concerned that some of her poetry actually risked public censure because of its intensity of expression, while Rowe herself, when she asked Watts to edit her work, argued that there was "no vanity" in her plan to publish her religious works because she was aware that "such thoughts as these will not be for the taste of the modish part of the world."¹⁸⁶ Metaphysical poetry was, of course, rejected as a dated and awkward form by the beginning of the eighteenth century, part of a larger rejection of seventeenth-century diction and a rejection of the kind of religious enthusiasm it seemed to describe. The ideal in the eighteenth century was for a sense of decorum and balance "between the capacities for moral solitude and for social engagement" portrayed by the poised and

¹⁸³ Marlene Hansen, "The Pious Mrs. Rowe," *English Studies* 76:1 (Jan 1995), 37 - 9.

¹⁸⁴ Forell Marshall 85 - 6.

¹⁸⁵ Forrell Marshall 20.

¹⁸⁶ Elizabeth Singer Rowe, "Mrs. Rowe's Letter to the Reverend Dr, Watts, at Newington," *Devout Exercises of the Heart in Meditation, Soliloquy, Prayer and Praise*, (Edinburgh: C. Bugloss, 1766), xxi.
See also Kathryn King, "Elizabeth Singer Rowe's Tactical Use of Print and Manuscript," *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550 - 1800*, ed., George I. Justice and Nathan Tinker., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 169.

courteous gentleman.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the value of religious intensity for Rowe was that it highlighted “‘feminine’ receptivity rather than ‘masculine’ assertiveness.”¹⁸⁸ It did not, therefore, require Singer Rowe to disrupt her feminine persona by engaging with a masculine style of debate or of rational analysis. She could emphasise the intuitive and the sensitive in her response to the pleasures and virtues of solitude and construct a poetic voice that gave her authority as a passive translator of divinely inspired emotion. This may not be the more overt ventriloquism described by Donna Landry, but it became an increasingly influential strategy for women throughout the eighteenth century.

Marshall’s argument brings an interesting dimension to any consideration of Rowe’s work, particularly when we examine her construction of a life of *beata femina*. Like Chudleigh, Rowe advocates a rural retirement in her early poetry that leads to a communion with God. Unlike Chudleigh, however, she does not visualise this retirement as a solitary development of the intellect, but as an affective immersion in the beauties of nature. In “On the works of Creation” she describes the way that God is present to her in every aspect of nature:

Beauty complete, and majesty divine,
In all thy works, ador’d Creator, shine.
Where’er I cast my wand’ring eyes around,
The God I seek in ev’ry part is found.
Pursuing thee, the flow’ry fields I trace,
And read thy name on ev’ry spire of grass.
I follow thee through many a lonely shade

¹⁸⁷ Lawrence E. Klein, “Sociability, Solitude and Enthusiasm,” *Enthusiasm and Enlightenment in Europe, 1650 - 1850*, (San Marino, Calif: Huntington Library, 2001), 155.

¹⁸⁸ Marshall 22.

And find thee in the solitary shade.

1 - 8.¹⁸⁹

This is a poem of rural retirement which refuses the tension between city and country, even as it privileges the natural world. Instead of arguing that there is greater virtue in the country than in the city, Singer Rowe ignores the city as she highlights the way that she finds the constant and continuing presence of God in the natural world. Like other women writers in this tradition, she does not articulate any sense of entitlement over this landscape. Indeed, Singer Rowe venerates the landscape as embodying God in the world. There is as well something of Winchilsea's delight in the sensuous beauty of nature as Singer Rowe describes what she sees:

I meet thee in the kind refreshing gale,

That gently passes thro' the dewy vale.

The pink, the jess'min, and the purple rose,

Perfum'd by thee, their fragrant leaves disclose. 9 - 12

Like Winchilsea, the poet finds God in geographic space in a particular moment rather than in the contemplation of a temporal journey. This strategy can be understood as something of a paradox in this poem because of Rowe's narrative fiction of a walk. She moves through the 'dewy vale' as the sun "drinks in light from [God's] exhaustless streams" (18) until the moon "reveals [God] by her glimm'ring ray" (19). However, because of Rowe's emphasis upon her continuing present moment encounters with God in the landscape, we gain a quotidian sense of her experiences with the divine. Singer Rowe does not deny the historical reality of progression through life to death. Her poem concludes with a desire for a time when "the heav'nly scene, without controul" (39) will "Open in dazzling triumph on my soul" (40), but that end is always signalled in the "shadows" (35) of the present moment in nature.

¹⁸⁹ Elizabeth Singer Rowe, *The Miscellaneous Works in Prose and Verse of Mrs. Elizabeth Rowe Fifth edition, corrected. To which is added , The History of Joseph, a poem in ten books*, (London: J. Buckland *et al*, 1772). Unless otherwise stated all citations are from this edition and are identified by title and line number.

Even at the beginning of her career, before she had fully developed her eventual authorial persona, Singer Rowe portrays herself as a being inspired, even divinely constrained, to write of the spiritual joys of the female retreat. In “*To one that perswades me to leave the Muses,*” she again echoes Winchilsea in equating literary composition with work that she must undertake.¹⁹⁰ Her “*active Genius will by no means sleep*” (13), she states, so that she *must* write or “greater mischief do” (16). Also like Winchilsea, she promises to avoid the current fashion for satire (7 - 10) because heaven has “assign’d” her “a Retreat” which inspires her to serious and religious composition (19 - 20). Nevertheless, her lyrical description of “*delightful Hills, refreshing Shades, / and pleasant Valleys*” (22 - 23) associates sensuous as well as spiritual joys with her retreat. She offers a variety of reasons for her determination, but her true reason is “*because!*” (36). In other words, there are no reasons, but a compulsion, which she has already identified as divine in origin.

In the same poem, she lists the typical female attitudes and training that she must abandon if she is to succeed at this task (37 - 59). Instead of listening to the ill-informed dictates of her female teachers and governesses, she will instead go “to Church . . . / And walk as if I sojourn’d by the hour” (48 - 49). Religious piety, literary labour and the pleasures of retreat are thus equated and set in opposition to trivial female concerns. Rowe’s temporal reference here extends the sense of “hour” to a lifetime, in a similar manner to Chudleigh. Significantly, it is placed in the middle of her rejection of the timewasting concerns of most women and thus stands in contrast to their ignorance and waste of life. There is a purposiveness to Rowe’s walk that invests her “hours” with meaning. She becomes a pilgrim, whose labour is to find God, a labour which, like Pope’s in *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, involves the work of poetic construction.

This labour becomes a more passive construction in “To Mrs. Arabella Marrow in the

¹⁹⁰ Elizabeth Singer Rowe, “*To one that perswades me to leave the Muses.*” “Selections.” *The Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (1674 - 1737)*, ed., Madeline Forell Marshall.

Country”¹⁹¹ This is a more conventional poem of retreat in many ways. Marshall calls it a “traditional pretty picture of country retreat” which echoes *L’Allegro*.¹⁹² Rostvig places this kind of poem by Rowe in the *beatus vir* model of writers like Philips, Cowley, Norris and Watts.¹⁹³ However, it is also a particularly female retreat which evokes intimacy between friends and a pious virtue which, as in “On the Works of Creation,” seems inherent in the retreat itself. Rowe constructs a traditional opposition between the delights of “the verdant field, / The grove, and mossy fountain” (1 -2) of the country, and the “sound of faction . . . / Ambition, hate or jealousy” (24 - 25) associated with the city. But in this poem the corruption of the city becomes an evil which actually seems to threaten “*Belinda’s* breast” (30) unless nature can protect her with “that soft repose, / Which from virtue only flows” (32 - 33). It is, of course, part of the *beatus vir* tradition that country life offers relief in its quiet simplicity from the noisy luxury of the city and that truth can be found in the works of nature, but Rowe’s version takes us a step beyond that. There seems to be an active agent of piety in the “tuneful feather’d throng” (7) or the “fragrant gales” (10) of the countryside which involves no effort by Belinda to interpret. She is neither a happy husbandman nor a serene contemplator. The active presence of God that is always embodied in nature in Singer Rowe’s verse acts upon the passive Belinda as a gift of grace.

This sense of religious grace in retreat is enhanced by the blessing that begins the poem. In calling down blessings on her friend, Singer Rowe signals that the retreat in this poem is the life of *beata femina*. Singer Rowe’s philosophy of retirement is significantly different from authoritative male versions of the *beatus vir*. It is not merely a Christianised version of Stoic or Epicurean philosophy, but a more intense immersion in divine transcendence through nature.

¹⁹¹ Singer Rowe, “To Mrs. Arabella Marrow in the Country,” in “Selections., *The Poetry of Elizabeth Singer Rowe*, ed. Forell Marshall.

¹⁹² Forell Marshall 32.

¹⁹³ Rostvig, Vol. II 113 - 115.

This immersion probably resulted from her dissenting background, but also results, I would argue, from a sensitivity both to nature and to the experience of the divine in nature which Singer Rowe herself would identify as distinctly feminine. The blessing offered from one friend to another as she invites her to share this experience emphasises the female character of this experience. The blessing invokes an intimacy between women that is an important part of the *beata femina*. It also invokes a temporal period because of its emphasis upon an act of communication. The period in which the blessing is offered, perhaps in a letter, becomes the governing time period for the poem. As in her poem, "To Chloe: An Epistle," Rowe privileges the moment of communication when she begs her friend to "try / What artless sweets the country scenes supply" (1 -2). Thus the temporal movements of "the gentle, blooming spring" (3) and the "summer in [its] glory" (4) are governed by that moment of communication.

The changes that Rowe makes to the *beatus vir* tradition are, of course, very nuanced, but if we compare Rowe's vision of rural retirement with that described in Pomfret's *The Choice*, for example, which was published at the same time, we can trace a significant difference. *The Choice*, claims Rostvig, citing Dr. Johnson, "was perused more frequently than perhaps any other composition in the English language,"¹⁹⁴ and was a highly influential poem in the eighteenth century. It "accumulates one pleasant detail after another, most of which concern external circumstance rather than internal values" and is designed to appeal to "the enthusiasm of middle class readers" who would feel a natural interest in the details of servants, silver plate and well-cooked, but simple meals with which Pomfret illustrates the life of the "happy man." In contrast, Rowe was responsible for popularising the inclusion of religious piety into the retirement tradition, and for "introducing the motifs of rural retirement into pious literature designed for middle class religious circles."¹⁹⁵ In "*On Love*," for example, Rowe constructs a survey of the

¹⁹⁴ Rostvig, Vol. II 146.

¹⁹⁵ Rostvig, Vol. II, 147. See also 112 - 115.

heavens similar to those of Fyge, Chudleigh and Cowley, but here the elements of the universe are filled with an active and creative love that comes from “the mind of God” (10). The “eyes” of the stars “sparkle” with “propitious love” (1 - 2), the moon “Darts soft glances thro’ her gloomy veil” (4), while the sun “kindles . . . the flames of love” (6) as “With gentle beams he warms the teeming earth” (7). God is characterised here, not as the more commonplace cosmic clockmaker, but as the “SPIRIT of Nature, its informing soul” (15) who is found “in fields, or floods, or thro’ the spacious skies” (18). For Rowe, the female retreat is something more than a place of retirement, virtue, study or literary inspiration. It is an opportunity for visionary experience where the poet encounters God in every moment of every day.

This particular recreation of the retirement motif, taking as it does, elements from male and female models, and emphasising “feminine” receptivity, piety and affective engagement, articulates a new model of the transformation of the *beatus vir* into the *beata femina*. Rowe’s concept of temporality also feminises the *beatus vir* motif with her rejection of extended time periods and her desire to reach God within the present moment. We have already seen something of this in her retirement poetry, but it becomes even more evident in her georgically inflected religious verse. In “On Love,” for example, Rowe’s cosmic survey privileges the diurnal movements of the moon and the sun, but, somewhat surprisingly in a poem about the God of nature, she avoids extending her survey to the temporal movement of the seasons or a temporal progression towards death. The diurnal movements of the sun and moon do not lead cumulatively to an unmediated comprehension of the divine at the end of time. Instead, they contain divine and creative love *within* their daily movements: the moon reveals “the glorious truth” (3) each night, and when the sun “comes forth in majesty above” (5), he “gives ten thousand various forms their birth” (8). In “The Wish” the poet expresses impatience with historic progression, claiming that “My life, by one bright course of piety, / And not by months and years should measur’d be” (29 - 30).

There is, of course, a preference for death expressed in much of Singer Rowe’s religious

poetry which implies a sense of temporal progression. But it is worth noting how often she treats temporal progression with impatience. In "Soliloquy XII," for example, she begs the hours to "Dance on . . . on soft and downy feet" (1) so that she can "fix [her] longing eyes" (8) on "celestial excellence" (9). This impatience is intensified in "Soliloquy XXVII" when she asks, "How slowly moves the sun? How dull the wheels / Of nature? Roll along, ye planets, fly / In shorter rounds, and measure out my day" (1-3). In this poem the natural movements of time are equated with the "wheels" of the heavenly spheres and are seen as a hindrance to her complete communion with God. Here, she abandons her previous delight in the blessings of the diurnal movement of sun and moon, and her erstwhile joy in the visionary moment as her conception of life becomes overwhelmed with her desire for a communion with God outside of time. It is worth noting that when she constructs this particular vision, her imagery of the natural world loses its tone of sensuous pleasure. She no longer expresses her enjoyment of the warmth of the sun or the light of the moon. Her life becomes "this tedious day, this interval of woe!" (4). It is as if she loses her connection to a feminine immersion in the moment when she abstracts herself from nature to concentrate solely on the divine. But it is also worth noting that, even within this vision of frustrated desire, she imagines her life not as a number of years but as a day, and death as a nightfall in which she can achieve complete consummation.

In "Soliloquy XLI" Singer Rowe articulates a resolution to this temporal impatience. As Marshall notes, the poem "opens with a heartfelt plea for the acceleration of time."¹⁹⁶ "Ye lagging months and years, take swifter wings" (1), the poet begs, "And bring the promis'd day, when all my hopes / Shall be fulfill'd." (2-3). Nevertheless, she comes to accept that "the hours must be fulfill'd, / And all their winding circles measur'd out" (10-11) before she can enter the realm where "Time shall be no more" (26). She also acknowledges that life is given meaning by the momentary visions arising from the natural world. Using the language of the geographic

¹⁹⁶ Forell Marshall 63.

survey, she concludes the poem by asking that she might be granted permission to often visit these “gay realms” (58), where in the intervals of bliss she can survey “the charming prospect of eternal rest” (62) which is “always present with my soul” (63). In “Soliloquy XL” this resolution is even more pronounced. Here she acknowledges that “no audacious glance from mortal eyes” (28) can pierce “the bright unveil’d Divinity” (27). She will instead, she claims,

. . . safely in reflection meet
 His scatter’d beams, and find in all his works
 The God in shining characters imprest.
 I Trace him round me now with vast delight;
 Among the lavish springs that proudly roll
 Their silver riches o’er the painted meads. 30 - 35

There is still a desire for death here in her impatience to “launch . . . into the deep abyss / Thro’ vast infinity” (82 - 83), but as she describes her ability to discover heaven in the present moment, she offers a resolution to the impatience she feels in a world bounded by time. Her resolution in both these poem is somewhat similar to Winchilsea’s in “A Petition for an Absolute Retreat” and in “A Nocturnal Reverie.” Winchilsea, too, surveys heaven from the “winding circles” of her time on earth and finds transcendence in her delight in nature. Like her, Singer Rowe envisions heaven as a geographic place which can be surveyed from her continuing, present moment delight in the natural world.

In many ways the “Soliloquy” poems can be seen as a natural development of her distinctive creation of an ideal of the *beata femina*. Beginning with a philosophy in which rural retirement, often with female friends, allows her immediate access to the divine, she then adopts an understanding of meditation in which nature is figured as a reflection of the unmediated presence of God for which she longs. This is necessarily a more individual retreat than we have seen with other women poets but remains, I would argue, a distinctively female retreat. It owes little to the classically-based conception of the *beatus vir* in any of its manifestations, and while it

may owe its origins to the Metaphysical poets, its roots in a sensitive intuition of the divine presence in every moment and experience of the natural world seems to be original with her. The Metaphysical poets did, of course, associate the garden with the meditative life and even employed the motif of the garden as an “emblem of meditation,” but these enclosed gardens are different from the uncultivated landscapes described by Singer Rowe.¹⁹⁷ Her use of time in her poetry is also distinctively feminine. Rowe is not always consistent in her employment of temporal movement: sometimes the diurnal round is a source of joy, and sometimes it is portrayed as a delay in her ultimate communion with God. But, immersion in the present moment in nature is always presented as a means to a visionary experience, which, for Rowe, is equated with God’s presence in the natural world.

In this emphasis upon the present moment and upon a sensitive and intimate connection with the nature which often includes named intimates, Rowe can be associated with Winchilsea, Fyge and Chudleigh, as a woman writer who constructs a distinctly feminine concept of the *beatus vir* trope. This feminine philosophy, is, as we have seen, connected with an understanding of temporality that rejects authorised temporal movements, to concentrate on a temporality that better reflects the constrained, intimate and domestic world of women. This is an understanding of time in which the present moment or the present hour of reflection within more extensive temporal periods is privileged as a temporal understanding that can be grasped by women in their quotidian lives.

¹⁹⁷ Stanley Stewart, 112.

Chapter Four

Two Labouring Poets of the Mid Eighteenth Century.

The life of the *beata femina*, as it was envisioned by Winchilsea, Fyge, Chudleigh and Singer Rowe received a significant adjustment in the poetry written by labouring women. To a certain extent, poetry by working people was an eighteenth-century phenomenon. The most famous labouring poet was Stephen Duck, a farm labourer, who, on the strength of *The Thresher's Labour*, received patronage from Queen Caroline and education as a cleric. But there were several others, including a shoemaker and a footman. Doody argues that this phenomenon reflects the desire of eighteenth-century poetry to encompass all possible expressions of experience. It is also probably true that the growing ubiquity of the publishing industry had an effect both on literacy rates and on the ability to become published. Despite these opportunities for publication, however, labouring poets were rarely considered to be anything other than somewhat novel curiosities, and their work was seldom given serious critical attention. Nevertheless, I would argue that the work of Mary Collier and Mary Leapor had a recognisable effect on certain productions by women poets. As labouring women their work has a stronger element of the depiction of domestic labour than the earlier writers whose work I have examined and they ventriloquise the georgic mode in ways that introduce a recognisably different and class-defined approach to traditional tropes. As we have seen, the early eighteenth century denigrated women's domestic labour, even the household management skills of middle-class and aristocratic women, as trivial, and women themselves seemed to acquiesce in this judgement. Winchilsea scorned women's domestic role and mourned the loss of women's true work as the artists and poets of their world. Other women adopted the *beatus ille* motif of *The Georgics* as a way of giving meaning to their lives in domestic retirement. Collier and Leapor may have found their lives of domestic labour difficult and exhausting, but they also wrote about it in great detail and demanded recognition for it.

The poetry these two women write can nevertheless be included in the larger tradition of the life of the *beata femina*. Like Winchilsea and Chudleigh, and, to a lesser extent, Singer Rowe and Fyge, both Collier and Leapor emphasise a sense of female community in their poetry. Collier and Leapor underscore this sense of community, as I shall argue, in different ways. Throughout *The Woman's Labour*, Collier consistently positions herself as a member of a disadvantaged community for whom she writes and which stands in opposition to the male authors who undervalue it. Leapor constructs a community of female kitchen workers in "Crumble-Hall" who infuse life into a lifeless household. Collier and Leapor may not write about living in retirement, as do Winchilsea or Fyge, but they do envision, like them, a segregated domain of women, with its own traditions and interests, that gains authenticity from the sense of connection its members all experience.

But perhaps the most significant similarity between the earlier women writers and these working women from the mid-century is in the sense of temporal movement with which they permeate their portrayal of female community. We have seen how Winchilsea and the writers in the *beatus vir* tradition rejected established temporal movements and even expression of clock time, in favour of an emphasis upon the present moment, whether that moment is a minute, an hour or a day. From these moments of contemplation, they could envisage transcendent possibilities that lifted them above the everyday world. Collier and Leapor, probably because of their working lives, do not articulate the same sense of transcendent possibility. But in poems that conventionally require either an emphasis upon seasonal circularity or upon a sense of progressive teleology, they both follow the earlier women writers in rejecting traditional, authoritative expressions of temporal movement. Instead, they too focus upon the day or the hour and find within these quotidian periods a meaning for their lives as women that cannot be measured by the seasonal cycles of georgic or the historic movements of the country-house poem.

It might be argued that the changes Collier and Leapor introduce into the traditions of women's poetry would have been read by very few later women poets and, if read, not examined with any real seriousness. Indeed, I have found no evidence of women poets in the late eighteenth century who claim to be influenced by either. Moreover, it might be argued that the development of domestic ideology was the most likely catalyst for a new emphasis in women's poetry of the late century upon women's domestic role. Nevertheless, editions of both Collier's and Leapor's work were published into the late eighteenth century, implying a continuing readership for their work, and the most probable readership for poetry that largely concerns women's lives would be women. I would not wish to overstate their influence, but the emphasis of both these writers upon the value of female domestic labour, the community of women and the temporality of the moment indicates a continuity of concerns between the women writers of the early and late eighteenth century.

What is perhaps surprising about these women is the extent to which they seem comfortable employing tropes and intertextual references that we might assume would only be available to a literate readership. Collier claims to have received no formal schooling at all and to have been taught to read and write by her mother. Leapor did receive schooling from a Free School, but it was not extensive. The fact that largely self-educated women could write with apparent ease in a variety of different modes is evidence of the spread of print culture into the provinces and into the labouring class in the eighteenth century. Collier reports having become acquainted with poetry and mythology from books and prints available to her through the libraries of employers. Leapor was able to afford some books of her own and also borrowed from the libraries of employers. Their use of classic references may not always have been very extensive or sophisticated, but they had gained some familiarity with classical authors, including Virgil (in translation), Shakespeare, Milton and Pope, before they became known as writers themselves and were thus introduced to patrons who mentored them.

Linda Zionkowski argues that this spread of print texts, which was supposed to have had a liberating effect on eighteenth-century culture, actually worked to contain the poetic expression of labouring class poets by channelling their work into accepted conventions defined by their middle class benefactors.¹⁹⁸ It is certainly true that the poems examined here do not display overtly radical departures in theme or construction from contemporary male models, and, indeed, if they had, they would perhaps never have been published. On the contrary, one senses a certain satisfaction felt by these labouring writers in their ability to employ conventions which, in an eighteenth-century context, signify their membership in the poetic community. Interestingly, this sense of satisfaction is strengthened by the way these conventions are then used, subversively, to express ideas that indicate the women's awareness of their difference from the mainstream both in their gender and their class. Collier uses the Virgilian motif of the beehive, for example, to illustrate the exploitation that women labourers suffer, while Leapor reconstructs the country-house genre to undermine nearly everything that it usually represents. In this way, they are acting more assertively than the socially privileged female writers of this period, who are normally more cautious in their questioning of established forms. However, while labouring women might express greater subversive energy, it is still disguised within conventional tropes and forms.

I: Mary Collier.

This subversion of standard tropes and themes is particularly pointed in the most famous poem written by Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*. Collier was a washerwoman and day-labourer in the households and farms around the Hampshire town of Petersfield. According to her autobiographical preface in the 1762 edition of the poem, she was educated by her mother but otherwise had no formal schooling. She was first inspired to write poetry by reading *The*

¹⁹⁸ Linda Zionkowski, "Strategic Confinement: Stephen Duck, Ann Yearsley, and the Problem of Polite Culture," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 13: 3 (Nov. 1989), 91 - 108.

Thresher's Labour by another labouring-class poet, Stephen Duck. *The Thresher's Labour* introduced a new and startling note into the production of georgic poetry by showing what rural labour really entailed. Significantly for Collier, Duck's account contains a resentful criticism of women labourers, who are characterised as gossiping time-wasters and who are compared by him to a flock of noisy sparrows. As Anne Milne points out, sparrows were considered to be agricultural vermin, and "were hunted by bounty in the eighteenth century," so Duck's use of this simile is not merely demeaning but aggressively contemptuous.¹⁹⁹ By her own account, Collier was so stung by Duck's portrayal that she wanted to gather "an Army of Amazons to vindicate the Female Sex."²⁰⁰ *The Woman's Labour* is her response, a georgic poem which rewrites the mode to take account of women's reality. It was initially circulated orally amongst friends and employers and eventually published through the encouragement of her employers but without the royal or aristocratic patronage that Duck enjoyed.

Collier begins her poem with an address to Duck that somewhat ironically acknowledges this difference in status. He is "an IMMORTAL Bard!" who has been "enrich'd by Peers, advanc'd by CAROLINE!" (2), while she is merely a "Slave" (6) whose life is "spent in Drudgery" (8) and who has nothing to offer him (5 - 6).²⁰¹ This statement appears at first to be a poetic apology common in women's poetry, but Collier uses the individual differences in their fates to emphasise the female community of which she is part. The drudgery she endures is the

¹⁹⁹ Anne Milne, "Gender, Class, and the Beehive: Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (1739) as Nature Poem," *Isle: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and the Environment* 8:2 (Summer 2001), 122.

²⁰⁰ Cited in Moira Ferguson, "Mary Collier: Women's Labour, Gender / Class Identity and Nation Building," *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class and Gender*, (Albany: State U of New York P, 1995), 14.

²⁰¹ Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck*. In Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour* (1736) and Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour* (1739), Introd., Moira Ferguson, (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library / The Augustan Reprint Society, 1985). All citations from Collier's and Duck's texts are from this edition.

general "Portion of poor Woman-kind" (10), she claims, and, echoing female writers like Mary Astell and the Countess of Winchilsea, she refuses to believe that women were "for [this] Slavery design'd" (14). She looks back to a "Golden Age" (29) that is very different to the convention portrayed in neo-classical tradition. In Collier's golden age, the inequity that operates between herself and Duck is reversed. Instead of a woman humbly approaching an elevated man with her gift of poetry, men are shown to have laboured in order to receive "a Female Smile" (18), and "sweet-tongu'd Poets . . . / . . . offer'd up their Lays" (27 - 28) to a female shrine. "Time and Custom," she argues, have, "by degrees destroy'd / That happy State, and now "great DUCK, upon whose happy BROW / The Muses seem to fix the Garland" (31 - 32), cannot even allow women the dignity to "lie / Forgotten, and in dark Oblivion die" (39 - 40), but must make them "the Objects of [his] Scorn at last" (30). Women are now abused by men instead of being worshiped by them, and Duck epitomises that reversal by abusing them in his poem.

The main means of Duck's abuse of women is through his dismissal and elision of their labour. He initially produces a binary opposition between the "good expecting Wives" (153) who put bacon and dumplings in front of their weary husbands and disappear and the "Throng / Of prattling Females" (163 - 164) who come at the "Heels" (162) of the farmer, in order to turn the cut hay. Throughout this section of his poem Duck dehumanises these female workers. They walk at the "heels" of their master like a pack of unruly dogs and are more interested in play than work, particularly once the disciplinary presence of the master is removed. The emphasis upon the irrational behaviour of the women continues as Duck describes "the brisk Chat" (176) that fills the women's meal break. They all talk at once so that "A Stander by can nought distinguish plain. / So loud's their Speech, and so confus'd their Noise, / Scarce puzzled ECHO can return their Voice" (180 - 182). Donna Landry points out that "structurally, *The Thresher's Labour*, obliges us to spot the analogy between the epic heroism of the men's competitive scything and the bathos of the women's conversation, which Duck strains to make competitive as well as

noisy and nonsensical.”²⁰² The women’s conversation is, in fact, claims Duck, the equivalent of the mindless chirping of sparrows, the destructive vermin whose noise “fills [the] Sky” (194) and “dins your Ears” (196) until a sudden storm sends them into the hedgerows and “all at once is hush” (198).

It is not surprising, therefore, that following this representation Duck cannot then depict the women’s presence in the fields as productive. Indeed, following the storm that sends them screeching for shelter, the women disappear from the poem. The “scorching sun” (121) which had previously “bath’d [the men’s] panting Sides in briny Sweat” (132), now “kindly shines” (201), allowing “the pleasing Work” (202) to be completed easily. The “next Day the Cocks appear in equal Rows” (203) as though they end up that way themselves instead of being put there by the women. This move into the passive voice allows for the removal of the subject, in this case, the women, from the act of labour, which, in the event that a reader might recognise women’s work, is itself characterised as much more pleasant and more easily accomplished than the work of the men.

The separation of women from their labour is not the only elision in the poem. What is also avoided here is any acknowledgment that the two sides of Duck’s binary opposition are one whole. The “good” silent wives are the same noisy women for whom a day in the fields with other women is a chance to “chat their Fill”(167). Most labourers’ wives, despite the increasing social pressure in the eighteenth century for them to become purely domestic beings, needed to supplement their husbands’ income with their own earnings from field labour. When he separates the domestic and labour functions of women, Duck is able to imply that even “good” women contribute little to the life of the labourer. The bacon and dumplings appear on the table almost without agency in the same miraculous manner as the haycocks “appear” in equal rows in the fields. What Duck achieves with this denigration and elision of women’s work is an

²⁰² Landry 62

emphasis upon the heroic nature of men's work. If he had included the full role of women in physically demanding and productive labour, the role of men in very similar labour would have been compromised by eighteenth-century stereotypes concerning women's inherent frailty. At the same time, he could not logically ignore their presence entirely. By characterising women as one of the problems that working men had to overcome, and by removing them as active subjects when describing the labour they did perform, Duck is able to portray the male labourer as the sole heroic figure upon his stage.

I have described Duck's portrayal of women in his poem at some length because Collier's poem is written as a detailed personal response to this representation. In doing this she effectively refutes his claims but, even more significantly, I would argue, she uses this personal response as a way to construct a community of women with common interests for whom she speaks. Thus the master who is a bully in Duck's poem becomes the smiling "honest Farmer" (45) in Collier's experience, who wants women to make his hay, "For if his Back be turn'd, their Work they mind / As well as Men, as far as he can find" (47 - 48). Collier, much like Chaucer's Wife of Bath, cites herself as her own authority as she rejects Duck's accusation of female gossip:

For my own Part, I many a Summer's Day
Have spent in throwing, turning, making Hay;
But ne'er could see, what you have lately found,
Our wages paid for sitting on the Ground. 48 - 51

Women do talk, she admits, when they stop to eat, but as they "freely toil and sweat / To earn [their] Bread" (56 - 57), they are, surely, entitled to chat. Claiming that Duck's position is un-English, she argues that only "Turks / . . . have Mutes to serve them" (65 - 66), while even "Slaves, at Work" are allowed "to chat it merrily" (67). What is irrational and irritating noise for Duck thus becomes part of every Englishwoman's "Liberty" (68 and 71) or civic right in Collier's reconstruction. This "liberty" of communication between women is an important part

of this poem. Women are portrayed by Collier as slaves and drudges but she asserts that they have a communal sense of integrity, which ensures they work as hard as the men for less recompense. Even more importantly, within their slavery they find solace in their enjoyment of each other's company. Collier is addressing Duck, but her witnesses to the truth of what she claims are the other women farmworkers with whom she identifies herself with her persistent use of the first person plural. Thus, when she replaces the elisions in Duck's poem by claiming that "the Case is clear" (60) that women work as hard as men, or "how should Cocks in equal Rows appear?" (61), she is declaring a truth that is not only self-evident but which is supported by all the women for whom she speaks.

Collier's construction of a female community of which she is part becomes even more evident when she addresses a more revealing elision by Duck. When she demonstrates that the women who have been working and chatting in the fields are the same women who look after the family home and children, she is writing of a life she never experienced herself. Nevertheless, she continues to connect herself with women who are married with children in order to maintain the strong understanding of female community with which the poem is infused:

When Ev'ning does approach we homeward hie

And our domestic Toils incessant ply:

....

Bacon and *Dumpling* in the Pot we boil,

Our beds we make, our Swine we feed the while;

....

Early next Morning we on you attend;

Our Children dress and feed, their Cloaths we mend;

And in the Field our daily Task renew,

Soon as the rising Sun has dry'd the Dew. 74 - 75, 78 - 79, 82 - 85.

Like the "cocks in rows," bacon and dumplings do not magically appear. Women leave field

work early in order to care for their children, cook, feed their domestic animals, and perform housework. Collier may not have performed all of these tasks herself but she expresses connection with the women who do and constructs a sense of their connection to each other. She also reunites the elements that Duck had separated and thus dismissed: “the triple burden of working women — wage labour, housekeeping and child care.”²⁰³

As Collier elaborates upon this triple burden, her poem develops into more than a series of ripostes to Duck’s attack. She constructs a georgic poem that addresses female concerns in much the same way that women writers in the *beatus vir* tradition recast certain elements in order to reflect their concept of retreat. Thus, Collier reconfigures the georgic from a representation of largely agricultural labour to a representation of largely domestic labour. She begins with field labour, but more than half her poem concerns domestic labour within the home, whether paid or unpaid. The georgic mode lends itself easily to a variety of uses, as we have seen, but Collier’s georgic text is probably the first to treat women’s labour within the home as if it had the same social significance as the rural pursuits of traditional georgic. The Countess of Winchilsea originated the concept of conferring georgic credibility on women’s domestic labour in her poem, “A Description of a Piece of Tapestry.” But the whole thrust of her text is that women no longer undertake such meaningful work as weaving. Collier, however, gives literary authority to the kind of domestic labour that even Winchilsea would have despised.

One of the ways that she achieves this literary authority is in the use of classical mythology. Collier is sparing in her use of this mythology, probably because of her lack of education, but what she does use is employed effectively to give meaning to the despised life of the working woman. Responding to Duck’s employment of the myth of Sisyphus to illustrate the lot of the labouring man, for example, Collier argues that working women are condemned like “Danaus’ Daughters” (239) to fill “endless Tubs of Water” (241). Sisyphus’s punishment of

²⁰³ Landry 66.

continually rolling a stone to the top of a hill is particularly illustrative of the mind-numbing repetitiveness and back-breaking difficulty of agricultural labour, but the punishment of Danaus's daughters even more accurately mirrors the endless tubs of water that domestic workers must have filled as they washed linen, cooked food, cleaned pots and scoured brewing vessels. Like Winchilsea's use of the legend of Arachne in "A Description of a Piece of Tapistry," Collier's employment of myth also gives women and their domestic labour an element of dignity normally associated with more masculine endeavours. Both Arachne and Danaus's daughters might be undergoing punishment, but the fact that the gods find them worth any kind of attention indicates a mythic significance at odds with contemporary evaluations of women and their work.

Collier's use of Virgilian echoes throughout her text is even more effective than her use of mythic imagery. Donna Landry notes "the Virgilian topos" of Collier's description of laundering linen, when she "addresses the washing as if it were an epic contest."²⁰⁴ "Now we drive on" states Collier, "resolv'd our Strength to try, / and what we can we do most willingly" (181 - 182). These Virgilian, echoes, including the kind of military imagery which is pervasive in *The Georgics*, can be found throughout Collier's poem: "Strength" (116) and "Courage" (155) are the virtues she most often invokes when depicting the women's approach to their duties. But perhaps the strongest claim she makes for women's domestic work to be accorded the same status as agriculture is in her concluding simile:

So the industrious Bees do hourly strive
To bring their Loads of Honey to the Hive;

Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains,
And poorly recompense their Toils and Pains. 242 - 245.

The management of hives and the social organisation of bees forms an important part of Virgil's

²⁰⁴ Landry 69.

fourth *Georgic*, and the industry of bees has remained a literary trope ever since. For Virgil, apiculture could be used to reflect Roman culture because it was thought that the queen and worker bees were, in fact, male. By the eighteenth century, it had been recognised that only the drones were male, so that the significance of the hard work and organisation of the hive not only conveys a literary significance, but emphasises the female nature of these ideal workers.

However, this concluding simile operates on more than an intertextual level and can be seen to give validity to women's domestic labour through a fusion of characteristics associated with bees and apiculture. The care of bees, for example, had traditionally been entrusted to women in England, but by the eighteenth century, as Anne Milne demonstrates, apiculture became interesting to the gentlemanly proponents of the agricultural revolution.²⁰⁵ Books such as Joseph Warder's *The True Amazons: or, The Monarchy of Bees* (1713) promoted several improvements in the management of hives so that the bees would produce more honey at less cost, and dismissed as ignorance female folk-wisdom concerning bees.²⁰⁶ I agree with Anne Milne that it is possible to find echoes of this development in Collier's simile. The role of bees in the folk-culture of England was disappearing because they had been co-opted into a new system whereby their traditional importance as family providers and psychopomps was diminished and they were now merely regarded as part of the profitable assets of "sordid Owners." According to Collier, women have also lost whatever dignity once attached to their sex, and are now treated, like bees, as undervalued workers in a system which offers them as few rewards as it can manage. As Milne points out, "Collier's metaphor helps to expose her own exploitative working conditions, [as] it exposes the exploitation of bees."²⁰⁷

Collier's ability to employ a literary reference with a variety of meanings invests the

²⁰⁵ Milne 115 - 122.

²⁰⁶ Milne 123 - 124.

²⁰⁷ Milne 123 - 124.

female labour that she describes with a significance that is truly innovative. However, her most important innovation is not found in her use of metaphors, or in her employment of classical allusions but in her construction of temporal movement in the poem. Because she credits domestic labour with such importance, the quotidian rhythms of domesticity rather than the seasonal cycles of rural field work become central to the poem. Again, a comparison with Duck's poem helps to illustrate her strategy. Duck employs a highly traditional structure of temporal movement. With two references at the beginning and end of his poem to "Each revolving Year" (8) and "the Year's revolving Course" (282), Duck emphasises the life of the labourer in an ordered seasonal cycle through winter, spring, summer and autumn. He does describe diurnal movements of time within this cycle. The master calls the workers to harvest so early in the morning that "the Stars are [still] glimm'ring in the Skies" (220), for example, and, at night, the workers "go late to Bed" (253). But this diurnal activity is subsumed firmly into a seasonal organisation. We are told clearly what seasonal work Duck performs, and we are also given a very real sense of the nature of the seasons: the "hoary" (83) winter spent threshing in barns, the "lovely *Spring*" whose "refreshing Show'rs / new cloath the Field with Grass, and blooming Flow'rs" (85 - 86), the "rip'ning *Summer*" (87) when "the Birds salute us as to Work we go" (105), and the autumn when the "Reapers cast [their] Eyes around the Field; / and view the various Scenes its Beauties yield" (223 - 224). Duck conveys the reality of labour within this cycle, but the cycle itself is unchanged from the earliest expression of the georgic mode.

In contrast, Collier omits any sense of cyclical rhythm in her poem. She does refer briefly to "many a Summer's Day" (49), to "Harvest" (87) and to "*Winter Nights*" (144), but she does not describe the seasons as Duck does, except once to emphasise the cold temperatures that "oppress" (153) her in winter. She does not situate her temporal references within a seasonal cycle, and the "revolving year" contains so little meaning for her that she does not mention spring at all. Her single references to summer and harvest are not made in order to highlight seasonal labour, but in specific responses to Duck's accusations concerning work undertaken by

women at those times. What Collier does emphasise about summer, harvest and winter is the way that women's lives are organised in quotidian movements of time that have no true seasonal affiliation. The early mornings when the women must rise early to tend to their families before going to work in the fields, and the evenings when "so many Things for [their] Attendance call, / had [they] ten Hands, [they] could employ them all" (106 - 107), have greater significance for her than the seasons of the year. These domestic duties are not, indeed, affected by the seasons at all. As the poem makes clear, whether it is summer or autumn, women perform the same tasks repetitively. In fact, it is the interruptive rather than cyclical nature of her quotidian labour that she emphasises: the need to leave field work to collect children, and "dress, feed, bring them [back] to the Field with care" (119), or being woken at night to begin washing or brewing for middle-class householders. Reading *The Woman's Labour*, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that, while Collier is, of course, aware as a countrywoman of seasonal movement, it means very little to her as a literary signifier.

Indeed, her entire text is structured as a quotidian movement from day to night and is not like Duck's structured as a movement through the revolving year. The first section of the poem (lines 1 - 140) depicts mainly the labour of the day from sunrise to sunset, and the last section of the poem (lines 141 - 245) depicts mainly the labour of the night. The labour of the day contains, as we have seen, multiple and interruptive layers of labour. The quotidian nature of this labour is highlighted by the repetition Collier employs as she describes the same daily pattern of activity over and over again. Women rise early, feed their husbands and children, go to work in the fields, interrupt their labour to collect their children, return to the fields where their labour is again interrupted by the need to keep their children safe, return home in the evening, and begin their domestic duties once more. Although Collier occasionally shows women working into the night in order to take care of their children, this section of the poem depicts the length, stress, and repetitive nature of the women's working days. She structures some variations into her triple iteration of this pattern, but the overall effect is so overwhelmingly uniform in its quotidian

movement as to make the seasonal nature of turning hay, reaping wheat, gleaning corn, or cutting peas irrelevant. It is all field work and an inevitable part of the quotidian routine that essentially remains the same day after day and year after year.

The only seasonal movement that appears to be given any significance is the move into winter, when the nature of women's paid work does change profoundly. The field work ends, and the women "out abroad, a Charing often go" (137). This second half of the poem, does not emphasise the season, however, as much as it emphasises the many nights that women work. In reality, of course, much of this work must have taken place in the day, and Collier does describe mornings when "bright *Sol* illuminates the Skies" (167), when the mistress enters the kitchen to give her orders, or when the women watch the sun "fearing he'll be set before [their] Work is done" (190) because they would then be working at night once more. But these two references, like her earlier reference to children keeping their mothers awake all night, exist to illustrate the extreme lengths of time that women work. They begin well before sunrise, so that they have already worked for hours by the time "drowsy Mortals" (168) like their mistresses get out of bed to bring them a breakfast ale and their orders, or they labour all day and into the night in order to clean all the pewter in the household (103 - 113). But the few references to daylight in this section are overwhelmed by Collier's repeated emphasis upon night time labour. Winter becomes an iteration of cold, labour filled nights in which the women slave "for several Hours . . . / before [they] can one Glimpse of Day-light have" (163 - 164). In fact, Collier compromises seasonal coherence in the middle of this section ostensibly concerning winter labour by stating that, "either in the Morning or at Night, / we piece the *Summer's* day with Candle-light" (191 - 192). It is not, therefore, seasonal labour that she details here, although it is work that more often takes place in the winter. What is important about this kind of work for Collier is not its seasonal but its seemingly endless nature. The work she describes in this section entails rising before dawn or working beyond sunset, and one of its defining characteristics is that it takes place in the cold and the dark, "when bright Orion glitters in the Skies" (142), and

requires candle-light for its completion.

The work described in this nocturnal section of the poem is solely domestic labour, but unlike the domestic labour of the first half of the text it lacks even the diurnal rhythm of family duties. The women undertake work that would once have been the responsibility of family servants or even of the mistress of the household, but which is now hired out to occasional workers. The women are summoned when needed, "often at Midnight" (227), and must stand waiting at doors, "o'ercome with Sleep" (151), for an equally tired maidservant to let them in. There is, nevertheless, something quotidian in the nature of the work that they are repetitively required to do. Whatever the specifics of the particular job they are called to undertake, it all demands that they become hot, wet, dirty and exhausted night after night. Thus they launder "heaps of fine Linen" (156) for hours until "not only Sweat, but Blood runs trickling down / [their] Wrists and Fingers" (184 - 185). As boiling hot water, lye soaps and wash-boards were necessities for cleaning linens and cambrics in the eighteenth century, we can accept that Collier is not indulging in exaggeration here. Similarly, cleaning pewter, brass and iron from early morning until late at night would have undoubtedly have left the women "colour'd with Dirt and Filth" (218). Sweat and filth probably also resulted from the necessity to keep coppers heated with burning coal or wood for brewing beer in a job that began in one evening and lasted around the clock until "the Night comes on again" (229). The night brings "Relief" (187) to male labourers, who can "Homeward take [their] Way" (195) after their daily work, eat their supper and sleep until morning. By contrast, the night "does but increase [the] Grief" (188) of the female workers who must care for their children or continue to labour without rest.

Apart from a few closing lines, Collier ends the poem with this portrayal of night-time work and the disruption of natural sleep patterns. Like Duck, Collier leaves us with a strong implication that the work begins again the next day, then continues the next night and the next day after that. Duck's poem ends with the same implication of unending labour. However, Collier's poetic structure of a depiction of day-time labour moving into a depiction of night-time

labour as opposed to Duck's depiction of labour within a seasonal cycle, privileges a quotidian sensibility. This sensibility is given added weight by Collier's repetitive images of quotidian labour within both sections of the poem. At the same time, her emphasis upon the duration and difficulty of domestic labour within each section links this quotidian sensibility with the lives and experiences of women. Domestic labour of all kinds, Collier implies, ensures that seasonal cycles or historic teleologies mean little to most women.

Duck, as we have seen, continues to find literary relevance in seasonal cycles, even if he avoids any expression of teleological development. Collier overtly rejects both. Her poem might begin with a constructed golden age, but she holds out no hope for a return: "For all our Pains, no Prospect can we see / attend us, but *Old Age and Poverty*" (200), she states. Similarly, while Duck works at the same seasonal labours "as the Year's revolving Course goes round" (282), Collier finds that her "Toil increases as the Year runs round" (237). She acknowledges the yearly cycle at the same time as she is unable to accept it as an organising principle. Time is not organised into seasons for women because they are being disciplined by a temporality abstracted from natural rhythms. Although the words "clock" or "watch" are never mentioned, there is a strong sense running throughout the poem that the women are "always working against time, against the sun's rise"²⁰⁸ in a way that jars against traditional understandings of duration. At midnight when they should be asleep, they are being roused to go to work, and at sunset when they should be ending their labours, their work is often beginning again. They "must make haste" (104) from one labour to another because they fear "the Time runs on too fast" (105). They cannot think beyond the next night or next day, and they "hardly ever [have] *Time to dream*" (133).

This poem is not, perhaps as complete an expression of mechanical time as Sherman has described it, but it comes far closer to it than almost any other poetic construction in the georgic

²⁰⁸ Landry 69.

genre in this period. Collier and her fellow day workers “were hired by the hour, both in large houses and in the fields”²⁰⁹ and, while they may not have owned watches or clocks themselves, the discipline of working according to hours timed by their mistresses’ or masters’ clocks is an unwritten but substantive force underlying the final section of the poem. It is why the women are shown racing through their jobs, always afraid that they will not be able to obey the demand to begin and finish at specific times. It is also one of the reasons why seasonal cycles mean so little to them. However, concern with the quotidian, with minutiae, and with the details of the individual’s daily life, while it appears to be a reflection of mechanical time sensibility, also arises more particularly out of the domestic nature of the labour that women perform all year round. It is this domestic labour and the temporality that is associated with it that link Collier’s poem most closely to the work of other women as they develop a tradition of women’s poetry.

Collier does not think in terms of extended temporalities, because for her, as for Winchilsea, Chudleigh, or Fyge, if for somewhat different reasons, thoughts of horizons beyond the immediate have no real meaning for her. Like Winchilsea, she argues that women’s history has to be different from her own experience, but she is cut off from it by lack of education. She does not even have Winchilsea’s knowledge of history but must construct one to give some dignity to her own life. Unlike the earlier writers who use the present moment as a means to access transcendence, Collier maintains that labouring women have very few moments that can be employed as a means to meditate or dream. However, Collier does show that working women find pleasure in the moments when they sit and gossip, or when they are treated to a mug of breakfast ale. We gain a real sense of the pleasures of the moment which are all that labouring women can afford. They might “hardly ever” have “*time to dream*,” but that is not the same thing as having no time to dream. It is evident, in any case, that Collier herself, perhaps because she was not married and had no children, takes time to dream. Her construction of a female

²⁰⁹ Ferguson 12.

golden age, she tells us, is the result of dreaming as she lies on her bed “eas’d from the tiresome Labours of the Day” (12). That this momentary relaxation will soon be interrupted is evidenced by the rest of the poem, but the moment does exist, and Collier employs it to construct a poem about female community and labour and the quotidian temporality that measures their lives.

II. *Mary Leapor.*

The quotidian labour that occupied the life of Mary Leapor was not as all-consuming as that of Mary Collier and it is, perhaps, her greater access to leisure that accounts for the more playful tone of her country-house poem, “Crumble-Hall.” Although born into the labouring class, Leapor’s situation was somewhat more privileged than Collier’s. Leapor’s father was a gardener and nursery-man in rural Northamptonshire, which would have placed him socially and economically several degrees above a day-labourer. Leapor’s biographer, Richard Greene, believes that both of Leapor’s parents were literate and that they sent Mary to a Free-School attached to and run by Magdelene College School in the local town of Brackley.²¹⁰ Her father later reported to Bridget Freemantle, who organised the subscription for Leapor’s first publication, that Mary read widely as a child and had already begun writing poetry before she began to work as a servant in her teens. She was fortunate in her first employer, Susanna Jennens, a widow with literary interests who was connected to Lady Mary Wortley Montagu’s circle. Jennens encouraged Leapor to borrow from her library and to continue writing. In response, Leapor addressed her as “Parthenissia” in her poems.²¹¹ Leapor later moved to a more prestigious situation at Edgecote House, home of the Chauncy family, which she would satirise as Crumble Hall. Although members of the Chauncy family subscribed to her published

²¹⁰ Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 8 - 9.

²¹¹ Richard Greene, “Mary Leapor: The Problem of Personal Identity,” *The Eighteenth Century* 42: 3 (2001), 218.

poems, she was dismissed from this position, apparently for allowing a joint of meat to burn while she wrote.²¹² In the year between this dismissal and her death in November 1746, she lived with her father and was befriended significantly by Bridget Freemantle, a gentlewoman who had read her poetry and plays in manuscript and was impressed with them. Freemantle, the daughter of an Oxford don, probably had “an intellectual as well as a personal influence over Mary Leapor” according to Greene,²¹³ and it was through her efforts that Leapor’s poetry made its way into print. Leapor died before her book was published so she never knew that it was a critical and commercial success.

Poems Upon Several Occasions, Volumes One and Two went into several editions and contains a wide variety of genres, from pastorals and satires to poems of retreat. Many of these poems have a georgic inflection but “Crumble-Hall” is Leapor’s only attempt at a country-house poem. It stands out in many ways from the rest of the collection because of its ambitious scope. It parodies an established poetic genre as well as the individuals and circumstances that Leapor encountered in her daily life. It also stands out from many other eighteenth-century satires inspired by the georgic or pastoral tradition in that its narrative setting in contrast with Gay’s *Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, for example, or Wortley Montagu’s *Town Eclogues* is not re-sited from the country to the city but retains the conventional geography of a georgically-inflected poem.

“Crumble-Hall” is more like Gay’s *The Birth of the Squire: an Eclogue*, in its critique of the reality of country house life as opposed to the ideal. Gay’s poem describes the squire on his country estate as a drunken, irresponsible boor interested only in hunting and seducing the local farmgirls. Leapor, with similar scepticism, portrays the owners of Crumble Hall as negligent and slothful. But while Gay offers no alternative vision to lighten his cynical portrait of the rural

²¹² Greene, “Personal Identity,” 218.

²¹³ Greene, *Mary Leapor*, 20.

gentry, Leapor introduces an attractive alternative in the lively community of women in the kitchen. This alternative, a portrait of a labouring ideal of a *beata femina* as we shall see, is one of the main reasons I examine Leapor's satire as opposed to any other of her works. Another reason concerns the temporal movement that she employs in this poem. As I noted in my introduction, most satirical writing in the eighteenth century equates an employment of mechanical time with the rhythms of city life as opposed to the traditional temporal movements of country life. In contrast, Leapor not only rejects the conventional temporality of the country-house tradition, but indicates and rejects the presence of clock time even within that tradition. At the same time, her construction of a *beata femina* places her satire within that body of women's writing which establishes a female temporal tradition of the quotidian and the present moment.

In choosing to write a parody of a country-house poem, Leapor engages with a genre which employs a distinctive operation of time, one at odds with the experience and interests of most women. As many scholars have noted, the typical country-house poem celebrates the values of hospitality and paternalism that are supposed to underpin a great estate and its family and presents the estate as an exemplar of historical practices and future prospects. Alistair Fowler points out that country-house poems are georgic panegyrics to the historic, interdependent relationship between owner and estate worker which offer a pattern of behaviour to the reader²¹⁴ and which, as William McClung notes, position "the estates as models of the nation."²¹⁵ By the eighteenth century the country-house poem had assumed a teleological pattern in which an idealised present incorporates a mythic past and points to a potentially glorious future. This sense of the estate as a map of national governance based on history and

²¹⁴ Alistair Fowler, *The Country-House Poem: A Cabinet of Seventeenth-Century Estate Poems and Related Items*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1994), 1 - 3.

²¹⁵ William A. McClung, "The Country-House Arcadia," *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House*, ed., Gervase Jackson-Stops *et al*, (National Gallery of Art, Washington: Studies in the History of Art 25, Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1989), 280.

tradition is particularly visible in Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*. Here, the idealised estate belonging to Burlington, which is built on the traditions of his "Father's Acres" (181), nurtures "rising Forests, not for pride or show" (187), but so that "future Buildings, future Navies [may] grow" (188). Monarchs who model themselves on such landowners, states Pope, are "worthy Kings" (204) who "Peace to happy Britain bring" (204).

As Leapor begins her poem, the reader is almost tempted to believe that she might be following in this tradition. Apart from Leapor's mock-heroic address to Artemisia (Bridget Freemantle), which is very much in Pope's lightly ironic style, the opening descriptive section at first appears to offer a genuine appreciation of the history of the house. Crumble Hall "has fed the stranger and reliev'd the Poor" (14), while everyone from "Knights and hungry Squires" (16) to "the sable Frier [*sic*] and the russet Clown" (24) have feasted on "good old *English Fare*" (19).²¹⁶ This is the panegyric model of the country-house poem harking back to the early seventeenth century. Yet, as we discover when we read further, while Leapor appears to engage with each element of the country-house tradition, she does so simply in order to disparage it. This strategy is signalled in the title. Most scholars accept that Leapor is not writing about an imaginary place in this poem, but about Edgecote House, the country manor from which she was dismissed. While she undoubtedly introduces some fictive elements in her description of Edgecote's history and geography, Leapor includes enough verifiable material for the reader to assume she is describing a real situation. Leapor's use of a mocking and unflattering name for Edgecote House, therefore, ensures that everything written about it, however complimentary it at first appears, is undermined by the comic implications of the title. Thus, the description of Crumble Hall's history and hospitality, which should induce a sense of nostalgia and romance in the

²¹⁶ Mary Leapor, "CRUMBLE-HALL," *Poems Upon Several Occasions by the late Mrs. Leapor of Brackley in Northamptonshire. The Second and Last Volume*, (London: J. Roberts, 1751). All citations from Leapor's work are from this edition and are identified by title and line number.

reader, appeals instead to a sense of the absurd.

Country-house poems are largely composed of idealised exaggeration, of course, but the reader is not left in any doubt that these exaggerations point to a genuine belief in the importance of the estate and its actual history. We are meant to find reality within the hyperbole. The exaggerations that Leapor introduces into Crumble Hall's history are outlandish and almost cartoonish. They are not rescued by any attempt to imbue them with a meaningful vision. Crumble Hall's age and appearance, for example, is not meant to inspire the reader with a sense of nostalgia. Its "Spires" and "towers" (15) are not "venerable" or "dignified" or "ancient" but "rusty" (15), a word that suggests senescence and disuse. Leapor's emphasis in her description of the hall upon "Gothic" towers (15) also draws attention, in this early poem in which "gothic" would signify "barbaric," to the outlandish appearance of the building. This lack of decorum is repeated in Leapor's portrait of the interior of the house where a sense of the ridiculous invests the traditional feasting scene. The cooked food sends out not merely a savoury aroma from the table but a "Gale" (25), and the guests do not simply eat their fill but "ravag[e] on the smoking Store" (27) like a horde of barbarians "till their stretch'd Girdles would contain no more" (28). This hyperbole does not lend a sense of historic validity but rather one of comic anarchy to Leapor's representation of the house's history.

A disregard for historic validity or hierarchic order is also evident in the food and drink Leapor imagines for the ancient feasts of Crumble Hall:

There powder'd Beef, and Warden-Pies, were found;
 And Pudden dwelt within her spacious Bound:
 Pork, Peas, and Bacon (good old *English* Fare!)
 With tainted Ven'son, and with hunted Hare:
 With humming Beer her vats were wont to flow,
 And ruddy Nectar in her Vaults to glow.

This is not the ordered feasting of the country house tradition, but a jumbled mixture of luxury and labouring-class food. Powdered (meaning “salted”) beef, pork, and pies, while not everyday food for the working man, was, nevertheless, his feasting food and was normal for middle ranking farmers and tradesmen. “Pudden” might be dessert, but the same word was used to describe the suet or flour pudding that was a staple of labouring class meals. Bacon and pease, of course, were strictly labouring class fare. Venison and hare, however, was reserved for the tables of the wealthy, and Leapor’s insistence that the hare is “hunted” and that the venison is “tainted” or well hung to give it a gamey flavour and tenderness indicates they are intended for an aristocratic palate. Only the privileged had the right to hunt game animals, and only they would have the luxury of leaving meat to be hung. Working men did not hunt hares, but caught them illegally in springes, and they would never keep a poached deer hanging long enough to become tainted. A similar confusion of social rank is evident with the alcohol served at this feast. Gentlemen drank both wine and beer, of course, but although Leapor describes the barrels of wine in the cellars, she privileges the ale of the working class, served to everyone, knight and commoner, in plebeian brown bowls, at her feast (26).

There is, as well, a promiscuous mixture in the social status of the people who share in this feast, from knights to labouring men. This mixture is, of course, historic in one sense, in that medieval halls separated the gentry from the commons only through the use of a high table. Separate dining rooms for the gentry did not become widespread until the seventeenth century. Nevertheless, the restriction of the high table to the lord or squire and his particular guests, together with the social divisions that placed even commoners above and below the salt, were rigidly enforced. Different food was also provided to each group, so that the venison and the bacon might be served in the same hall, but it would not be served at the same table. Significantly, there is no lord and no high table in “Crumble-Hall,” and no difference is shown between knight or clown, venison or bacon. They are all heterogeneously mixed into one disordered group in a way that would violate eighteenth-century notions of politesse and

decorum.

Leapor might have taken this heterogeneity from Jonson's "To Penshurst," where Jonson emphasises the idealised nature of Penshurst when he states that the same food is served to all. However, Jonson is clear that this is not a mixture of aristocratic and labouring food, but "the lord's own meat."²¹⁷ As readers, we are meant to feel Jonson's own amazement that no culinary distinctions are made by the lord of Penshurst between the gentlefolk at the high table and the commoners seated below. Yet, within this idyllic portrait of aristocratic generosity, there is a strong sense of hierarchic order, which is signally lacking in Crumble Hall's feast. The lord of Penshurst may be happy to share his own food with the commonality, but he is unquestionably in command of his household. Unlike the diners in "Crumble-Hall," the guests in "Penshurst" do not "ravage on the smoking store," but politely ask the lord's servants to fill their plates (67 - 71).

We cannot be sure that Leapor had read "To Penshurst," although many similar poems were published, including Marvell's "Upon Appleton House," Sir George MacKenzie's "Caelia's Country-House and Closet," or Waller's "At Penshurst," which she had probably encountered.²¹⁸ She certainly seems familiar with all aspects of the genre and is undoubtedly creating a mock medieval feast from conventions which are characterised in many of them. She may also be responding to Pope's critique of the etiquette-ridden and unfulfilling "rich buffet" served by the pretentious Timon in *Epistle to Burlington*²¹⁹ which we know she had read.²²⁰ However, the comic absence of order and, more particularly, of a lord in the feasting scene in

²¹⁷ Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst," *The Forest. The Complete Poems of Ben Jonson*, ed., George Parfitt, (London: Penguin, 1975), 94 - 98 (Line 62).

²¹⁸ Greene, *Mary Leapor* 137.

²¹⁹ Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington. The Poems of Alexander Pope* 586 - 595.

²²⁰ Greene, *Mary Leapor* 137.

“Crumble-Hall,” as well as the improbable details of its architecture, indicates that the real significance of the beginning of the poem lies in Leapor’s refusal to buy into the historical myth of the conventional country-house poem. Nothing in the portrait of Crumble Hall’s past can be understood to offer a sympathetic historical view beneath the hyperbole. Leapor’s vision is a parody of authorised visions of the Golden Age, which is here presented as an age of misrule, a Saturnalia. Just as Crumble Hall is a cartoon version of a place like Penshurst, so is its past a cartoon version of Penshurst’s past and traditions.. This refusal of historic validity is partly a matter of a satiric belittling of established conventions, of course. But even within a satire we might expect a closer approximation of those conventions, or a criticism of the way that the parodies do not meet some ideal. When Pope mocks Timon’s villa, for example, he does so in order to highlight the ideal represented by Burlington’s estate. There is no ideal family history in “Crumble-Hall” to set against the cartoon-like history presented here. Leapor does not even attempt to convey the real, and possibly, flawed history and family mythology of Edgecote. A refusal to engage with history and tradition on any level except the burlesque, particularly in a poem about a real house, indicates her refusal to accept the authoritative ideals historical sensibility itself.

Recent critics have argued that the poem should be read nostalgically as a “vision of a lost sense of mutual obligation.”²²¹ Greene believes, for example, that “Crumble-Hall” is a lament for a lost way of life and a rejection of a new economic system that spurns the ancient sense of *noblesse oblige*.²²² But these interpretations depend upon an essentially serious reading of the opening passage of the poem. We have to believe that, on some level, Leapor means us to accept her account of medieval hospitality at Crumble Hall as a truthful representation.

²²¹ Jenny Dalporto, “Landscape, Labor and the Ideology of Improvement in Mary Leapor’s ‘Crumble Hall,’” *The Eighteenth Century* 42:3 (2001), 242 - 243.

²²² Greene, *Mary Leapor* 140.

However, Leapor seems to emphasise the exaggerated and the improbable in her depiction of the history of Crumble Hall. Indeed, if she believed that social relations in the house's past were mutually beneficial, it seems odd that she would choose to describe the betrayal of that relationship in a satiric parody of the genre that celebrates it. In contrast with *An Epistle to Burlington* or *An Epistle to Bathurst*, Leapor offers none of the didactic praise that Pope bestows upon Bathurst or Burlington in opposition to the excesses of Timon or Villario. There is, in fact, no positive portrait of a landowner and no image of a mutually beneficial relationship between landowner and estate worker anywhere in "Crumble -Hall." It is particularly significant in this context that no-one in the feasting scene is equivalent to Penshurst's lord who shares his bounty with his tenants and receives bounty in return.

Leapor's refusal of authentic historic context is emphasised by the fact that her poem gives no hint that it was a royal manor before the Chauncys purchased Edgecote House in the seventeenth century. Both Henry V, as Prince of Wales, and Anne of Cleves had lived there. This royal connection would certainly have found a place in any poem which seriously attempted an authorised historic vision. Even a writer of a satiric country-house poem would find it difficult, I believe, to resist the temptation to invoke the presence of one of England's most famous kings. It might be argued, of course, that as a kitchen-maid, Leapor would have been ignorant of historical details in general and of Edgecote House's history in particular. Indeed, it is possible to understand Leapor's omission of the "official" history of the house as the uneducated vision of a servant, imagining a freedom from order and constraint not to be found in contemporary life. But Leapor was an intelligent, literate, and well-read woman, within the constraints of class and gender. As well as her own books, she had access to the libraries of two intellectual women, and her later work, like "Crumble-Hall," was written under the encouragement of one of these women. Furthermore, it is very probable that the history of Edgecote Hall was widely known in the Brackley area. It is almost certain that the servants working there would have known it had once been a royal manor. Thus, it is likely that Leapor

had a fairly accurate knowledge of the history and customs of Edgecote. In any case, her ironic tone throughout the opening section of the poem invites readers to laugh at her depiction in a way that, in itself, suggests superior knowledge. I would argue that the comic disorder of Leapor's vision of the past, defined by excess and absurdity, and a refusal to acknowledge elements of genuine historic interest, is designed to undercut conventional visions of history in the country-house tradition.

In contrast with the burlesque of the opening passages, Leapor's present-tense description of the house expresses a social and spatial reality. The difference in tone and construction between the two sections is marked, and there is no transitional phrasing to link them. Unlike conventional country-house poems, which assert the power of history to influence the present, we are obviously not meant to discover connections between past and present in "Crumble-Hall." Here, the past is cartoon-like and unbelievable, while the present is assertively material. As Cynthia Wall notes, "what the poem most insists upon is that we come inside, walk through and *see* the details of Crumble Hall."²²³ This insistence upon present-day materiality is achieved by Leapor's use of a first person address in this section of the poem, as if, like Pope, she is writing a verse epistle. However, in *An Epistle to Burlington*, we are always aware that Pope is addressing his friend in a poetic letter. It is as if we are looking over Burlington's shoulder as he reads. Leapor's use of the same manoeuvre in a straightforward narrative produces a somewhat different effect. She appears to be addressing her readers directly, and because she takes this strategy much further than Pope, we feel as if she is taking us on an intimate, backstairs tour not usually afforded to eighteenth-century guests or tourists. We are shown the kitchens and attics as well as the halls and parlours, and all the time we are reminded that this is a real house being displayed in a narrative approximation of real duration. "Then step within,"

²²³ Cynthia Wall, "The Rhetoric of Description and the Spaces of Things," *Eighteenth-Century Genre and Culture: Serious Reflections on Occasional Forms: Essays in Honour of J. Paul Hunter*, ed., Dennis Todd and Cynthia Wall, (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2001), 274.

she tells us, “there stands a goodly Row / of oaken Pillars” (35 - 34), or she instructs us to “stay a little then: / back thro’ the Passage — down the steps again”(94 - 95). Thus the tour consistently emphasises the current spatial solidity and particularity of the house.

As well as an emphasis upon current spatial layout, and a rejection of a connection between past and present, Leapor also offers a commentary that refuses opportunities to elaborate upon historic artefacts and mocks those that are described. Thus, the obviously ancient carvings in what must once have been the medieval hall are not dated or placed in any kind of historic context. The narrator seems fascinated by their grotesque appearance, and this might have given a “sinister air to the house’s history,” as Landry claims,²²⁴ except that Leapor does not offer any architectural history to contextualise her description. As it is, the “two grim Giants o’er the Portal” (32), or the “Tyrant, with distorted Eye” (42) give a macabre air to the present day house rather than a sinister air to its history precisely because they remain historically and architecturally uncontextualised. The central hall itself is described in admiring tones as having a roof so tall that “no *Cyclops* e’er could reach so high” (43). But no link is made to the medieval feasting that begins the poem. Instead, we are told that the lofty proportions of the hall make it difficult to clean. Cobwebs infest the ceiling where “the pleas’d Spider plants her peaceful Loom”(46) and “weaves secure, nor dreads the hated Broom” (47). The “brown Parlour” (60) is famous only for its “leathern Chairs” (61), not for any historic notables who may have sat there. The tapestries are mentioned only to be dismissed (70 and 81), while the paintings on the main staircase appear to be restricted to generalised mythology rather than historic family portraits, as we might expect. The one historic portrait described is not given an attribution but is dismissed as a painting of a “royal Maid” and portrayed in plebeian terms glaring “like a Milk-wench” (79).

Perhaps the most significant rejection of the historic context of the house and family lies

²²⁴ Landry 112.

in Leapor's description of the heraldic shield that dominates one end of the hall. Most commentators note that Leapor appears to diminish the significance of the shield, arguing that she emphasises instead the need to clean it "once a Year" (48). This emphasis is undoubtedly correct, but it gains power when we note Leapor's reference to the phrase "*Honi Soit*" which "round the fierce Dragon . . . twines" (50), and to the portrait of "Royal Edward" which "o'er the Chimney shines" (55). These references make it clear that this is not a family coat of arms, as is usually assumed, but that of the Order of the Garter.²²⁵ No member of the Chauncy family was entitled to display this device, but its presence in the hall indicates the history of the house as a royal manor. Henry V, for example, as a member of the Order, would certainly have been entitled to employ its insignia. However, Leapor's use of the Order's armorial bearings in this poem does not seem designed to evoke this royal history. Like her coy description of the painting of "the royal Maid," Leapor's brief and ambiguous description of the shield seems intended to hint at a fascinating past that is inaccessible to her in the present. She does not, for example, complete the French motto but refers to "the Herald's mystic Compliments" (49). Again, I do not believe this inaccessibility is a function of Leapor's ignorance: she knows enough of the meaning of the shield and painting to give three essential clues to their significance. But, in describing and then dismissing a genuinely notable historic artefact, she undermines the defining feature of the country-house tradition that locates validity in the present from the influence of the past. As a woman and as a servant, the only significance that the shield offers to her is that it needs to be "furbish'd" (48) every year.

It is worth taking particular note of Leapor's treatment of this device, because it seems to me that it encapsulates, in brief, what she is undertaking in this section of the poem. She refuses

²²⁵ The Most Noble Order of the Garter was founded in 1348 by Edward III, and its membership is restricted to the reigning monarch, the Prince of Wales, his siblings, and 24 Knights Companion. Its motto is *Honi soit qui mal y pense* (shame be to him who thinks evil of it) and its patron saint is St. George. Its insignia was originally a garter surrounding a badge depicting St. George and the dragon.

to acknowledge the historic significance of a building that is obviously old and has an interesting history. Edgecote House, with its royal past, would normally be an ideal subject for a country-house poem, but Leapor rejects every opportunity to draw the past and the present of the house together in any meaningful way. This is, of course, part of the “servant’s perspective” that Landry and Greene have both noted in this poem,²²⁶ but it is also a self-conscious and systematic reversal of the established temporality of the country-house poem. The fact that the house has a history that can be linked to nationhood and tradition makes Leapor’s project even more distinct.

The effect of Leapor’s refusal to allow the history of the house to impinge upon the present and her construction of spatial materiality in her tour of the house combine to produce a sense of contemporaneity in this section. Particularly noticeable in Leapor’s emphasis upon realistic, contemporaneous detail is the sudden move from the jolly anarchy of the imaginary feasting to the entropy that characterises this spatial solidity and particularity. The narrative movement is that of a tour but almost everything that is described on the tour is characterised as dusty, dark, inert, or broken. The spider webs on the hall ceiling ironically indicate the ceiling’s impressive height, but they also highlight especially the sloth of servants unwilling to employ a ladder. Similarly, mice can run “safely” down dark passages (52) because they are not harried by watchful cats or alert servants. The windows are so “dim” they keep out the sun (53), and “the Stranger” must “blindly feel” his way along the wall as if it were night (54). These sombre images and the sense of lassitude they convey extend to the gentlefolk of the house. In the family rooms, “the soft Stools and eke the lazy Chair, / to Sleep invite the Weary, and the Fair” (82 - 83), while, in the library, “*Biron* sleeps” (90), encircled by “dusty Volumes” (92) which rarely “wear the Mark of *Biron*’s Hand” (93). The library is also characterised as a dark prison, “aptly fram’d to hold / Sir *Wary*’s Person, and Sir *Wary*’s Gold” (88 - 89). The master of the

²²⁶ Greene, *Mary Leapor* 137.
See also Landry 112.

house is thus portrayed as a miser embattled within the house by his suspicions and fears. Here, we are not surprised to learn that the farm machinery necessary to the dynamism of an agricultural estate lies broken and rotting in “yon dark Room” (96). The tempo of the house seems instead to be orchestrated by “the dull Clock” (63) in the “brown Parlour” (60) which “beats audible and slow” (63).

Leapor’s use of this clock is interesting. The rhythms of the house are apparently not governed by tradition or a grand historical narrative but by the relentless, monotonous passage of successive minutes, unilluminated by the past or the beckoning future. This temporality is emphasised in Leapor’s tour of the house, where her construction of a continuous present tense and her refusal to admit the influence of history characterises the mechanical time discipline represented by the clock. At the same time, the clock is described as “dull” and its beat “slow” (63) which associates it with the entropy that pervades this house. The clock itself seems to generate the languid torpor of Crumble Hall. It is, of course, compromised as a possession of this particular family, and while it seems to impose its own rhythm upon the house it also appears to reflect a torpor that is not only temporal but social. The owners of the house, hiding in their library with their money, have abdicated all responsibility for their estate. The house is dirty and badly managed, the farm machinery is broken and even the clock is winding down.

Even the narrator seems affected by the lethargic rhythm of the house. When she begins her tour in the main portal and the hall, Leapor gives us a detailed description of the elaborate carvings. The “gallant Show / of mimic Pears and carv’d Pomegranates” (37), and the “Mouths that grin . . . and some that spew” (40), writhe vigorously around the hall. But, as she moves the reader through the house, her intensity of tone rapidly diffuses and slows. Her description of the main parlour, for example, is a series of negatives and anticlimaxes. “Gay China bowls” might shine “o’er the broad Chimney” (68), but it would be “too sublime” to attempt to give the “long description” they deserve (69). The room itself is “neither long, nor round, nor square” (65), she states, and, while “much might of the Tapestry be sung,” she is “content to say, the Parlour’s

hung" (71). Fatigue is emphasised when Leapor tells us to "count the Stairs" (72), or "up ten stone steps now please to drag your Toes" (86). This last is a reference from Pope's description of Timon's villa. Leading Burlington through the extensive landscaping that Timon has undertaken, Pope tells him that "Thro' the length of yon hot Terrace sweat, / And . . . up ten steep slopes drag[] your thighs" (130 - 131). The splendours of Timon's villa have little in common with Crumble Hall, of course, but the extended sibilants in both phrases emphasise the pointless exhaustion of touring either house.

Leapor's insistence upon contemporaneous and realistic detail, her refusal to allow those details to be associated with the history of the house or family, and her emphasis on the entropic decay of the house and family combine to reject the idealism and sense of tradition that normally invests the country-house poem. This is certainly not a house that the reader can associate with a present-day Golden Age: the details are too realistically conveyed and too mundane. There are some attractive elements in the house, such as inviting furniture or pretty ornaments, but these serve to prevent the negative imagery from becoming too extreme and thus unsettling the material verisimilitude that Leapor wants to establish. We are given no excuse for believing that Leapor's portrait of this domestic interior is unrealistically negative. Overall, therefore, our understanding of the house is that its present-day reality is unattractive and detached from its history and traditions.

The house also seems detached from the estate that surrounds it. In traditional country-house poems, a portrayal of the estate as a contemporary rural paradise usually predominates and connects the house and its family to the surrounding countryside and its community. But instead of this connection between house and estate, Leapor introduces a contradiction between them. She leads us from a dark attic full of broken tools into brilliant sunshine on the roof of the house. Here, we are given a conventional survey view of the estate: "a gay Prospect meets the ravish'd Eye: / Meads, Fields and Groves in Beauteous Order lie" (105 - 106). This brightly-lit georgic order is very much at odds with the broken implements and dusty rooms we have just left behind,

and is, in its trite conventionality, self-consciously distanced from the immediacy and authenticity of Leapor's critical gaze. She might, of course, be implying that the meads are in "beauteous order" only because seen from a distance. Greene points out that while the passage to the roof and the roof itself are described in detail, the view gained from the roof is described in only vague and generalised terms.²²⁷ It is as if Leapor is setting the narrative of the country-house poem in striking contrast to her realistic and dark portrayal of the house, and persuading us of the genre's artificiality. She also highlights the disconnection between the house and family, and the estate surrounding the house. There is little evidence in this poem of the kind of vigorous activity that produces such prospects. Indeed, the only proprietorial activity Leapor shows us is the destruction of a grove of trees at the end of the poem. The greed of the miserly Sir Wary ensures that the only outdoor work he initiates is destructive of prospects in both the literal and figurative senses. The prospect view and all it implies in georgic poetry has, in any case, little relevance for her as a woman or as a servant. Unlike the male writers of the georgic tradition, Leapor cannot claim possession, either for herself or for Artemisia, of the landscape she surveys, and it is, perhaps, this exclusion which leads her to characterise the prospect view as a meaningless convention. Her sense of exclusion is emphasised when, after two brief lines of georgic eulogy, she and her muse are "hurl'd" precipitantly "down . . . to the nether World" (107 - 108) of the kitchen.

It is in the domestic life of the kitchen that Leapor establishes her alternative vision to the traditions and teleologies of the estate poem. The kitchen is the only part of the present-day tour of the house that displays a real sense of vitality. Despite Leapor's some earlier hints at carelessness in the running of the kitchen — smoke-blackened walls and floors greasy enough to fry food (57 - 58) — we are given a real sense of stimulation and life. Unlike the dark passage along which "the Stranger blindly feels / and (trembling) dreads a Spectre at his Heels" (54 - 55),

²²⁷ Greene, *Mary Leapor* 140.

or the dull brown parlour (60 - 61), the kitchen, calling “much” attention (56) to itself between these two gloomy sites, literally crackles with activity: “the Fires blaze; the greasy Pavements fry; / and steaming Odours from the kettles fly” (58 - 59). The dark passage characterises the house as a mausoleum, foreshadowing of the house’s ultimate fate. The brown parlour contains the languid heart of the house, “the dull Clock” which “beats audible and slow” (63), perhaps because it is winding down. The contrast with the depiction of the kitchen is sharp.

The liveliness of the kitchen is centred in Leapor’s vivid portrait of the “menial train” (110) who work at Crumble Hall. Foremost amongst these is the cook, Sophronia, who “first in Verse shall learn to chime” (113). Sophronia, the name Leapor gives here to the cook-housekeeper at Edgecote House, appears in other poems, but not in a sympathetic light. In “An Epistle to Artemisia: On Fame” (Vol. II), for example, Sophronia is described as a “barb’rous Turk” (10) who berates Mira (Leapor) for wasting time in writing when she should be working and dismisses her from service. Leapor’s reference to Sophronia in “Crumble-Hall” can be seen as a satirical threat to involve Sophronia in the verse-making that had previously enraged her. Nevertheless, there is also something forgiving in the playfulness of Leapor’s tone. In the present context, Leapor seems to have decided to present Sophronia in an attractive light. She will, therefore, despite Sophronia’s “Turkish” temper, bring Sophronia into harmony, and thus to “chime” with the rest of the poem.

Sophronia is only the first of several servants who will be brought into harmony with Leapor’s verse. They will “chime” with her poetry in a way that stands in contrast to the negative portraits of Sir Wary and Biron. Unlike the torpor characterising Sir Wary and Biron, her description of the servant displays enormous energy and detailed subjectivity. As well, while the servants are often treated with humour, that humour never descends to the dark satire with which she describes the owners. There is satire in Sophronia’s portrait, for example, when Leapor undercuts her initial declaration of “*Sophronia sage!*” by revealing that she is really praising Sophronia’s “learned Knuckles” (115), which can expertly knead pastry. But this is an

extremely light and sportive piece of satire which does not detract from Leapor's sensuous appreciation of Sophronia's creation of cheese-cakes as she "bruise[s] the Curd, and thro' her Fingers squeezes / *Ambrosial* butter with the temper'd Cheese" (117 - 118). Note that Leapor connects sweet and celebratory foods, such as tarts, jellies and dessert puddings, with Sophronia's "Skill" (119), emphasising the pleasurable association she wishes to establish between the kitchen and reader.

Sophronia's creative, social energy is also signalled by a pun on the word chime. Leapor's main use of the word, as I have indicated, signifies correspondence between herself, her poem and the servants, particularly Sophronia. But "chimes" also denote the sound of bells, notably the striking of bells to indicate the hour. In this secondary reading, the creative and active Sophronia is associated with the chiming of the hour, and thus stands in opposition to the slow, dying clock of the parlour. Her presence in the poem signals the dinner hour for the servants, perhaps quite literally by the striking of a bell, and, with the arrival of the servants into the kitchen, the dragging pace of the tour of the house accelerates into the lively narrative of their meal. Thus, Sophronia, as she prepares and cooks food for the household, is a motivating force that is missing from the genteel rooms of Crumble Hall.

Even the sleeping men in Sophronia's kitchen seem energetic in their slumbers. They display none of the torpor of Biron in his library. Indeed, it is only in this passage concerning the farm servant that we gain a brief sense of georgic responsibility. Only the farm labourers seem concerned about the affairs of the estate. Thus, "Grave *Colinettus* of his Oxen dreams" (121), as he waits for dinner to be served, but his worries about "his new-mown hay" (123) impel him suddenly awake, and he "runs headlong out to view the doubtful Day" (124). After the meal, "unwieldy *Roger*" (133) falls more completely asleep, but it is not a peaceful inertia: "His able Lungs discharge a rattling Sound: / *Prince* barks, *Spot* howls, and the tall Roofs rebound" (134 - 135). Indeed, every servant in the kitchen, whether asleep or awake, is described in terms which emphasise character, movement, energy or agitation. "Surly *Gruffo*" (126) carries the ale-

jug to the table and “turns a glaring Eye” (127) to the waiting farm-hands as if he suspects them of “Insurrection nigh” (128). These young men, resentful at being kept waiting for their beer, are a “fierce Crew that gaping stand a-dry” (129). The kitchen-maid, Ursula, is a “mournful Maiden” (137) who exaggeratedly laments over Roger’s snoring form, then turns with vigour to cleaning the dirty plates and saucepans.

This evidence of energy and vigour remains unnoted in much of the critical commentary on the poem. Donna Landry, for example, claims that Leapor undertakes a powerful commentary on “the ‘bourgeoisification’ of working class ideas about sexuality, marriage and the family.” Landry ignores the role and significance of Sophronia, and concentrates on Leapor’s presentation of the relationship between Ursula, recast as the cook, and Roger, understood to be Ursula’s husband. In this reading, “domestic labour and household production have ceased to have any meaning apart from the expression of marital devotion they supposedly signify.” Thus, “one would think that the gargantuan meals Ursula prepares were destined for Roger’s table alone,” states Landry, “rather than for the gentry at Crumble Hall.”²²⁸ Dalporto follows this analysis. Also ignoring Sophronia, she agrees that Ursula is “wasting the landlord’s food by overfeeding the other servants,” particularly her “husband” Roger, and “has forgotten that she labors for the gentry.” Thus, “the relations of production . . . are subsumed within domestic ideology.”²²⁹

But if we look closely at Ursula’s duties and bring Sophronia into consideration, we can see that Ursula is not the cook and is probably not married to Roger at all. Leapor clearly identifies Sophronia as the cook. We see her preparing the kind of luxury food that would certainly go to the gentry’s dining room. Ursula, on the other hand, feeds the pigs and chickens, prepares the servants’ stew, winds the jack, bastes the roast joint speared on a spit over an open

²²⁸ Landry, 115.

²²⁹ Dalporto, 239.

fire, and cleans the dirty plates and pots.²³⁰ These were all duties of a kitchen-maid, and were considered amongst the most menial in the household. Accordingly, the job of kitchen-maid was usually given to young women starting out in domestic service. Mary Leapor, for example, was in her teens when she began as a kitchen maid for Mary Jennens and was only twenty-three when she was dismissed from Edgecote House for failing to turn the jack and baste the meat properly. If she had lived and remained in service, she would undoubtedly have become a cook like Sophronia, as kitchen maids were often understood to be apprentices to the cook²³¹. Thus, it is probable that Ursula is not a middle-aged and childless wife to Roger, as several commentators have assumed. Indeed, Leapor identifies her as a “Maiden” or unmarried girl. This identification is emphasised at the end of the poem when Leapor tells us that Ursula will see fairy-elves (182). In the folk traditions of England, fairies are supposed to be visible only to those who are young and sexually innocent. How chaste Ursula might be is, perhaps, something of a moot point, but if she is able to see elves she is certainly not a middle-aged married woman despite her “fading brow.” It is therefore as a semi-literate teenager that we should understand her lament to Roger.

Nevertheless, Dalporto argues that Ursula’s attitude is diffused throughout the kitchen, so that “the servants act as though their place within the order of the estate is based only on affective relationships.” She cites the description of Colinettus, “an overseer of the field work . . . or a tenant farmer,” distracted from his duties by the “sexualised, ‘prevailing charms’ of ‘Dinner,’”²³² and of “another overseer, ‘surly Grusso’ [*sic*]” who “treats his crew harshly then

²³⁰ The handle and operating system of the spit.

²³¹ See Greene, *Mary Leapor* 17 and 115. Records show that as a kitchen maid, Leapor was “required to assist [the cook] and observe her methods” and was “expected to combine basic cooking with extensive cleaning both in the kitchen and in other parts of the house. She may have had some outdoor work as well.”

²³² Dalporto 239.

fears their rebellion.”²³³ For Dalporto, these characters are evidence of the dominance of affective relationships in which the “workers on the estate have lost sight of the exact nature of their servitude.”²³⁴

However, Colinettus, whose name, far from signifying an estate manager, recalls Spenser’s Colin Clout, as well as Leapor’s own “Colinetta” (Vol. I) and many other rustics in pastoral poetry, *is* concerned with his duties. This is why he dreams of his oxen even when he sleeps and why he rushes outside to check the weather. I do not believe Leapor intends any criticism of him for responding to the lure of dinner after a morning of work. We are meant instead to appreciate the redolent smell of Sophronia’s and Ursula’s stew, which can turn an anxious man from his worries. Gruffo, who, as his name suggests, is a grumpy old man, might well glare at the young field hands, but there is no suggestion in the poem that he “refreshes himself with the ‘tall Jugg’ while neglecting to give a drink to his ‘fierce crew.’”²³⁵ He “bears the tall Jugg” (127), that is, he carries it, presumably to the table, so that the beer it contains can be shared out over the beef and dumplings, in accordance with standard practice in eighteenth-century estate kitchens. In the context of a portrait of the servants’ dinner hour, none of this, even with Leapor’s satirical touches, suggests that private and affective relationships have taken precedence over normal household duties. The kitchen during the dinner hour is an attractive and nurturing place and time, but Leapor does not equate its sensuous pleasures with anything other than the rest and refreshment that the servants must have expected to find there. Sophronia is obviously a notable cook, but there is none of the hyperbole and improbability in this dinner hour as there are in the description of the medieval feast. Sophronia feeds her fellow servants generously, but not extravagantly, with largely labouring class food supplemented by the

²³³ Dalporto 240.

²³⁴ Dalporto 239.

²³⁵ Dalporto 240.

leftovers of the gentry's roast joint. The weary ploughman takes a nap while the food is served, and the foreman glares at the thirsty field-hands as he places a communal jug of ale on the table.

What is important about all these relationships and activities is that in the duration of a dinner hour we gain a vivid and intimate understanding of the inhabitants of the kitchen. They may be somewhat two-dimensional and even a little comical, but they are also surprisingly believable. Indeed, they may well be portraits of servants Leapor had worked with at Edgecote. Even Ursula's lament can be accepted as a fairly true-to-life portrayal of the excessive emotionalism a teenaged girl might be expected to indulge. Indeed, it is worth noting that, despite her declared love for Roger, Ursula turns from her lament as soon as the "Dish kettle" (150) boils, and "to each Plate the scalding Clout applies" (153). She is so energetic and effective at her task that in a short space the dishes glow and the saucepans shine (154 - 155). She has simply been voicing her lament whilst waiting for the kettle to boil. Far from being in thrall to "bourgeoisification," it appears that Ursula might well have been enlivening a boring interval with manufactured drama.

Indeed, her complaint to Roger that "for you my Pigs resign their Morning Due: / My hungry Chickens lose their Meat for you" (142 - 143), indicates neither that Ursula is feeding Roger gargantuan meals intended for the gentry nor that she is overfeeding the other servants. She is, in fact, depriving the pigs and hens of kitchen scraps in order to give them to her sweetheart. This may be dishonesty, of course, but, again, it is precisely the kind of venial act that we might expect of a young servant at the bottom of the household hierarchy. More importantly, Ursula's appropriation of pig food for the lumbering and unappreciative Roger adds to the comic irony of her plaint. The elevated diction of Ursula's love complaint is so disproportionate to the content of her speech that one cannot read it seriously.

Indeed, Leapor not only parodies the country-house poem in "Crumble-Hall" but, in these passages, also parodies the pastoral complaint or elegy. Leapor was familiar with pastoral. Several of her poems, such as "Damon and Strephon: a pastoral Complaint" or "Colinetta," are

themselves formal pastorals or employ such pastoral conventions as the complaint, where a swain laments the cold-heartedness or death of a beloved nymph. One of Pope's *Pastorals*, for example, describe Hylas lamenting that the flowers die and trees wither because of the absence of his beloved. Women poets generally were prolific in the form, and often reversed the genders of the faithless or dead lovers and grief-stricken victims. Thus, in Sarah Fyge's, "The fond Shepherd: A Pastoral," Larinda is forsaken by Exalis, who courts her, then disappears as soon as she confesses her love for him. Leapor may not have read this particular poem, but it was a common narrative, and she had probably read something similar. She must certainly have read Gay's mock-pastoral, *The Shepherd's Week*, because Ursula's lament is so similar to Marian's complaint against Colin Clout in "Tuesday."

Leapor employs the pastoral here to burlesque the erotic tradition of the form. Ursula is a somewhat comic nymph, and Roger, an unattractive love-object. The lack of pastoral glamour in their relationship is highlighted by Roger's name. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "roger" has been employed to describe the act of sexual intercourse since the early eighteenth century. Its use as a noun to describe both a rogue and a penis predates that. I think it not unreasonable to assume that Leapor, a woman from a labouring class, rural background, where the use of these terms probably first began, could be supposed to know of them by 1745 when she was writing this poem. It seems beyond coincidence that the only English name in the poem should be one with erotic connotations, and be attached to a rogue who has seduced the affections of Ursula, even if he is plainly unable to perform. Indeed, his flaccidity and his supine position on the table, added to the comic implications of his name, undercut all pastoral conventions even as they draw attention to them. It emphasises Leapor's attempt to keep her mock-pastoral grounded in the everyday world.

Read as a mock-pastoral complaint, the narrative of Roger and Ursula thus becomes another rewritten genre in a poem that refocuses the country-house tradition to privilege the labour that supports it. In fact, Leapor's portrayal of Ursula and Roger appears to participate in

a dated, but still current critical debate between the followers of the French poet Fontenelle and the adherents of Pope over the nature of pastoral poetry. Fontenelle's approach to pastoral was fairly flexible, so that elements of modernity were allowed to enter into a portrayal of Arcadian ideals, whereas Pope insisted that pastoral should reproduce what was an Arcadian reality, a reproduction of a Golden Age.²³⁶ Pope argues that "we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceived then to have been; when the best of men follow'd the employment."²³⁷ Leapor's pastoral interjection mocks many of these precepts and seems to follow Fontenelle's more flexible approach. Roger, for example, is not "the best of men," but a believable farm hand who eats too much and falls asleep after dinner. We are certainly meant to find amusement in the portrayal of Ursula, the greasy nymph, and Roger, the incapable lover, but at the same time, we are not made to feel disgust about the life of the kitchen, nor do we feel that her portrayal lacks validity. The servants are not made to appear unbelievably absurd. Indeed, if the pastoral is supposed to offer an image of the Golden Age, Leapor's portrait of the servants in the kitchen offers something similar. Not shepherds in Arcadia, of course, and not a fictive ideal. But, her construction of a mock-pastoral complaint does help to recast the kitchen narrative as a domestic pastoral, a sympathetic and energetic, if occasionally humorous, portrayal of rustics and their concerns in an interior geography which, despite its essential realism, is attractive because of its embrace of life.

To recast the pastoral in a somewhat more believable form is, indeed, the function of the country-house poem, according to Heather Dubrow. She argues that poems like "To Penshurst" and "Upon Appleton House" are pastorals rewritten to "replace the Arcadian ideal . . . with a

²³⁶ Joseph Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age*, (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991), 181 - 190.

²³⁷ Alexander Pope, "A Discourse On Pastoral Poetry," *The Poems of Alexander Pope*.

more practical and practicable view of society.”²³⁸ Thus, in “To Penshurst,” Jonson does not produce an ideal “alternative to the everyday world but rather . . . a peculiarly attractive version of it.”²³⁹ Similarly, the surprisingly idyllic portrait of the kitchen in “Crumble-Hall” offers, not an alternative to the everyday world, but an attractive version of it. We see none of the smoke-blackened walls and greasy floors of the realistic tour of the house, but a plenitude of food and drink in a world of “warm Kettles and sav’ry Steams” (121). Sophronia, in other poems a household martinet, is here a gifted creator of “sweet Tarts and Pudden too” (119) who cooks a dinner that calls the servants with “prevailing Charms” (125). Gruffo may be surly and his crew fierce, but they are fed with enough beef, dumplings and beer to leave one of their number snoring on a table. Ursula indulges in a pastoral lament, but neither she nor the reader is truly afflicted, while the effort of cleaning pewter, which so exhausted Mary Collier, disappears in Jonsonian hyperbole as the utensils almost appear to clean themselves: “the purging Bath each glowing Dish refines, / and once again the polish’d Pewter shines” (154 - 155).

Finally, Leapor’s reconstruction of the kitchen as the true centre of her country-house poem, leads into a far more intimate engagement with the gardens surrounding the house than she could obtain from a prospect view from the roof. This is a survey from within the landscape itself:

Now to those Meads let frolick Fancy rove,
Where o’er yon Waters nods a pendent Grove;
In whose clear Waves the pictur’d Boughs are seen,
With fairer Blossoms, and a brighter Green:
Soft flowery Banks the spreading Lakes divide:

²³⁸ Heather Dubrow, “The Country-House Poem: A Study in Generic Development,” *Genre* XII (Summer 1979), 159.

²³⁹ Dubrow 162.

Sharp pointed Flags adorn each tender Side.
 See! The pleas'd Swans along the Surface play;
 Where yon cool Willows meet the scorching Ray,
 When fierce Orion gives too warm a Day. (156 - 164).

This description is reminiscent of Marvell's portrayal of the estate at Nun Appleton. But where Marvell and most male writers of estate poems employ idyllic landscapes as illustrations of the spiritual and national superiority of the estates they describe, Leapor's description is more like Winchilsea's portrayals of Eastwell. They both assert an intimacy which refuses a wider implication. Leapor's description of the landscape surrounding Edgecote House conveys a fully realised, if enchanting, parkland, which, again like Winchilsea's shadowed gardens, offers cool waters and shady groves to those who enter. The beneficiaries of the garden's pleasures are not the owners of the estate but those who take joy and recreation in its beauty: both swans and swains find sanctuary under the sheltering branches of its groves.

Leapor seems to view this landscape as a particularly feminine geographic space. Although the "hapless Swain" (170) takes shelter there, Leapor demonstrates that it is really the haunt of nymphs and dryads, of feminine turtle doves with "their silken Wings" (171), and of the nightingale, characterised here as Philomela (169). Thus, when the owner of Crumble Hall has the grove destroyed to make way for fashionable improvements to the house and grounds, we gain a sense of male assault against female nature. The dryads howl, and "each Nymph distracted flies" (167), while Philomela, associated with a mythic narrative of rape and abuse, is once again violated. Even the "rev'rend Oaks" (172), normally associated with masculine strength, are here represented as feminised victims, "perish[ing] shameful[ly]" (174) as their roots are "ignobly . . . torn" (173).

It is significant that one of Leapor's most influential model for this poem, Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*, while it portrays and condemns the destruction of a grove of trees, merely depicts this destruction as a failure of reason and good taste rather than the traumatic assault that Leapor

envisages. Indeed, Leapor herself seems to connect these wrong-headed improvements with the owners' neglect of their georgic responsibilities. It is certainly significant that an estate with rotting ploughs should take short-sighted and destructive measures to raise money and "improve" the prospect. However, where Pope remains detached in his criticism, Leapor appears involved and passionate. The nearest literary analogy to Leapor's vision is in Winchilsea's portrayal of the destruction of an ancient grove in "Upon My Lord Winchilsea's Converting the Mount in his Garden to a Terras." Winchilsea does not use images of ravaged dryads, as Leapor does, but she does specify the female gender of the grove, and the male gender of those who destroy it. The details of the demolition and the emotions engendered by that demolition also give the two narratives a strong affinity. Richard Pickard agrees and demonstrates that Winchilsea and Leapor are two of a group of eighteenth-century poets who protest the destruction of trees in terms which give as much importance to the beauty of trees as most georgic poetry gives to their utility.²⁴⁰ Like Winchilsea, and unlike Pope, Leapor obviously believes that there can never be an acceptable rationale for the kind of improvement that leads to the destruction of nature and in which the nurturing world of the grove and the garden is eliminated because of masculine desires and actions.²⁴¹

Nature has been "banish'd" (177) states Leapor, in order "to clear the Way for Slopes and modern Whims" (176). All that is left is a "barren Gloom" (176) and a "Ravag'd Plain" (180).

²⁴⁰ Richard Pickard, "Environmentalism and 'Best Husbandry': Cutting Down Trees in Augustan Poetry," *Lumen* XVII (1998), 108 - 112 and 117 - 121.

²⁴¹ Dalporto 233. Dalporto points out that landscape projects of the mid-eighteenth became so disruptive of local communities that in popular literature they began to "signify 'corruption of landed society.'" This corruption is, of course, what Pope warns against in *Epistle to Burlington*, and Oliver Goldsmith in *The Deserted Village*. See also Greene, *Mary Leapor* 16. Greene notes that two years after the publication of "Crumble-Hall," Edgecote House was indeed torn down and rebuilt, and some of its existing parkland was uprooted for landscape improvements. In 1788, further improvements led to the removal of the village of Edgecote and its people from the vicinity of the house.

Similarly, the new house is characterised by sterility and “aukward Art” (178). Unlike Pope’s vision of the future of Timon’s villa, Leapor does not offer any hope for this improved estate. It will be forever haunted by the “injur’d Nymphs” (180), while “strange Sounds and Forms shall tease the gloomy Green; / and Fairy-Elves by Urs’la shall be seen” (181 - 182). The new house will “Echo” (183) these supernatural visitations and suffer from a biblical plague of “doleful Crickets” (184). This bleak, if satirically expressed, future vision of Crumble Hall, which owes little to any of the models that Leapor probably used, is Leapor’s final rejection of the conventional temporality of the country-house poem. Here, the landowners who should be the guardians of the estate, ensuring that its ancient traditions are maintained and passed on to future generations are the originators of its destruction. While the estate remains, and the house is rebuilt, the pointless changes that are undertaken ensure that there will be no growth in the future, and no fertility, but only ghostly plagues and sterility.

Greene argues that this final vision of the estate indicates that Leapor does not reject the entire country-house tradition, but only the gentry who violate those traditions.²⁴² In other words, the poem should be read as a labouring-class version of *Epistle to Burlington*. But, unlike Pope, Leapor not only refuses to describe an exemplary landowner, even in the medieval past, she offers no vision at all of a positive future. A glorious and fruitful future is an almost inevitable assumption in a traditional country-house poem. Even seventeenth-century country-house poems such as “To Penshurst” and “Upon Appleton House” assume that the idealised Golden Age of the estate will never be interrupted. But Leapor rejects that assumption, as she has rejected every other country-house convention. She does not even appear to truly favour the house as it stands. While the new house is condemned as “vacant” (178), the old is described in dark and negative imagery. It is significant, I feel, that the poem ends with an appeal to “*Diracto*” to “stay thy desp’rate Hand” (185), if not from “the Parlour,” then from “the Grove”

²⁴² Greene, *Mary Leapor* 140.

(186). Far from feeling some inherited loyalty to a building that had once “relieved the Poor” (14) seems perfectly resigned to the destruction of the house so long as the far more important grove is left untouched.

If the house and its history, traditions, family and future mean little to her, we can see that what does matter to her are the servants in the kitchen and the nymphs in the natural world. Significantly, Leapor appears to feel that the two are connected and draws connections between them in a variety of ways. Most obvious, of course, is the way she invests the kitchen and its inhabitants with a pastoral-georgic sensibility that is echoed in her depiction of the grove and lake. Both kitchen and grove contain nymphs and swains, and share an atmosphere of sensuous pleasure. Indeed, as Greene demonstrates, Leapor draws frequent connections between the natural world and her own domestic labour.²⁴³ But perhaps the strongest link in “Crumble-Hall” between the kitchen and the grove is that Leapor figures both as sites of female hegemony. Just as the dryads and nymphs of the grove are portrayed as its most significant inhabitants, the two female servants of the kitchen are the heart of its domestic idyll. The male servants we meet are obviously field hands who come only periodically to the kitchen, as the swain goes to the grove, for rest from labour and restorative care. Roger is thus a comic analogy to the “hapless Swain” who is lulled to slumber by Ursula’s version of “Philomela’s Strain” (169 - 170). It is Sophronia and Ursula who cook the dinner with its “prevailing Charms” (125), and are responsible for “the warm Kettles, and the sav’ry Steams” (121), as well as the glowing dishes and shining pewter (154 - 155). Like the more conventional grove, the kitchen is a form of *beata femina*, a female world of sensuous satisfaction and pleasure.

What is the significance of these connections between kitchen and grove? Taken in the context of the poem as a whole, Leapor’s female-centered vision of these two places demonstrates that her ventriloquism of the country-house form has a gendered as well as a class-

²⁴³ Greene, *Mary Leapor* 141.

based stance. Not only is the female labour of the kitchen given a significance that is normally reserved for the estate and its history, but the women of the kitchen are associated with a female-centered natural world in the gardens of the estate filled with the profound and mythological figures of pastoral. Like the feminised grove, the female-based kitchen is under a threat of destruction, and a similar sense of alienation is present. Landry and Dalporto are correct in noting that the servants in this poem appear to be as unaware of their employers, as landowners in traditional country-house poems seem to be unaware of the labour that supports their estates. But while Landry and Dalporto attribute this obliviousness to developing social and economic issues in the eighteenth century, such as the development of sentimental ideology, I believe that Leapor's primary aim is to highlight the alienation of women from male areas of power and ownership. This particular concern is made evident when Mira is thrown from the roof. As a servant, but more particularly as a woman, she is prohibited from the possession of landscape which is such an integral part of georgic convention in this period.

As a result of this emphasis upon a feminine restructuring of the country-house poem, the traditional teleology inherent to the genre is not merely rejected, as we have seen, but is also recast. Thus, the traditions and history of Crumble Hall, so important to the standard country-house poem, are treated as absurd and ahistorical myths, with no connection to or relevance for the present. Instead of a idyllic survey of the estate which unites the house to the surrounding countryside in a portrait of a contemporary Golden Age, we are given a servant's graphic perspective of a crumbling and moribund domestic interior. Instead of a family whose history, traditions, and potentialities are bound up with the estate and the nation, we are introduced to Sir Wary and Biron, isolated and inert within their dusty library, who are responsible for the destruction of their house and estate. Finally, instead of a future of growth, fertility and glory, the estate is shown to be stripped, desolated and filled with ghosts: in essence, there is no future at all. Like other women writers, Leapor's rejection of traditional temporal movements is accompanied by an emphasis upon the present moment. The tour of the house, for example,

transforms spatial exactitude into the time it takes to follow Leapor's instructions, expressed in a continuous present tense, which appears to be measured by the clock in the parlour.

Nevertheless, Leapor does offer an attractive alternative version of both traditional and technical temporality in her portrait of the kitchen and the servant's dinner hour. Here, as we have noted, Sophronia stands as a kind of human clock who chimes the hour for dinner, which, by its very nature is a quotidian temporal period. Leapor then fills this hour with so much vitality and energy that it becomes temporally more significant than the history of the hall, the time she gives to the tour, or the future of the estate. The intimate, domestic, quotidian world of the female servants who organise the dinner hour becomes the central feature of the poem in an understanding of the life of a *beata femina* that is echoed in the beauty of the grove. The servants in the kitchen might not be able to claim the kind of mythic past that Biron and Sir Wary would undoubtedly believe belongs to them, but the servants' sharply defined characters, and their intimate concerns and interactions have an immediacy and an appeal lacking in any other aspect of the house except the threatened grove. This appeal invests the temporality of the dinner hour. If Leapor had merely wished to privilege the servants over the landowners she need not have specified the period in which they appear in the poem. But in assigning the duration of an hour for this section in which the readers are brought into an intimacy both specific to and comprehensive of every other dinner hour, Leapor privileges a feminine temporality in which a brief span of time can expand to encompass a continuous expression of experience.

Both female domains and the temporality that encompasses them are vulnerable to male dominance and ownership, as Leapor demonstrates. They are not idealised worlds, despite the pastoral-georgic sentiment that invests them, but sympathetically drawn sites of nurture and pleasure. As such, their vulnerability is made into an affective tool with which Leapor manipulates the emotional response of her readers. We would rather have Ursula sighing over Roger than haunted by fairy-elves, and we would rather the oaks should continue to shelter the "hapless Swain" than be torn up by the roots. That empathy and sense of attraction also then

incorporates the temporality with which Leapor imbues these female domains. The present moment, in which food is served and swans play, and the quotidian, in which those moments are repeated becomes more attractive than a fictive past with no connection to the present, or a future which promises destruction and sterility.

In rewriting the country-house tradition so completely, Leapor has rewritten its essential temporality and its essential meaning. She has taken a georgically-inflected genre, which, perhaps more than any other, celebrates possession, nation-building, and teleological progression, all elements which exclude female participation, and recast it for a woman and a servant. Not as dark a vision as that produced by Mary Collier, "Crumble-Hall" portrays female labour and temporality as components in a *beata femina* for the female labouring poet. This is not precisely the apprehension of the divine in the present moment that Winchelsea and other more socially privileged female poets discover, but the apprehension of a very similar kind of enjoyment in immediate intimacy and sensuous beauty .

Mary Leapor is somewhat different from Mary Collier in this apprehension, a disparity that is probably a function of their difference in status. As a regularly employed kitchen maid, Leapor had numerous and onerous duties, but she had also mandated free time each day. In "To Artemisia: On Fame," she relates the censure she incurs from Sophronia for using this free time for writing rather than the approved leisure activity of sewing. As a day-labourer employed by the hour, Collier, as *The Female Labour* makes plain, does not have even this restricted freedom. Her free time is snatched from other activities, including sleeping. It is not surprising, therefore, that we see Collier taking little overt pleasure in the natural world, or finding little that is rewarding in the quotidian pattern of her life. Nevertheless, there are striking similarities between the most important poems of these two labouring writers. In common with other women poets, they reject the use of extended, authorised temporalities even when these temporal movements are conventions for the genres they employ. They privilege, instead, quotidian movements of time, Collier emphasising daily labour, and Leapor highlighting a repeated hour of

leisure. Significantly, they both find a sense of liberation in intimate interactions and personal relationships, although this is less pronounced with Collier than with Leapor. Their relationship to the world around them is not, of course, devoid of a sense of seasonal circularity or historical progression, but is more meaningfully defined by the immediate, the particular and the everyday. Their social and economic status undoubtedly prescribed certain aspects of this relationship, but, it seems to me, it is their position as women that is the determining characteristic that governs their understanding of time.

Chapter Five

Two Late Eighteenth-Century Poets.

As women writers developed more confidence in literary production later in the century, we can see significant changes in the subjects they address and in their greater willingness to become, within certain limitations, public figures. Part of this change resulted from women's greater experience in publication as the century advanced. Female scholars, such as Elizabeth Elstob, Elizabeth Carter and Catherine Macaulay, demonstrated, at least to other women, that women could engage publicly and successfully with intellectual pursuits. At the same time, such women poets and novelists as Anna Seward, Helen Maria Williams and Charlotte Smith extended the scope and thematic range of women's narratives. As more women published and gained acceptable public recognition, other women built on their initial successes and learnt from occasional failures.

Social changes also made a literary career somewhat easier as the century progressed. The greater prestige given to domesticity and family life in the later eighteenth century seemed to expand women's potential as writers. Today, many feminist scholars, echoing such eighteenth-century female radicals as Mary Wollstonecraft, tend to condemn domestic ideology and the cult of sensibility that accompanied it as confining and imprisoning. Yet, many eighteenth-century women writers embraced this ideology, which conferred a social role of substance rather than triviality upon the lives they were obliged to lead. It appealed especially to women writers from non-conformist religious backgrounds and those attached to various intellectual coteries such as the Bluestockings, for whom a connection between domesticity and serious study had long been a virtue. It was as if a more serious appreciation of domesticity and emotional affect made it increasingly possible for women to comment upon the wider issues of history, politics and nationhood in a way that was nearly impossible for Winchilsea, or Singer Rowe. Thus, two of the earliest writers to stand publicly against the slave-trade were Hannah More, in *Slavery: A*

Poem (1788), and Ann Yearsley in *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave-Trade* (1788). Within the same period, Anna Seward discussed the inequities of English and Welsh history in *Llangollen Vale* and Charlotte Smith meditated upon the French Revolution in *The Emigrants*.

Though increasingly inclined to comment on larger issues, women poets nevertheless brought the same overarching interest in the particular, the intimate and the quotidian that we have seen define their work in the early eighteenth century. They were encouraged in the application of these more intimate issues to historical and public narratives by widespread cultural changes in the writing of history. History had privileged abstract paradigms of progress and decline into which were synchronised details of individual lives and events.²⁴⁴ But from the mid century, as Mark Salber Phillips demonstrates, new ideas of what could be understood as history expanded so that “it was increasingly hard to think of history as exclusively concerned with the narrative of political action.”²⁴⁵ New historical subjects, Salber Philips argues, included the history of manners, customs, art or literature and much of this new emphasis resulted from an awareness of new readers of historical narratives, particularly women.²⁴⁶ Both Salber Philips and M.G. Sullivan credit David Hume’s *History of England* (1754 - 1763) with introducing sentimental and novelistic ideas about the inclusion of the interior lives of protagonists into the writing of history.²⁴⁷ According to Greg Kucich, women appropriated these sentimental and novelistic paradigms in the writing of history in order “to develop a more comprehensive kind of

²⁴⁴ Greg Kucich, “Women’s Historiography and the (dis)Embodiment of Law: Ann Yearsley, Mary Hays and Elizabeth Benger,” *Wordsworth Circle* 33:1 (Winter 2002), 4.

²⁴⁵ Mark Salber Phillips, *Society and Sentiment: Genres of Historical Writing in Britain, 1740 - 1820*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 17.

²⁴⁶ Philips 130 - 170.

²⁴⁷ M.G. Sullivan, “Rapin, Hume and the Identity of the Historian in Eighteenth-Century England,” *History of European Ideas* 28 (2002), 157.
See also Philips 35 - 75.

alternative historical vision which foregrounds sympathy as the central component of historical understanding.” In this particularly female understanding, the interior lives and “domestic communities” of historical figures became more important than the political events in which they were involved. Women in the past, such as Mary Queen of Scots, for example, who had suffered because of social and political processes over which they had little control became a favourite subject of female-authored histories which gave a special prominence to “the graphic details of bodily pain while also interrogating the gendered social and legal systems that produce such violence towards women.” ²⁴⁸

Women poets addressing issues as diverse as the slave trade and South American history brought this sentimental emphasis to bear upon their involvement with public issues. Thus, Ann Yearsley’s theories of “social love,” which she developed out of her connection with the Bluestockings, became her argument against the slave trade. ²⁴⁹ She focused her objections around one particular slave deprived of his family and made him the paradigm for the anguish of all slaves. Helen Maria Williams invoked sympathy for victims of imperialism in *Peru* by bringing readers into the domestic lives and romances of Peru’s indigenous royal family. This concern with a sentimental register was, as Kucich notes, not wholly restricted to women writers. Edmund Burke certainly employs it in his portrayal of the French royal family during the Revolution. But its use among women writers is more intense and less concerned with some of the abstract theoretical issues which may be attached. I would also argue that while women poets may have found a precedent for the use of a sentimental register in the exploration of history in the works of Hume and Burke, their particular interest in the intimate, the affective and the immediate has its roots in women’s writing dating back to the seventeenth century. In many

²⁴⁸ Kucich 4.

²⁴⁹ Moira Ferguson, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class and Gender*, (Albany: State U of New York P, 1995), 73.

ways, women writers in the late eighteenth century were merely applying women's traditional interests to non-traditional themes.

At the same time as women writers were expanding their literary horizons to include matters of politics or history, they also continued to write about their own domestic lives and quotidian concerns. Indeed, many women poets at the end of the century focused with even greater intensity on the quotidian, finding within particular moments or hours of the day, access to experiences out of time. Even a writer like Anna Seward, who was a great admirer of Thomson and modelled much of her work on his, resists the historically progressive and cyclical emphasis of *The Seasons*. Her "georgics" are sonnets, never extending temporally beyond the description of one season and often focusing on her personal response to a particular time of day or event. Her long poem, *Llangollen Vale*, does begin with a traditional survey of Welsh geography and history, but the history becomes subsumed into the intimate lives of Sarah Ponsonby and Lady Eleanor Butler, who are shown to end all temporal movement with their construction of a domesticated *beata femina*. Other writers like Ann Yearsley or Anna Barbauld show themselves open to models of temporality that owe more to earlier women writers than to male models.

Finally, it is worth noting that women poets in the last decade of the eighteenth century continued to employ georgically inflected forms. The question of the alleged disappearance of the georgic mode at the end of the eighteenth century has been widely discussed elsewhere. But if the georgic evolved into other forms in the late eighteenth century, it is still recognisable in women's verse. Sometimes, as in the georgically-inflected verse of Seward or Joanna Baillie, it retains its conventional geography of the farm and rural landscape. Sometimes, its geography is transformed to the kitchen or urban nursery. But it remained a popular form with women, many of whom acknowledge Virgil, Pope, Thomson or Cowper as models. The georgic mode had proved a flexible and useful tool for women and gave authority to works which might otherwise have been condemned as trivial.

The two women writers whose works I examine in this final section employed georgically-inflected paradigms in some of their most compelling poetry. They are sometimes included in the female romantic canon but are as often included in discussions of eighteenth-century women poets. The two periods overlap, of course, and the beginnings of romanticism are fluid enough that any late eighteenth-century poet has to be considered with reference to romantic sensibilities. Nevertheless, both Ann Yearsley and Anna Laetitia Barbauld claim earlier influences upon their work and portray themselves as part of an ongoing female tradition of poetics. They also reflect two of the major influences on female poetry in the mid to late eighteenth century: non-conformist religious faith and the Bluestocking movement.

Anna Laetitia Barbauld was born into a family tradition of religious dissent, and this tradition can be seen to affect her construction of gender in her poetry. Women from dissenting families were expected to be both domestic and literate, both sensitive and rational. This expectation fitted well with the new domestic ideology, although the excesses of sensibility were rejected by dissenting communities. Barbauld's working life extended well into the romantic period, and yet, perhaps because of her dissenting background, and her association with some of the founders of the Bluestocking movement, she seems to have more in common with earlier writers than with the romantics. I discuss Barbauld's work at the end of the chapter. I begin with a discussion of the poetry of Ann Yearsley. Although Yearsley had a vexed relationship with the established church, she was not from a dissenting background and her association with the Bluestockings was distant. But she was patronised and mentored in her early career by Hannah More, a dissenter and a Bluestocking, and by Elizabeth Montagu, known as the "Queen of the Blues." This relationship was broken soon after the publications of Yearsley's first book, but the Bluestocking programme of rational discourse and mutual affection can be found throughout her poetry. Like Barbauld, her working life extended into the romantic period and displays a certain romantic consciousness, but she herself admitted much earlier influences in her poetry. I have chosen these two women as representative members of the late eighteenth-century

female literary community largely because of the way they connect earlier eighteenth-century traditions with romanticism. As well, they both employ georgically-inflected verse fairly widely throughout their work and ventriloquise their models in ways that are significant for later writers.

I. Ann Yearsley.

Ann Yearsley has often been designated as a labouring-class poet, and indeed, the title page of her first publication declares that the author is a "Milkwoman," someone who delivered milk from door to door and who was probably responsible for the milking too. We know little of her early history, most details originating with her first patron, Hannah More, who was a somewhat biased and inaccurate reporter. In her "Introductory Letter" to Yearsley's first volume and in her private letters to Montagu, More gives few details of Yearsley's early background, except to emphasise in vague terms her labouring-class origins and to describe the way Yearsley's mother, also a milkwoman, borrowed books from her clients for her daughter to read. More goes into great detail about the family's destitution in the harsh winter of 1783, when Yearsley and her husband, her mother and four children were discovered starving to death in either a barn or in a cottage stripped bare by an unfeeling landlord (More's versions vary). The family's rescue, the death of Yearsley's mother, and More's adoption of her disciple are dwelt upon with even more particularity. To her credit, More seemed to be genuinely impressed with Yearsley's talent, and she went to some trouble to edit Yearsley's verse and to establish a worthwhile subscription list for her first book of poetry. At the same time, her letters betray a certain self-complacency. She was unmistakably pleased with her own role in the affair, and she condescended towards Yearsley in a way that is absent, for example, in Freemantle's relationship with Leapor. As a result, More exaggerates the pathetic and dramatic in Yearsley's story at the expense of any real insight into Yearsley's history, as well as her own role in rescuing an

improbable talent from obscurity.²⁵⁰

What, for example, can be made of the names of authors and texts Yearsley claimed to have read before she met More? More indicates in her preface to Yearsley's first volume that her catalogue of Yearsley's reading is exhaustive, and represents the limits of her knowledge. However, in her letters to Montagu, More suggests that the names Yearsley gave her is, are, in fact, a catalogue of Yearsley's preferred authors and texts. This is a telling difference. If *Eloisa to Abelard* is actually Yearsley's favourite poem by Pope rather than the only poem by Pope she had encountered, we can make significant assumptions about Yearsley's literary preferences. The same assumptions could then be made about Yearsley's enjoyment of Virgil's *Georgics*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and Young's *Night Thoughts*. If these are choices rather than limitations, we can assume that Yearsley's literary imagination is stimulated by that which is serious, dark, introspective and affective. We know from her own poetry that Yearsley consistently employs a tone of serious introspection; thus, it would be something of a coincidence if the only books of poetry she encountered were those which might be supposed to most appeal to her. Indeed, I would argue that much of Yearsley's conception of the *beata femina* came from the solitary musings of poems like *Night Thoughts* or Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*. Perhaps Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard* showed her ways to connect the past and the present so that the past is always alive in the present for the solitary and melancholy narrator. Although Yearsley privileges a retreat which relies upon the personal and particular rather than the universal or the abstract and although her reliance upon earlier feminine models

²⁵⁰ Moira Ferguson, "Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 27: 3 (Fall 1986), 248 - 249.
 See also. Mary Waldron, "Ann Yearsley and the Clifton Records," *Age of Johnson* 3 (1990): 302 - 315.
 See also "A Prefatory Letter to Mrs Montagu by Miss Hannah More," "Mrs. Yearsley's Narrative to the Noble and Generous Subscribers" and the Deed of Trust in *Poems on Various Subjects by Ann Yearsley, a Milkwoman of Clifton near Bristol*, (London: G.G.J. and J. Robinson, 1787), vii - xxx.

seems extensive, we should never forget that she consistently acknowledges and even reveres writers like Young and Pope in her poetry, even as she reworks their concepts.

Yearsley's first book of poetry was an immediate success, with three editions appearing in quick succession. Much of this initial success must be credited not only to Yearsley's talent, but to More's active support. Nevertheless, it is not surprising that Yearsley, despite her initial gratitude, should soon feel resentful at the overbearing character of More's patronage. It is obvious from More's letters to Montagu that she had no intention of allowing Yearsley to rise above her labouring-class status or to have control of the money that she earned from her poetry.²⁵¹ Mary Waldron demonstrates several gaps and evasions in More's account of Yearsley's background. Waldron's research in the Bristol Record Office indicates that the Yearsleys had almost certainly leased property, possibly an inn, in Clifton and actually contributed to the parish poor rates. Their loss of income does not appear to have been owing to "the poet's vice - want of oeconomy," as More expresses it in her preface but was more likely the result of the seizure of leased properties around Hotwells and Clifton by the Bristol Society of Merchant Venturers. Thus, although Yearsley and her family were destitute at the time when More first encountered them, Waldron argues that Yearsley probably considered herself several degrees above the improvident labouring-class to which More, and later scholars, assigned her.²⁵² It is even possible to imagine that in the early days of her marriage she might well have had enough leisure and disposable income to become relatively well-read. As Waldron notes, none of Yearsley's poems position her as a member of the labouring-classes and only one, "Clifton Hill," alludes to her work as a milkwoman.²⁵³

If Yearsley cannot be labelled unreservedly a labouring woman, she cannot be situated

²⁵¹ Cited in Moira Ferguson, "Resistance and Power," 248.

²⁵² Waldron 303 - 310.

²⁵³ Waldron 316.

either as an exemplar of the retiring domestic ideal that defined middle-class women throughout the century. In her poetry and her prefaces she consistently presents herself as the main protagonist in her family and her life. Indeed, as a regularly published author, as a woman who had to single-handedly find a new publisher and a new patron after her break with More, and as the eventual owner of a successful circulating library, she represents a new generation of professional women writers. By contrast, the Countess of Winchilsea had had to disguise her desire to write serious poetry, Sarah Fyge was punished by her family for daring to publish, and even a successful poet like Elizabeth Singer Rowe had to construct an excessively chaste persona to counteract the kind of public censure that tended to attach to more obviously professional writers like Aphra Behn or Delariviere Manley. But by the last third of the century, women such as Anna Seward, Anna Barbauld or Hannah More could pursue careers as published authors without threatening their public reputations. Indeed, much of Charlotte Smith's poetic output concerns her public career and the emotional effects of the financial disasters that forced her to keep publishing. The domestic ideal had not disappeared. All these women claimed to place domestic duties above every other activity, even if the evidence of their individual output placed that claim in jeopardy. But the ideal had altered enough to accommodate the existence of respectable women earning money and supporting their families through professional authorship.

However, despite this sense of professionalism, Yearsley describes a life of the *beata femina* that shares many similarities with earlier writers in the tradition. She sometimes describes the site of the *beata femina* as rural retreat like Clifton Hill, but she also describes it as a retreat of the self into mental solitude. In this, she is, perhaps, closer to Chudleigh than to Winchilsea, but she shares ideas with both. She finds in the natural world a freedom from the demands and tensions of social life and her own personal tragedies, but that freedom can also be found in her own reflections. Solitude is a necessary part of the freedom she seeks, but like earlier proponents of the *beata femina*, she also insists on a sense of female community within it. This insistence is, of course, a paradox and like earlier writers she attempts to solve that paradox in various ways.

Her usual strategy is to portray herself as part of a feminised natural world and as a mentor to a female constituency. This generalised sense of feminine connection is often particularised by Yearsley's employment of her mother's memory, which gives emotional intensity to an association that might otherwise seem somewhat detached and intellectual.

One might associate the emotional nature of Yearsley's understanding of *beata femina* more with Winchilsea than with Chudleigh, except that again, she often intertwines both elements of *beata femina*, the emotional and the intellectual. Yearsley appeals to both affect and to reason in her construction of a feminine retreat. This appeal to both affect and reason reflects the social and cultural atmosphere of Yearsley's era. It is not surprising that a writer like Yearsley, concerned to establish an intellectual legitimacy amongst a readership that would tend to perceive her as a working-class prodigy, would infuse the emotional nature of her retreat with reasoned and informed reflection. A maternal georgic such as "To Mira, on the Care of her Infant," for example, describes a deeply emotional bond between mother and child, but does so in terms of reasoned argument.

Poems such as "To Mira" also highlight another element of Yearsley's construction of *beata femina*: her unashamed adoption of domesticity. Many female writers of retreat in the early eighteenth century seemed to accord domestic duties the same level of contempt that was demonstrated by men. By the late eighteenth century, as we have seen, contempt had changed to admiration. This admiration could be equally constricting for women, of course, but it allows a writer like Yearsley to equate her *beata femina* with the domestic and particularly with the maternal. Her sense of retreat is infused with a sense of family, and the serenity that can be found in these relationships. Even her portrayal of the natural world emphasises a relationship to it that is experienced as a familial and domestic connection.

Finally, her understanding of time demonstrates the same ability to experience a sense of transcendence within the present moment that we have seen in other female writers of georgically-inflected verse. For Yearsley that sense of transcendence is given added poignancy

by her insistent evocations of memory. Earlier writers of *beata femina* also invoke memory, of course. It could be argued that much of their poetry consists of remembered narratives.

Nevertheless, writers like Winchilsea or Chudleigh declare the importance of concentrating on the present moment, to the exclusion of the future or the past. Yearsley's privileging of memory, like much else in her poetry, seems to have both emotional and intellectual roots. Intellectually, personal memory can be seen to represent the re-writing of historiography in which Yearsley was involved. Winchilsea and Chudleigh had felt excluded from the traditional understanding of history, but Yearsley could, through the privileging of personal memories, include herself within a feminine understanding of history. At the same time, memory represents for Yearsley a deeply personal emotional response to events by means of which she anchors her sense of self in the present. Throughout her work, memories of her family or of people with whom she has felt a personal connection are consciously invoked in order to reflect upon problems in the present. These memories are not so much a reflection upon the past, but involve the reconstruction of the past within the present.

I will examine two of Yearsley's poems, "Clifton Hill" and "Soliloquy," which illustrate her construction of a *beata femina* within the georgic mode. Like other women writers whose works I have examined, Yearsley ventriloquises the mode for her own uses. This is, perhaps, most tellingly displayed in her early poem, "Clifton Hill," in which she constructs a *beata femina* within the georgic trope of the survey or prospect view. The prospect view and its employment within the georgic mode were introduced, as Ralph Cohen demonstrates, by Sir John Denham in *Coopers Hill*. In a typical survey poem, the narrator climbs a tall hill, and, observing the landscape, reflects upon the history that the view suggests. The poet-narrator compresses the space between himself and the landscape laid out before him, Cohen argues, and thus compresses the historical movement of time "in which past events are seen to offer present spectators the

possibilities of the future.”²⁵⁴ The topographical poem and the prospect view remained popular throughout much of the eighteenth century, without the kind of significant transformation that Cohen would define as generically innovative rather than variational. *Windsor Forest* and *Grongar Hill*, for example, both introduce several variations into Denham’s model, but the basic concept of transforming observed geographic space into an apprehension of historical time remains. Thus, when Yearsley wrote “Clifton Hill” in 1785 she was employing a mode with a significant history and specific conventions. Of course, we do not know whether Yearsley had read *Coopers Hill*, *Grongar Hill*, *Windsor Forest*, *The Seasons* or any of several examples of the prospect view in this period, but the mode was widespread. She may even have read *Clifton: A Poem in Two Cantos*, a highly conventional work which was published in Bristol in 1767.²⁵⁵

Yearsley’s employment of the topographical trope involves considerable transformation, not least a transformation of the kind of landscape she chooses to portray. Survey poems of the earlier eighteenth century, such as *Windsor Forest* or *Grongar Hill*, eulogise domesticated and fertile landscapes suffused with history like the Thames river valley. Later georgic poems, such as *The Fleece* or *The Seasons*, employ the survey to give a sweeping view of largely rural areas of production. Later still, the early romantics like Wordsworth would abandon surveys of tamed nature for the sublime glories of a nature wild and remote. Yearsley constructs her own vision of an ideal landscape in “Clifton Hill.” She chooses a geographic site that is unlike the fertile landscapes celebrated by Pope or Thomson. “Clifton Hill” celebrates a more spectacular and rugged geography: a river gorge with steep sides, somewhat like the cliffs above the Wye river that would, ten years later, be commemorated in “Tintern Abbey.” But, unlike Wordsworth in

²⁵⁴ Ralph Cohen, “Innovation and Variation: Literary Changes and Georgic Poetry,” *Literature and History: Papers Read at a Clark Library Seminar. March 3rd 1973 by Ralph Cohen and Murray Krieger*, (Los Angeles: William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, 1974), 17.

²⁵⁵ Henry Jones, *Clifton: A Poem in Two Cantos, including Bristol and all its Environs*, (Bristol: E. Farley, 1767).

"Tintern Abbey," Yearsley acknowledges more openly the farms and shepherds in the landscape she celebrates, as well as tourists in the small spa and the busy river traffic. More particularly, as Landry notes, Yearsley rejects the prevailing masculine ideology of possession often reflected in the topographical poem.²⁵⁶ Her description of Clifton Hill is not a means for historical or national reflection, and, while her recreation of a walk over the hill enables her to access memory and to experience delight, there is none of the sense of personal dominion that we gain from romantic treatments of landscape.

Perhaps the most significant transformation that Yearsley undertakes in this poem is signalled in the complete title. "Clifton Hill: Written in January 1785" draws immediate attention not just to space but to time.²⁵⁷ The temporal addition to the title signals the changes that Yearsley will make in this genre. Instead of a description of geographic space that enables access to time, Yearsley will reverse the convention to privilege time over space. The title also indicates that the temporality evoked by Yearsley is not the progressive, historical time of *Coopers Hill* or *Windsor Forest*, but time that is specific and particular. Other eighteenth-century writers, it is true, have drawn attention to time in their titles. But these, like Thomson's *Winter*, often lack the kind of specificity that is emphasised here. Our attention is not being drawn to a generalised winter's morning, but to an emphasis upon the act of writing and to the memory of a particular morning and a particular walk.

Temporal particularity is further emphasised in Yearsley's first line. "In this lone hour," she begins, and the ensuing eleven line sentence, together with the thirty-four line introductory section, all depend, structurally and thematically, on that initial prefatory phrase. The definite

²⁵⁶ Landry 131.

²⁵⁷ Ann Yearsley, "Clifton Hill: Written in January 1785," *Poems, on Several Occasions. By Ann Yearsley, a Milkwoman of Bristol*, (London: T. Cadell, 1785). All citations from the text are from this edition and are identified by line number.

article in this phrase, strengthens this specificity, as well as a series of temporally-charged prepositions: “*When* angry storms descend” (1), “*When* all [the] sprightly fires inactive lie” (3), “*When* hoary Winter strides the northern blast” (5) (my emphases). Although Yearsley is describing a particular season, winter, it is subordinate to the moment. Everything she sees or imagines or remembers on this walk exists, not within a cycle or a teleology, but within a particular “lone hour.”

Yearsley’s extended emphasis at the beginning of the poem upon a specific time rather than geographic space produces an effect similar to Winchilsea’s emphasis upon specific and intimate temporality in “A Nocturnal Reverie.” Winchilsea’s survey of her husband’s estate transforms a public mode into personal reflection by situating her poetic eye within the landscape in a particular moment that has personal meaning for her, instead of hovering above the landscape and associating progressive temporality with a prospect view. Similarly, the “lone hour” in Yearsley’s poem also represents a personal and intimate duration, here the very early morning, which allows access into the landscape and the lives of the people and animals inhabiting that landscape, rather than maintaining the distance of the observer as in most prospect poems. Later in the poem, Yearsley includes more conventional prospect views, and didactic interjections, but the overarching movement of the poem takes us into the lives of the inhabitants of the hill and into the mind of the poet in a way that is far more reminiscent of Winchilsea than of Denham or Pope.

Yearsley also includes an appeal to the universal and as well as to the intimate. Yearsley’s conventional descriptions of “angry storms” (1) and “hoary Winter” (5) universalise the hour she describes. However, she also particularises the hour when she emphasises that it is her own “chill’d soul” that “deplores her distant friend” (2) and fills her mind with “gloomy objects” (4). Similarly, she describes the animals and rural labourers on the hill both as universal paradigms and as particular victims of the brutality of winter. Thus, the conventionally-described “feather’d warblers” (8) are forced to abandon their homes in the woods to “seek the

savage haunt of man" (10). But Yearsley's outrage over the senseless killing of "the beauteous red-brest, tender in her frame" (23) particularises the winter suffering of the birds. This is not any robin, but one that Yearsley recalls, whose "song oft wak'd the soul to gentle joys" (27). The swains and nymphs who lose their "soft desire" (17) for each other in winter when "Love seeks a milder zone" (19) are also somewhat conventional figures. But here, Yearsley particularises the swains into the "rough clown" (23) who kills the robin, and domesticates the nymphs into a kitchen maid who "asks no warmth — but from the kitchen fire" (18). This particularity is emphasised when Yearsley places herself in the narrative as "Lactilla" who, "half-sunk in snow / . . . shivering, tends her fav'rite cow" (19 - 20). Each of these narratives exists within Yearsley's consciousness during the "lone hour" of her walk, yet they convey at the same time a generalised understanding of all other lone hours and of all other winters. Her habitation of one specific hour and the recreation of narratives within that hour expands rather than compresses time to encompass a universality of experience.

This sense of expansion is highlighted by the reminder in Yearsley's title of the act of writing. She reminds her readers that her entire poem is a production of memory. This is a self-evident truth, of course, for most survey poetry, but one often overlooked or ignored by both authors and readers. The fiction of the prospect view is of immediacy, although, obviously, the scene must be remembered in the study. Nevertheless, as readers of topographical survey we feel as if we were upon the hill with the author, seeing what he sees. Yearsley's acknowledgment in the title that she is looking back and writing of her recollections of a particular walk, creates a stronger impression of memory and reflection than most prospect poems. Her reference to "this lone hour" becomes an ambiguous temporal indicator. Does she mean the lone hour of her walk or the lone hour of her composition? The sense of specificity given by her use of a date and a particular duration in the title, together with the confusion caused by the ambiguity of her temporal intention in the first line, emphasises that the temporal movement of this survey is purely subjective. The lone hour can represent the walk or the act of

composition or both. As such, it can be seen to signify that period of solitude and retreat in which the poet can experience memories of the past and reflections upon the future in a continuing present moment.

Yearsley's construction of this kind of temporality gains power from her extended postponement of a conventional geographic survey. The survey invariably dominates a topographical poem, and is an important structural feature in most georgic poems. Yearsley reverses this convention and although we learn later in the poem that she is recalling a walk over the hill, we gain no real sense of this geographic movement at the beginning. She does not, for example, claim to see the birds or shepherds she describes, as traditional writers of the georgic survey normally allege. Indeed, the description of herself milking a cow is self-evidently a remembered or an imagined scene. It is her memory of the hour within the season that has stimulated these narratives, rather than geographic prospects that initially are barely described. We are therefore not given the sensation of moving outwards into the landscape, as is usual in poetic surveys, but inwards to the memory and imagination of the author in her solitary retreat.

This emphasis upon imagination operating within a particular temporality is then extended into the next section of the poem, in which Yearsley looks forward towards spring:

Tho' slow and pensive now the moments roll,
Successive months shall from our torpid soul
Hurry these scenes again; the laughing hours
Advancing swift, shall strew spontaneous flowers. (35 - 38)

Here again, we are reminded by Yearsley's "now" of the "lone hour" in which the poem is conceived. On one level, she describes the return of spring in an apparent engagement with cyclical temporality. However, on another and more significant level, those successive months and the advancing hours are all subsumed into the "slow and pensive" present moment in which Yearsley dreams of spring. Indeed, Yearsley brings the future into the present as she depicts the potential delights of spring in a sustained present tense. She does not describe the flowers that

will bloom, but “the early-peeping snowdrop” (39) and “modest violet” that “grace the secret wild” (40) *currently* in her mind. Similarly, she brings the future of the swain into the present when she states that he “*now* stalks along the vale” (45) (emphasis mine) in spring as he “snuffs fresh ardour from the flying gale” (47). We know this is a spring and not a winter gale Yearsley describes because the swain’s erotic impulses, frozen through the winter, are reviving. “Strong raptures rise” (48) as he “louder whistles” and “stretches o’er the green” (49). Thus, memories of winters past and thoughts of future springs inhabit the imagination of the poet’s lone hour as if they were occurring in present time.

This representation is somewhat different to the cyclical movement of time found in conventional georgic poems or the teleological sense of past and present pointing towards the future common in the topographical survey. Yearsley does not contemplate a yearly round of seasons, nor a movement in which geographic space transforms into a significant historical narrative. Nor does she compress time into a representation of geographic space. Instead she portrays an expansion from herself in the present moment into a past and a future that are personal and particular to her experience. In most topographical poetry, from Denham’s *Coopers Hill* and on, the primary focus of the text is not the poet-observer but rather what the poet-observer sees and imagines retrospectively. In contrast, by restricting the essential focus of this poem to herself in an hour of time, Yearsley reiterates the thematic reversal with which she begins. In effect, she privatises the public ambit of the conventional topographical survey. Her narrative and didactic expansions always remain within the ambit of her personal compass, both geographically and temporally. Even when she describes sweeping vistas or events removed from her in time, or she universalises experience to encompass eternal time, she continues to convey a sense of the operation of her own consciousness within the present moment as the vantage-point of her text.

This narrative of the self becomes particularly evident when Yearsley finally begins to describe her walk on the hill. Employing a conventional trope for a topographic poem, she

briefly takes us outwards from her mind to a sweeping prospect view: "As o'er the upland hills I take my way, / My eyes in transport boundless scenes survey" (67 - 68). But, like Leapor's dismissal of georgic tropes in "Crumble-Hall," Yearsley employs this convention in order to emphasise her transformation of it. Instead of an historic narrative suggested by the visual features of her survey, the geographic movement is transformed into a localised, intimate view. The sight of Clifton Churchyard where Yearsley's mother is buried recalls personal rather than general memories. This passage begins in the past tense and describes a very different kind of survey as Yearsley exclaims, "Dead! Can it be? 'twas here we frequent stray'd / And these sad records mournfully survey'd" (77 - 78). But, significantly, as memory progresses, the past becomes interfused with the present:

Abash'd, I caught the awful truths she sung,
And on her firm resolves one moment hung;
Vain boast — my bulwark tumbles to the deep,
Amaz'd — alone I climb the craggy steep. (85 - 88)

She climbs the craggy steep in the past and in the present with the same concerns exercising her mind and with the presence of her mother very much part of her psyche in both temporalities.

The past is not simply recalled and compressed here by geographic space: we gain a sense that the ordered movement of time is transformed to bring the past into the present moment.

Yearsley's exclamations of sorrow which are constructed to sound as if she had just heard of her mother's death, and her fractured diction, which Landry calls "distraught" and "linguistically inadequate,"²⁵⁸ underlines this sense of the present moment expanding to incorporate the past.

The compression of time in conventional surveys works to invest the landscape with a national significance. Yearsley's strategy invests the landscape with personal significance, and time is transformed in order to emphasise the importance of the poet's self in the present moment and in

²⁵⁸ Landry 137.

the simultaneous experience of past and present undergone within the present moment.

In privileging the self and the consciousness of the self within time to such a degree, Yearsley rewrites the essential narrative of the topographical form and the traditional role of its narrator. In "Clifton Hill," she not only associates personal memories with elements of landscape, but situates herself, as I will demonstrate, as a mentor and friend to a female constituency that encompasses people, animals, and the landscape itself. Her concept of time is an important part of establishing this constituency, because it is her own consciousness and its expansion into the past, present and future that link the various elements of the constituency. Landry associates the feminine consciousness of the poem with "a scattering of fragmentary female perspectives."²⁵⁹ But I would argue that these differing perspectives are harmonised and unified by Yearsley's narrative perspective operating within her own understanding of temporal movement.

As we have seen, Yearsley is much more willing than earlier women writers to engage with the past and the future. However, she explores these temporal understandings subjectively, without submitting to a male-authored sense of teleology. I do not argue that male authored poetry never explored the subjectivity of temporal experience in the eighteenth century, but I would argue that many male writers in the georgic mode privileged a belief in the progressive forward movement of time. Historic narratives are invariably placed within a recognisable temporal context in most topographical and survey poetry. Even Denham's technique of attaching unrelated historic narratives to geographic sites in the landscape does not obscure the accurate chronological context of those narratives, or their temporal position with regard to the narrator in the poem's present moment. Pope's historic survey, in *Windsor Forest*, is even more conventional. While it is occasionally fragmented and gives greater emphasis to some monarchs as opposed to others, his chronological description of the kings of England moves forward from

²⁵⁹ Landry 131.

past to present in an established line of progression. Both Denham and Pope, of course, like many writers of topographical surveys, are describing public and national narratives of history. They are constrained by the discipline of historical knowledge to convey some sense of the progressive movement of history. In contrast, Yearsley describes personal and private histories, the subjects of her own memory. She is therefore more able to deliberately distort the context of historical narratives. Thus, although it is clear that her mother's death has occurred in the past, Yearsley is able to obscure details of when the death took place in relation to her present temporal position in the poem. Because of her insistence upon a mixture of past and present tenses in describing her memories of her mother, and her use of agitated diction indicating the immediacy of loss, we have no sense of whether Yearsley's mother died in the near or distant past. We only know that in the present hour of her walk, her mother's life and death come alive for her.

Yearsley employs a similar technique, as we shall see, in her history of Louisa, her address to the ladies of the spa, and her description of the inhabitants of the hills. Part of her success in employing a subjective depiction of time relies upon the fact that, unlike most male writers of surveys, she is not attempting to link geographic sites to political or national narratives. As Landry notes, the hill is for Yearsley a "site of personal and local historical significance," a perspective which stands in opposition to conventional masculine topographical subjects such as "property, politics, commerce and war."²⁶⁰ As Greg Kucich has demonstrated, several women writers in the eighteenth century, including Ann Yearsley, were anxious to position their own reading of history in opposition to that of established male historians. This feminist reading, as we have seen, privileges narratives of the suffering of individual women in the past and emphasises the writer's immediate and affective connection with these women. It is a reading of history that tends to negate constitutional and historical data and elevates the self-

²⁶⁰ Landry 131.

conscious interpretation of the historian. “Clifton Hill” needs to be understood in terms of this project.

The introductory sections of “Clifton Hill” establish that Yearsley is engaging in a project of re-writing a poetic form that usually celebrates constitutional and historical data. It becomes a means of constructing and describing her sense of *beata femina*. She undertakes this reconstruction by elevating a narrative of the self in a temporality that negates the teleology of history. Because the text is always filtered through the overtly self-conscious presence of Yearsley on her lonely walk, the consciousness of the poem is, of course, “always feminine.” But Yearsley’s descriptions of scenery and her narratives of the inhabitants of the hill as she develops her poem out of the introductory material become much more than a depiction of local and personal history and fragmentary female portraits. She constructs an idiosyncratic topographical survey that privileges a female understanding of history over conventional historical narratives.

The highly personalised nature of this reconstruction argues against Landry’s belief that there is no “unified ‘self’”²⁶¹ in this poem. Yearsley’s narrative voice remains consistent throughout the poem and draws together all the disparate scenes she portrays, as does the poetic voice of *The Seasons*. It is significant as well that the “feminine consciousness” noted by Landry establishes Yearsley as an authoritative, concerned and, above all, as a maternal voice. Her tone, as she gives advice to milkmaids and visiting gentlewomen at the spa, is often affectionate, and never critical. Like Lady Mary Chudleigh, Yearsley seems concerned to construct a role for herself as a mentor to other women and to offer them a sense of community, a *beata femina*, that is not so much a physical place of retreat (although Clifton Hill certainly serves that function), as an attitude of mind and an awareness. Unlike Chudleigh, however, Yearsley portrays the female community as a site that is always under threat from male hegemony. This portrayal of

²⁶¹ Landry 131.

vulnerability to a male-ordered world draws together and emphasises the connections among the different female portraits, and is the means by which she elevates the affective response of her own consciousness in the poem.

This emphasis can be seen in the introductory section of the poem when the swain is castigated both as the killer of the “beauteous” and “tender” (23) female robin and as the lustful pursuer who threatens the virtue of the “screaming milkmaids”(50). As readers we are not allowed to view either event with objective distance. The robin is presented to us as an appealing personality, a female refugee from her natural home in the woods forced to “seek the savage haunt of man” (10) in winter. She is thus portrayed as if she were a female character in a novelistic narrative, perhaps a foreshadowing of the final narrative of Louisa. This effect is heightened as Yearsley describes the bird singing “near the low cottage door, in pensive mood” (25) and dreaming of her lost family in the forest. Yearsley’s hyperbolic anger directed at the “ruthless soul whose gun destroys” (28) then connects both herself and her readers in a strongly affective response to the subsequent death of the bird. Yearsley seems to be reflecting here upon Pope’s affective connection with the hunted birds in *Windsor Forest* or the sentimental domestic scene in Thomson’s *Winter* where the wild bird feeds in the cottage.²⁶² But she nevertheless gives to this scene a sense of female vulnerability that is not emphasised by these earlier writers.

The milkmaids are not portrayed with quite the same intensity of vulnerability but Yearsley’s description of their simultaneous fascination with and avoidance of the swain, and their own apprehension of the risk they run in attracting his attention, links them to the bird who risks the attention of man by singing at cottage doors: their “downcast look ne’er fixes on the swain, / They dread his eye, retire and gaze again” (51 - 52). Yearsley acknowledges that the maids are threatened as much by “mighty Love” (53) as by the physical presence of the swain,

²⁶² Pope, *Windsor Forest*, lines 111- 118 and 131 - 134.
See also James Thomson, *Winter*, lines 245 - 256. *The Seasons*, ed. and introd., James Sambrook, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981).

but she emphasises that the real power of “mighty Love” resides with him. He is energised by the “raptures” rising through his body: the maids are constrained and restricted by the dangers such raptures pose for them. They are almost as much at risk from the swain’s “fresh ardour” (46) as is the robin from his gun.

These two narratives in the introductory section of the poem illustrate Yearsley’s transformed topographical technique. Her walk on Clifton Hill brings to her mind not national or public history but the histories of negligible and humble inhabitants. Their stories are treated with all the seriousness normally given to national history in conventional topographical poems. Yet, the intensity of Yearsley’s affective engagement with her subjects discourages her readers from finding amusement in the dislocation between the convention and her ventriloquism of it. Her disruption of established temporal movement strengthens this technique. The robin has died in the past, and the maids will be threatened in the future, but Yearsley treats both narratives as if they were occurring in front of her eyes in the present. The resulting immediacy of the robin’s death and the maids’ fears draws her readers into the same affective engagement with these narratives as Yearsley experiences. We are not distanced by time or objective rationalism. These lives matter to us as well.

However, Yearsley also connects her readers to her subjects through her self-designated role as a feminine mentor. Throughout the poem she positions herself as a commentator and advisor in ways that draw connections among the diversity of her female subjects. Thus, the anger with which she curses the robin’s killer and the concern with which she warns the milkmaids against entering “the lone thicket with a lover” (54) situate both animal and human within her ambit of concern. Similarly, her advice to the “languid fair” (136) ladies who visit the Hotwells spa that they should seek for a cure for their “panting breath” (140) by walking in the “cool and strong” breezes (139) of the “wild hills” (136) of Clifton connects these middle-class women to the labouring class maids as equal members of her constituency. There is something almost georgic in Yearsley’s advice, which prescribes useful exercise for women, in

much the same way that Virgil or Dyer advise gentleman farmers on the best way to plough or shear sheep.

However, Yearsley's advice is not intended to improve the estates of the nation, but to connect women within her understanding of the *beata femina*. More importantly, her role as mentor also allows her to employ intellectual rationality rather than affect in an effort to familiarise her middle-class readers with female lives very different to their own. As a mentor, she describes to her readers the ways labouring-class women resist passion, apparently highlighting the differences in sexual morality between the two classes. Whilst acknowledging that labouring women are taught nothing of the "conquest of the passions" (57) that govern gentlewomen, she demonstrates that "the fear of shame" (61) acts as an equally "strong bulwark" (62) against the dangers threatening the milkmaids. As Yearsley compares the ways that gentlewomen and labouring women repel perilous eroticism, her apparent attempt to demonstrate difference becomes a means to discover connection.

Gentlewomen, states Yearsley, are taught to suppress their own desires: "To sacrifice, to govern, to restrain, / Or to extinguish, or to hug the pain" (59 - 60). Labouring women, on the other hand, must restrain the men in their lives: "they flout, reject, deny" (63) their swains, and employ "unreal scorn, stern looks, affected pride" (65). Nevertheless, Yearsley demonstrates that while the nature of female restraint may be different for each rank, the language of denial is similar for both. Even the claim that labouring women's scorn is "unreal" finds an echo in Yearsley's somewhat ironic comment that the ladies are bound by "high romantic rules of honour" (55). In its context here in a poem that is grounded in the commonplace, the everyday and the personal, this phrase stands out for its inauthenticity. It seems to imply rules which are fantastic and sentimental, as unreal in their way as the "scorn" of the maids. Certainly, the language of war that Yearsley employs for both sets of women, the "conquests," the "vanquish'd" thoughts (58), and the "bulwarks" that "shield" reputations, connects the behaviour of the two ranks of women more than it divides them. Both are engaged in a war against the

threat of male sexuality. Further, a genteel female reader of any honesty would have to admit that the denial of passion in women of every rank has one self-evident object: to “secure [] their fame” (61) and to “save the trembling bride” (66).

Yearsley’s triple role as an intellectual mentor who explains women to themselves, gives them advice, and connects them to other women, is extended in her address to the ladies who visit Hotwells spa. As we have seen, these are portrayed as enervated and fragile hypochondriacs with “tardy pulse” (134), who suffer from the lives they are expected to lead in urban centres. Explaining these gentlewomen to themselves, Yearsley shows that the demands of “Fashion” (159) and “fell Dissipation” lead to “INDOLENCE” (145) which is the “bane of health” (147) and the “grand prelude / To dire disease and death” (152 - 153). There is a tone of moral lobbying here which is reminiscent of Hannah More’s lectures to young women or of Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Unlike More or Wollstonecraft, however, Yearsley does not blame or criticise these women for conforming to a condition of life which she describes as a “Tyrant” (158). Wollstonecraft, for example, implies that women exercise a certain amount of choice in their physical and mental incapacity.²⁶³ Yearsley, by contrast, depicts these women as she does the robin or the milkmaids: as victims of a culture that renders them vulnerable. Thus, in a maternal voice, which demands an affective response from her readers, she addresses one of their number, assuring her that Clifton Hill will restore her to health:

Fear not the western gale, thou tim’rous maid,
Nor dread its blast shall thy soft form invade;
Tho’ cool and strong the quick’ning breezes blow,
And meet thy panting breath, ‘twill quickly grow
More strong; then drink the oderiferous draught,

²⁶³ Wollstonecraft 44.

With unseen particles of health 'tis fraught. (137 - 142)

Yearsley's mixture of rational analysis and affective appeal and her narrative voice of concerned responsibility brings these overly-refined gentlewomen into the compass of her larger constituency: female figures who need a community, a *beata femina*, in which they can discover some kind of refuge. Here, that sense of connection and support is provided by Yearsley's narrative voice and her role as mentor and guide. Thus, just as she portrays labouring and middle-class women as struggling with similar problems of passion and restraint, she now offers middle-class women a solution to the debility of their lives in a regimen of physical activity familiar to her labouring-class constituency. By walking regularly in the cool breezes of Clifton Hill, the "high-born maid / Whom fashion guides (153 - 154) can avoid the "icy grasp" (157) of early death brought on by a social code that privileges female fragility and delicacy: "Keen exercise shall brace the fainting soul," she states, "And bid her slackened powers more vigorous roll" (149 - 150). Yearsley is aware that this commonsense advice, similar in tone to her prescriptions for the milkmaids, might seem "rustic" or "rude" (151) to her middle-class readers, but, as with her advice to the milkmaids, she supports colloquial advice with intellectual analysis. Her *beata femina* is not merely a site of loving concern, but, like Chudleigh's retreat, it is also a place of rational reflection.

Both rational reflection and emotional response are combined, of course, when Yearsley recalls her mother's death. In fact, rational reflection is subsumed within emotional response as Yearsley explores her own fear of death in her anguished re-animation of her walks with her mother. This re-animation and her response to it are a significant part of her transformation of genre, as we have seen, but Yearsley also employs it as a means to situate herself within the community of vulnerable women. It is significant, I feel, that Mrs. Cromartie's advice to her daughter is expressed in the same maternal, rational and authoritative tone with which Yearsley addresses the various women in her poem. "Start not my child," Yearsley reports her mother saying in response to Yearsley's repugnance at the imagery on tombstones, "each human thought

subdue" (82). She then comforts her daughter with a discourse upon "love divine, and moral truths" (92), as she urges an acceptance of the inevitability of death. In maintaining this sympathetic yet pragmatic tone when she advises other women, Yearsley claims a kind of maternal authority from her mother.

At the same time, her claim that her emotional response to her mother's death will draw the contempt of sophisticated readers (93 - 97) implies that she is as much a female victim of established cultural practices as the maids and the gentlewomen she describes. "The proud Croesean crew, light, cruel, vain" (93), she states, will sneer at her sense of loss and will "here call for satire" (97). This crew is not just a representation of the middle-class, as Landry claims.²⁶⁴ I would argue that Yearsley's apparent fear is of a much more specific aristocratic, or at least, authorised, male contempt. Her invention of the word, "Croesean," to signify this group identifies them with Croesus, a male figure of regal wealth and power. The words, "light, cruel, vain" can also be seen to identify a fashionable section of society very different in character to the sober industriousness and non-conformist piety normally associated with the middle-classes at this time. Indeed, satire has been largely associated in the eighteenth century with writers with aristocratic associations or patronage, such as the Scriblerians and their friends, and even more with male writers than female. It is these male authority figures who appear to threaten Yearsley in her portrayal of maternal advice and overwhelming grief and who thus enable her to include herself within the constituency she addresses.

However, this literary threat works in more than one way for Yearsley. She not only expresses fear of a literary critique that would ridicule her reflective sensibilities, but she also signifies her consciousness of a readership she can trust. After all, despite her stated apprehension of the "cruel, vain" crew, she continues to privilege the affective and the reflective throughout her work. She must have felt she had a significant readership amongst those who

²⁶⁴ Landry 137.

were not part of the “impious race” (98), who would appreciate, as they should, the *beata femina* she constructs. She does not feel the need, as Winchilsea did, for example, to conform to the expectations of those who would disparage her. Her ventriloquism is therefore less restrained than earlier women writers and more transgressive. Her assertion here expresses a criticism of her sophisticated audience and invites her more discerning readers into a constituency of the sensitive and serious. Indeed, her interjection here is somewhat disingenuous. Satire was no longer the authoritative genre that it had been in the early eighteenth century. Celebrated poets like Thomson, Collins, Gray or Cowper wrote serious, didactic or reflective poetry, rather than satire. In claiming that those who threaten her prefer satire to pathos, Yearsley not only situates herself as a victim of male oppression, but also signals to a preferred readership who reject, as she does, the cynicism of an outmoded form. In the same way that satire appeals to an elite audience because of its exclusion of those who fail to decode its irony, Yearsley’s interjection appeals to her own select audience because of its exclusion of those who fail to understand her use of pathos and reflection.

However, her employment of pathos and reflection to construct a *beata femina* of the mind and her reconfiguration of those cultural norms which lead to the victimisation of women, do not lead to a call for any radical change in the nature of women’s lives. Nor does she challenge the male establishment that authorises the largely unwritten rules governing both milkmaids and ladies. Even Winchilsea’s or Collier’s pleas for a return to ancient dignities and respect for women are absent here. When she tells the story of Louisa the refugee, condemned by her father to life in a convent because she would not marry the man of his choice, Yearsley fails, as Landry notes, to offer a radical solution to female powerlessness.²⁶⁵ Indeed, the story of Louisa is remarkable for its lack of any resolution. This particular refusal is all the more startling because Yearsley portrays Louisa as the ultimate victim and assigns blame specifically to male

²⁶⁵ Landry 143.

authority for Louisa's plight, calling it, "That hard duty . . . / by which the meek and helpless maid's decreed / To dire seclusion" (235 - 237).

Yearsley is not shy of addressing political issues elsewhere in her poetry, and her stance in those works could be described as radical. So it is worth examining why such a stance is so significantly absent here. It seems to me that her desire to rewrite the topographical poem as survey of personal histories and responses and as a means to portray her concept of *beata femina*, prohibits an overtly political approach. Any suggestion of a politically radical solution to any of the problems she considers in the hour of her walk would attach a national or historic significance to the sites she observes and would thus dilute the pathos of her narratives and of her affective connection to them. It would also undermine her concept of a female community of interconnection whose temporality rejects national teleologies. Such an understanding tends to eschew political or radical arguments that by their nature would have to engage with the sanctioned narratives of public history. At the same time, Yearsley is not interested in presenting an idealised Utopia for women. Women have to live in a world of men, who are presented in this poem as being almost without exception threatening, demanding, savage or unjust. In her narrative of affective connection between vulnerable women, Yearsley is more concerned with introducing narratives of female experience in ways that animate her readers than with exploring radical agendas.

Yearsley's narrative of Louisa, in particular, conforms with this feminist understanding of history. This is highlighted by comparisons Yearsley draws between her own tale and Pope's *Eloisa to Abelard*. There is enough similarity in the two accounts to assume Pope's influence here. We know that *Eloisa* was the only poem by Pope that Yearsley had certainly read and that it was one of her favourite texts. What is interesting in the comparison are the changes that Yearsley effects. What had been for Pope a narrative of a passionate woman balked of her passion, attempting and failing to control herself through the disciplines of religion and reason, becomes, in Yearsley's treatment, a narrative of male-authored injustice visited upon a helpless

and submissive victim. Pope's Eloisa is a woman of strength. He does imply the presence of social constraints which operate against Eloisa, but she nevertheless appears to suffer more from the violence of her own feelings than from external disciplines which, in any case, fail to restrain her nature. Despite the *tour de force* of Pope's composition, in which he assumes Eloisa's voice, he ensures that we understand Eloisa as the author of her own misfortune. Yearsley retains enough of Pope's melodramatic imagery of storms and "monastic glooms" (239) and as we shall see, his narrative immersion in his subject, to stimulate recognition amongst her readership, but she then ensures that they are more likely to sympathise with the injustice visited upon Louisa than to condemn her passion. Pope's Eloisa has made choices; Yearsley's Louisa has none.

Louisa suffers from the legal and social powers her father holds over her and from the spiritual demands of the church. Escaping from her convent to England, she lives as a beggar on Clifton Hill and descends into madness. Throughout this lengthy history which closes the poem, Yearsley engages the reader in Louisa's tragedy through her own affective connection to it. This imaginative recreation draws our attention to Pope's model, as we have seen, but it also serves a more important function. Without pretending to be Louisa, Yearsley nevertheless enters into the consciousness of her subject. Indeed, it is often possible to confuse the subject of the narrative, Louisa or Yearsley, and Yearsley's emphasis upon a present-tense description of Louisa's thoughts further intertwines the two sensibilities. In effect, Louisa's history becomes part of the reflection of Yearsley's lone hour. When Yearsley describes Louisa's memory of her long-lost lover, for example, any categorical understanding of past, present or future, or any substantive difference between narrator and subject, is progressively blurred:

... — Now heaves the sigh,
 Now unavailing sorrows fill the eye:
 Fancy once more brings back the long-lost youth
 To the fond soul, in all the charms of Truth;
 She welcomes the lov'd image; busy Thought

Pourtrays the past, with guiltless pleasures fraught;
 ‘Tis momentary bliss, ‘tis rapture high,
 The heart o’erflows and all is extacy.
 MEMORY! I charge thee yet preserve the shade,
 Ah! Let not yet the glittering colours fade!
 Forbear the cruel future yet to view,
 When the sad soul must bid a long adieu,
 E’en to its fancied bliss — Ah! turn not yet
 Thou wretched bankrupt, that must soon forget
 This farewell draught of joy. (245 - 259).

Memory is as electrifying an undertaking for Louisa as for Yearsley, and this passage thoroughly intermingles the two.

Landry notes that “the poet gradually identifies herself” with Louisa, so that her madness “becomes dramatized for us from within,” but she seems uncomfortable with Yearsley’s “political enervation when it comes to conceiving of radical alternatives” for Louisa’s situation.²⁶⁶ I would argue that Yearsley’s affective interconnection with Louisa’s history and her attempt to include her readers in that connection, are an end in itself. The sight of a haystack on Clifton Hill recalls Louisa’s history to Yearsley’s mind and, in rewriting the historical narratives of the topographical survey, Yearsley produces Louisa’s story as an individual and affective narrative of injustice and suffering, rather than as one of a series of events in political history. In associating herself so closely with Louisa, particularly at the climactic ending of the poem, Yearsley brings the memory of Louisa into a community of women who will sympathise and identify with her suffering. She also connects Louisa to the tensions between duty and desire,

²⁶⁶ Landry 140

submission and assertion that they all, milkmaid and gentlewoman, must daily negotiate.

Yearsley's concept of *beata femina* might perhaps be shown to have failed at the end of the poem with Louisa's descent into the "Lawless anarchy, which sweeps the soul, / Whilst her drown'd faculties like pebbles roll, / Unloos'd, uptorn, by whirlwinds of despair" (288 - 290). However, Yearsley makes it plain that Louisa had come "too late to these mild shores" (282) to prevent the guilt she feels over her rejection of authority from overwhelming her "in wild disorder" (284) or to prevent her broken vows from sticking "like serpents in her trembling soul" (285). But Yearsley does show the community of women helping Louisa in the figure of the "kind friend . . . / Who to Louisa's shed of misery came" (227 - 228). She also shows a period of calm and relative happiness for Louisa upon the hill, which seems to have been conveyed by nature itself. This *beata femina* might, in the end, have been inadequate to protect Louisa's sanity, but that inadequacy indicates the power of the male world to invest its social codes and institutions with punitive consequences for transgressive behaviour. Louisa is, therefore, not unique. Yearsley uses her as an extreme example of all women's vulnerability to a largely male-authored hegemony. Thus, Yearsley's technique of intertwining her own sensibility with Louisa's, while it emphasises her affective immersion and that of her readers in Louisa's history, also indicates that Louisa's suffering is a possibility for all of them.

Nevertheless, it is also important to note that Yearsley shows that Louisa had already begun her descent into madness already before she escaped from the convent. If she had reached the sanctuary of Clifton Hill sooner, she might have responded more completely to the *beata femina* she found there (275 - 284). Certainly, in Yearsley's narrative interconnection with Louisa, we can see that while Yearsley positions herself as one who could have suffered as Louisa does, her sense of self remains whole and healthy. Her ability to retain the stability of her conscious self, despite the trauma of her mother's death, is credited not only to her sense of community with other women, particularly with the memory of her mother, but to the world of nature on the hill. Significantly, just before she relates Louisa's history, she salutes the "lovely

meads" (201), the "tufted grove, and the low winding vale" (204) that enable her to escape the sorrows which normally attend her. Her "bosom lighter grows" in this landscape, and "Shakes off her huge oppressive weight of woes, / And swells in guiltless rapture" (201 - 203). Yearsley finds the same sense of delight in her walk on the hill that Winchilsea and Singer Rowe find in their retreats or Leapor in her daily release from labour. Like these earlier writers, Yearsley delights not only in her solitary immersion in "Nature's wilds" which give her "peace, . . . joy serene," and "thought as pure as cam as the vernal scene" (199 - 200), but also in her sense of connection to other women. This somewhat paradoxical immersion in both solitude and community is emphasised by Yearsley's construction of Clifton Hill as a feminised geographic space. Once she begins to describe her walk, the landscape is infused, as we have seen, with gendered memories and narratives. As well, the physical reality of the scenery of Clifton is conveyed through imagery that evokes the feminine, the maternal and the domestic. Thus, even when Yearsley portrays herself as alone in the landscape and delighting in her solitude, she conveys a sense of that landscape as a familiar female presence.

She achieves this feminine familiarity in two ways. The first is the manner in which she depicts animals in the poem. They are almost always described with affectionate concern in the same tone that Yearsley uses for the women she addresses. Indeed, Yearsley appears to be following a tradition that Margaret Doody has identified in women's writing: she portrays animals sympathetically as beings with a special connection to women.²⁶⁷ Almost without exception, the animals that Yearsley depicts are, like the beautiful robin, female. They are usually vulnerable and are often domestic. Despite the harshness of winter that keeps the other maids by the kitchen fire, for example, she describes herself "shivering" and tending "her fav'rite cow" (20). The flocks of sheep that roam Clifton Hill are addressed more than once in the same loving tone. She portrays them as vulnerable during the harsh days of winter, "nibbling . . . / a

²⁶⁷ Doody, "Sensuousness" 22 - 28

meal penurious from the barren plain" (100 - 101), and running from "the human form, their only foe" (105). She reassures them in the same voice she employs for her address to the milkmaids or the gentlewomen, associating herself with their vulnerability at the same time as she assures them of her concern:

Ye bleating innocents! dispel your fears,
My woe-struck soul in all your troubles shares;
'Tis but LACTILLA — fly not from the green:
Long have I shared with you this guiltless scene. (106 - 109).

Later in her walk she also reassures a herd of cows that the hoarded hay of spring and summer will prevent their starvation:

Low not, ye herds, your lusty Masters bring
The crop of Summer; and the genial Spring
Feels for your wants, and softens Winter's rage,
The hoarded haystack shall your woes assuage. (205 - 209).

It is worth noting that these domestic female animals, like their human counterparts, are dependant upon a male hegemony. They might run from men, "their only foe" (105), or eat from haystacks supplied by their "lusty Masters" (205), but they are always vulnerable to forces beyond their control.

This is a greater sense of ambivalence in her portrayal of the wild animals on the hill. Unlike her depiction of the robin, her description of the wild animals in Leigh Wood is not sentimental and acknowledges their sometimes repugnant nature. There are poisonous snakes who "thro' the helpless sleeper dart the sting" (172), the "toad envenom'd" (173), and "the woodland rat" (179) who "feast[s] on dreadful food, which hop'd a milder grave" (186). However, even here, Yearsley finds a sense of connection with some of these animals. The snail, for example, is not only "harmless" (175), but is given a special connection to Yearsley who feels that "If transmigration should prevail, / I fear Lactilla's soul must house in snail" (177 -

178), perhaps because of her “slow journeying” (175) over the hill. But her humorous and affectionate interjection brings this disregarded, and often disliked, animal into community with Lactilla. Similarly, the female rabbit is invested with a sense of vulnerability which connects it to the vulnerable females she addresses throughout the poem. Like the feminised animals in Winchilsea’s “A Nocturnal Reverie,” the “timid rabbit hails th’impervious gloom” (181), in order to “elude[] the dog’s keen scent, and shun her doom” (182).

Yearsley not only employs the animals on the hill, both domestic and wild, to construct a female understanding of nature, but also the physical landscape itself. Nature had often been personalised as female in eighteenth-century poetry, of course, but Yearsley’s representation of female nature is very different to the classical or alluring images that often represent nature at this period. Yearsley does not want to worship, possess or penetrate the natural world, she wants to “share” it (109). Despite the often rocky, infertile landscape she describes, she nevertheless depicts nature as feminine and, often, nurturing. We have already seen that the scenery of the hill has brought her “peace [and] joy serene” (199) in spite of the “huge oppressive weight of woes” (202) from which she suffers. The sense of release she feels does not come from a sense of ownership or entitlement but from a sense of connection that would be recognised by Winchilsea, Fyge, or Leapor.

With Yearsley, it is worth noting how often she employs feminine and domestic imagery when describing the scenery, using male imagery only when she occasionally eroticises the natural world. Thus, as she walks on the hill in the hour of sunrise, she describes how the “infant light pursues” (118) the “pallid streak of early dawn” (116). Later in the hour, “the cheeks of morn with blushes glow” (120) like a young girl before giving way to the distinctly male “God” of full daylight (122). As Yearsley walks on to Leigh Wood, she again uses language that evokes the feminine. The trees are described as if they were a group of young women in the assembly rooms at Hotwells. They are “lovely” (162) and “ever-blooming” (164). Even the “vengeful black-thorn” is “of wild beauties proud” (165) and has a bloom which shines “in the gloomy-

chequer'd crowd" (166). Like Leapor, Yearsley provides the normally masculine oak with a "hamadryad" (168) which allows her to feminise and domesticate the tree into a mature woman whose "twice fifty years / Have crown'd her woodland joys, and fruitful cares" (169 - 170). Like Leapor and Winchilsea, Yearsley believes that woodland should be understood as a site of beauty and protection, and "Ne'er should feel the stroke / Of axe relentless" (168 - 169). Leigh Wood should not be envisioned as an area of the hill that could be improved or exploited, as it might be portrayed in a standard georgic or survey poem, but as part of a feminine and domestic landscape whose georgic function is encompassed by the protection it offers to the wild animals in its depths and the psychological comfort it offers to the narrator.

Yearsley even invests the River Avon, busy with commercial and intercontinental shipping traffic in the eighteenth century, with a domesticated character. Yearsley initially introduces the river, which flows through the gorge at Clifton, in typically georgic terms as a "useful channel" (187) which brings "various treasure" from "either pole" to Bristol (188). But she immediately subsumes this georgic praise of commerce and utility into a domestic narrative of a returned sailor who "clasps the fond parent, and the sighing maid" (190). It is this domestic return, rather than commercial wealth, that gives the river true utility in Yearsley's understanding. The sailor's return produces cries of joy so loud that "the rocks rebound the roar" (191) and "the deep vibration quivers 'long the shore" (192). While the merchant may hear the noise and "hail[] the peeping mast" (193), the sailors and their families celebrate familial rather than mercantile return with "love and joy" (195) and "clumsy music" (196).

Yearsley initially employs a standard topographical convention here, following both Denham and Pope who describe the Thames as the means by which England's commercial power would become an empire. Yearsley revises this convention by describing a commercially-important river as a means by which family is reunited and domestic affections dominate the landscape. That Yearsley leaves behind the "vulgar dissonance" (197) of the sailors as she crosses the river and, solitary, stretches her "ardent eye / O'er Nature's wilds" (198 - 199) does

not imply contempt or rejection. She is simply not part of that essentially urban scene, however much she domesticates it. Nevertheless, this narrative of re-united families is an important part of her ventriloquism of the topographical genre. It also indicates that, however much she might prefer to immerse herself in remote solitude, she recognises the importance of urban life within the landscape. It is not ignored, as Wordsworth was to ignore the river traffic of the Wye ten years later but it is brought within the poet's construction of her *beata femina* before she returns to the natural world that nourishes her.

Even more striking than this reconstruction, however, is Yearsley's portrayal of St. Vincent's Rocks, overlooking the Avon gorge. We have already seen how she employs a very different kind of landscape from Denham, Pope or Dyer for her topographical poem. Her description of "Vincent's rugged height" (99), which forms the most dramatic and visible component of Clifton's scenery, highlights the difference between the fertile river valleys normally celebrated in surveys, and the landscape celebrated here. These cliffs conform more easily with the conventions of the sublime in landscape, as it was defined by Edmund Burke, or with the gothic imagery of contemporary novels. They are

Silent, solemn, strong, stupendous heights

Whose terror-striking frown the school-boy frights

.....

Coeval with Creation they look down

And, sunder'd, still retain their native frown. (123 - 124, 129 - 130)

It is worth noting that Burke figured his definition of the sublime as an essentially masculine principle in opposition to his definition of the beautiful as a feminine principle. Burke's text was, perhaps, one of the most influential of the century, affecting both visual art as well as literature. It seems extremely unlikely that Yearsley had not been introduced to so seminal a work by More and Montagu. But even if she had not read Burke, she had probably read gothic fiction or seen popular prints of sublime scenery. We know she had read Ossianic poetry which

makes extensive use of sublime landscape and language. We also know that she had read and loved *Eloisa to Abelard* which makes use of what Burke would call sublime landscape, although it was published before Burke's text. She certainly appears to know of the conventions of the sublime, and she uses them effectively here to describe St. Vincent's Rocks.

Yet, Yearsley refuses to describe the imagery of the cliffs in a conventionally sublime manner. She does not herself express emotions of awe or dread in response to her evocation of the cliffs: these emotions are projected onto an immature schoolboy, who has, as we shall see, reasons other than sublime for fearing the cliffs. Instead, Yearsley reverses the sublime convention to express pleasure and serenity, instead of dread and awe, in the appearance of strength and protection that the cliffs offer. Further, this sense of strength and protection is not figured as a masculine presence, but as distinctly feminine and maternal. The cliffs are guarding a nest of baby jackdaws within their "rugged breast" (125), and their brooding presence serves only to protect them from thieving schoolboys, not to evoke sublime emotions. "The chattering brood, secured by Horror, rest," Yearsley notes approvingly (126). Ancient demi-gods may have created the cliffs, but Yearsley insists that the resulting gorge is a feminised and domesticated "low cradle" bearing the "calm stream" of the Avon to the sea. The cliffs also give birth to and shelter the "balmy springs" (131) whose "kindly powers" restore "life's genial heat" (133) to the delicate ladies of the spa. Indeed, according to Yearsley, the threat to the birds and to the ladies of the spa originates from the world of male aggression and urban dissipation, not from the sublime qualities of the landscape. Indeed, if the ladies would walk along the cliffs every day, and breathe "the purer air on Vincent's rugged height" (99), Yearsley claims, they would soon lose "the source of real pain" (147).

Yearsley's reconstruction of sublime landscape as a site of feminine strength and protection which stimulates the narrator to pleasure and a sense of community is, according to Anne Mellor, a particular aim of female romantic writers. Analysing the works of both female poets and novelists in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Mellor argues that:

In the feminine Romantic tradition, the sublime combines with the beautiful to produce, not the experience of *sehnsucht*, of solitary, visionary transcendence sought (however futilely) by several male Romantic poets, but an experience of communion . . . or *domesticated* sublimity An experience that produces an intensified emotional and moral participation in a human community A commitment to the welfare of others and an ethic of care . . . [rooted] in the daily practice of friendship and the domestic affections.²⁶⁸

Yearsley was writing several years earlier than any of the writers that Mellor considers, but it is possible to see these elements of feminine romanticism in her understanding of the sublime. The differences, however, are significant. Yearsley's "ethic of care" not only includes female friends but extends to animals and landscape. At the same time she embraces the solitude that was so important for male romantic writers. I would argue that these differences are rooted in Yearsley's adoption of the *beata femina*. Earlier writers such as Winchilsea, Fyge and Leapor, also conceived of a sense of female community that is not merely bounded by female friends, but incorporates a female understanding of nature. Like them, Yearley experiences solitude not merely as an absence of people, but as an immersion in the natural world, in memories or in personal reflections that people her retreat with a community of support and affection. Thus, when she depicts the sublime in landscape, she naturally rejects the transcendent solitude implied by Burke or celebrated by Wordsworth, and invokes the paradox of feminine community in a solitude that defines the *beata femina*.

This experience of the sublime also comes out of Yearsley's tendency to emphasise her own consciousness and memory within her poetry. She thus reorders the essential narrative of the topographical poem and the traditional role of its narrator. Yearsley was not, of course, the first eighteenth-century poet to highlight the workings of her conscious mind in a georgically-

²⁶⁸ Mellor 103 - 105.

inflected poem. She may have been influenced by Pope's emphasis upon his own situation within the forest at the end of *Windsor Forest*. She might also have read Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country-Churchyard* (1751) or Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* (1770) which privilege the self-conscious voice of the narrator. However, while the self-conscious voice in these poems is highlighted at certain points, it is nevertheless subsumed to the importance of the narrative action. Yearsley's extended introduction works to situate the narrative of the entire poem within her conscious mind in a particular hour. She is almost certainly responding to the increasing interest throughout the eighteenth century in the psychology of the self, but, at the same time, she constructs her survey within the ideals of the *beata femina* as it has developed from the works of the Countess of Winchilsea.

Her strategy in constructing this privileged narrative would have been familiar to various female poets throughout the century, from Winchilsea and Chudleigh to Collier and Leapor. Yearsley not only reverses generic expectations to place herself rather than geography or history at the heart of the poem, but she genders the geographic space she describes as feminine and directs her narratives and didactic lectures towards intimate memories or female subjects. She thus places herself at the heart of a female community even when she is ostensibly alone. Therefore, despite her literary debts to Ossian and Edward Young, she does not explicitly conform to the image of the wild, untutored poet, or to the psychological portrait of literary loneliness that define the works of these poets. Nor does she prefigure the solitude of the romantic poets. The occasionally elegiac tone and the reflective digressions are reminiscent of Young, as well as Gray and Collins, but Yearsley's emphasis upon herself as a member of and a mentor to a constituency of women transforms the elements of psychological isolation and emancipation in her poem to pleasure in a solitude which includes a sense of community and domesticity.

Yearsley reworks and explores many different literary, intellectual and personal issues in "Clifton Hill." Her primary aim seems to have been to rewrite the topographical survey to

earlier writers of the eighteenth century, which exist to demonstrate the erudition of the author and to place the poem in a particular tradition, this privileges the particular intimacy of family life out of which this poem was created, and the deeply personal nature of Yearsley's meditation. Greek and Latin tags had become somewhat dated by this late period, but epigraphs which cited Pope, Thomson or Cowper remained popular and were employed in much the same way: to give literary authority and status to the text. Yearsley does not appear to need this kind of authority. Her epigraph is closer in character to Coleridge's narrative introduction to "Kubla Khan." "Kubla Khan" was not published until twenty years after Yearsley's poem, but the appeal to the authority of the self and the context of the personal is similar. Coleridge, of course, would also claim, both in his epilogue and in his poem, a phatic role for the poet and a sense of mystery in his sources of inspiration. Yearsley often invokes deeply emotional responses to situations, memories or landscapes in her poetry, but these responses are always grounded in the everyday and the particular. Thus her epigraph to "Soliloquy," a poem which explores issues of life, death and transcendent meaning, emphasises the commonplace domesticity in which her inspiration is rooted.

It is also worth noting her emphasis upon "the circumstance of the moment" and "the images of memory." The circumstance of the moment is familiar to us from the poetry of Winchilsea and other women writers. For Winchilsea, circumstances of the moment that led to poetic construction were walks at Eastwell with her husband or intimate friends. For Fyge, it was her daily life of retreat in Shenley, and for Leapor it was the servants' dinner-hour. The circumstance of the moment is not the same for all women poets, but for those for whom the present moment and the quotidian are important, its different manifestations provide a rich source of inspiration. Yearsley, as is her practice in her poetry, specifies the moment: here, it is late at night on the 27th February, 1795. She does not give the hour or minute, but this combination of particularity of date with an ambiguity of exact time, emphasises the presence of timelessness within the quotidian. This could be any late hour of any evening, and the domestic

intimacy of the scene between mother and son, emphasises both the commonplace and the transcendent in the mutual concern evidenced in their relationship.

This familial tenderness offers a clue to the “images of memory” that will haunt this poem with its meditation upon the author’s mother and her death. As we have already seen with Yearsley, she does not refuse to look into the past as she constructs a *beata femina* of the mind. Indeed, memory is, for her, a powerful tool for poetic construction. There are personal reasons for this, of course: Yearsley’s relationship with her mother and the circumstances surrounding her mother’s death continued to exert a profound influence over Yearsley’s life and work until her own death. We have also seen that Yearsley’s construction of a feminine historiography allows her to explore the past and the future in a way that avoids the cycles and teleologies of mainstream poetry. More particularly, for a devotee of Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, a meditation in the dark hours of the night inspired by memories of death and loss would have the authority of a literary exemplar.

However, while “Soliloquy” takes themes and images from *Night Thoughts*, Yearsley’s epigraph signals an important difference between her poem and the works of “literary loneliness” from the 1750s which it resembles. Young, Gray, and other practitioners of the “graveyard” school of poetry universalise their gloomy and isolated view of the world, even as they narrate their own feelings. Thus Young moves from a plea to God to

... lead my mind

....

through various scenes of life and death;

And from each scene the noblest truths inspire,

to a generalised discussion concerning man’s relationship to the movement of time.²⁷⁰

²⁷⁰ Edward Young, Book I, lines 44 - 47, *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts on Life, Death and Immortality. The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed., Roger Lonsdale, (Oxford: OUP, 1984), 344 - 348. All citations from this text are from this edition and

Yearsley's epigraph indicates that the narrative of her poem will remain particularised in her own life. It also indicates that looking into the past has a different connotation for Yearsley than it does for Winchilsea or Chudleigh. For these writers, concentrating upon the past interferes with their immersion with the present moment, while history is something from which they all feel alienated. Yet, in recounting their quotidian lives in their poetry, they are, in fact, constructing personal historical narratives. Yearsley accepts this paradox. Without subscribing to a progressive view of temporal movement in the world, she embraces memory as an important part of her quotidian life. Here, it forms an inextricable part of her daily interactions with her son.

Finally, Yearsley's introduction of a watch into this introductory scene enables her to focus her meditation upon time and memory in the body of her poem. The watch is given a disciplinary role in the epigraph which is further expanded in the poem. It determines the hour at which her son must go to bed, and it must be resisted if Yearsley is to write. It also indicates the primacy of clock time by the late eighteenth century. The lateness of the hour is no longer solely indicated by natural means but is determined by the watch laid upon the table and displaying its mechanised organisation of time. Its disciplinary powers make it a third element in the interaction between Yearsley and her son, highlighting their concern for each other. Yet Yearsley must reject its discipline in order to continue writing, a rejection that will be emphasised in her conclusion to the poem.

This final rejection is foreshadowed in Yearsley's structuring of the poem which replicates meditative arguments within her mind from the moment when her son places the watch on the table. The watch makes her think about the relentless forward movement of time, which in turn forces her to confront the reality of death. This thought fills her with fear which encourages her to turn to memories of her mother as a means to obtain a sense of serenity. Serenity allows her to think about the future once more in a way that develops into

are noted by book and line number.

criticisms of man-made philosophical and legal systems. These, for her, are analogous to the workings of the watch, and hold no answers to the problems of life and death. The poem ends with an affirmation of the power of affection and memory to give meaning to life. Although the poem makes a coherent argument, Yearsley moves from one element of the argument to another, sometimes contradicting herself, sometimes asking herself questions, sometimes introducing arguments which appear to have been stimulated by a previous thought but which have little to do with her main thread, sometimes interrupting herself or exclaiming at her own thoughts, as if she is writing down her thoughts as they occur. This kind of structure gives importance to the immediate and affective response, even if it concerns matters of history, and it resists the discipline of successive progression even as it appears to determine her argument. Yearsley does not move from one idea to another in the kind of logical or deterministic progression we might associate with mechanical time but in a series of intuitive leaps backward and forward, which somehow always remain within the parameters of her thesis.

The beginning of the poem flows immediately from the circumstance of her son's placing his watch on the table, and appears to acknowledge the power of mechanical time to discipline Yearsley's life: "How patiently toils on this little watch! / My veins beat to its motion" (1 -2) she exclaims. Instead of logically introducing a discussion of progression through life, her thought prompts her to ask the framers of mechanical philosophy a personal question: "why Time / Sets in this toy a larum to my heart" (3 - 5). She offers no answer but expands on her fears so that time represents for her not merely duration, but a progressive movement towards death. It is "sacred Time!" (5) but it moves her mind ever closer to thoughts of its own mortality. Yearsley seems to be employing similar imagery to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* here. In Book I, "the bell strikes one" and Young declares "it is the knell of my departed hours" (I 54 and 58).

Watches, clocks and sandglasses have all, of course, served as reminders of the

inevitability of death in paintings from much earlier periods, and Young is recalling a lengthy tradition in using the striking of a bell as a metaphor for the approach of his own death. However, Yearsley questions and complicates this model even as she employs it. In using a watch rather than a clock or a church bell and in questioning the philosophy that explains the universe as a clockwork model, Yearsley challenges teleological ideas, whether religious or mechanical, which focus our minds towards the future and, ultimately, upon our own deaths. Yearsley admits frankly that such ideas fill her with dread. This admission places her in the tradition of Winchelsea and Chudleigh rather than Young or Gray. Young's reflections upon death lead into a reflection upon the nature of life, as all *momenta mori* are supposed to do. For the women poets who employ similar imagery, however, thoughts of the future interfere with their ability to reflect upon life or eternity.

Most people, Yearsley argues, prefer to concern themselves with the future events of the "sixty coming hours" (6) rather than the past of "sixty years sunk to oblivion" (8). Yet, for her, memory, "hated by many" (10), is a "silent fascinating power" (9). She will be a "willing slave" to this power (11) because it stands opposed to the discipline of successive time, represented by the watch, and it allows her to meditate without fear. She calls "Mild Contemplation, from the barren rock / Where mourns the ship-wrecked mariner, to trim / My midnight lamp" (14 - 16). Again, she uses a metaphor from Young which she then problematises. In Book 7 of *Night Thoughts*, Young describes time as a rough sea whose tides rush us onwards into an unknown future, and he asks:

Is there no rock, on which man's tossing thought
Can rest from terror, dare his fate survey,
And boldly think it something to be born?
Amid such hourly wrecks of being fair,
Is there no central, all-sustaining base,
All-realising, all-connecting Pow'r,

Which as it called forth all things, can recall,
 And force Destruction to refund her spoil?
 Command the grave to restore her taken prey? (5 - 13)

Young concludes that if there were such a power it would be "an all-prolific, all-preserving God!" (28). But Yearsley, whose relationship to established religion is often ambiguous, places that power in memory. The contemplation of her memories give her a point of stability in the rushing storm of life and the inevitable approach of death that enables her to contemplate her existence with something approaching serenity.

The power of memory not only offers the rock-like serenity that Young centres in God, but proves equally able to "command the grave restore her taken prey." No sooner is Contemplation called up from the rock of memory, than Yearsley hails a being "much rever'd in death!" (16) who appears before her. There has been some scholarly discussion about this being, whom Yearsley never identifies. It has been argued that it is the memory of a lover Yearsley was forced to abandon when she married.²⁷¹ However, I would argue that it is her mother. The tone of reverent affection and the memories all match Yearsley's description of her mother in other poems. In "Soliloquy" the being restored from death is described as one who "knew[]to chart the moral world, and bend / The springs of thought to wisdom" (17 - 18). Yearsley further notes "thou wert wont / In life to smile, when wilder than the bard on Cambria's height I struck the lyre: my sigh / Made harsh and inharmonious by despair / Thou taught'st to break with melody" (18 - 22). This relationship sounds very similar to Yearsley's relationship to her mother as it is described in "Clifton Hill" and, as Moira Ferguson notes, the death of Yearsley's mother became a powerful image and symbol

²⁷¹ Waldron 328.

to her throughout her work.²⁷²

Their relationship also reflects Yearsley's readings in Gray, Ossian and Beattie. The idea of the wild, unfettered bardic imagination was developed and celebrated by poets like James Macpherson to whom Yearsley had been introduced by More and Montagu. It was an important literary influence from the 1760s when Macpherson published poems supposed to have been written in the Celtic past, and Gray published *The Bard* (1757) about the last Welsh bard. Landry has shown that Yearsley knew James Beattie's *The Minstrel: Or, the Progress of Genius*, published between 1771 and 1774, probably through the offices of Elizabeth Montagu.²⁷³ This attribution is emphasised when we look at Yearsley's comparison of herself to the wild "bard / On Cambria's height." This might be a generalised reference influenced by her readings in Macpherson and Beattie, although they both refer to Scottish bards. However, I think that it is probable that she is specifically referring to Gray's *The Bard* who is Welsh, or Cambrian, and who throws himself from a cliff in despair when surrounded by the forces of Edward I. Despair, fear of death, and the feeling of being overwhelmed by forces outside of her control, are all elements of her description of herself in this and many of her poems.

This reference in "Soliloquy" underscores the sense of despair Yearsley feels at the thought of death, and highlights the spiritual relief given to her by the memory of her mother. Her mother is portrayed in the warmest manner as possessing "eyes that beam'd benevolence" (24) and a "heart / Once rich with fine regard" which "mid this inhospitable scene was mine!" (24 - 26). The feeling of comfort and reassurance provided by this memory emphasises the intimacy of family life with which Yearsley begins the poem and,

²⁷² Moira Ferguson, "Ann Yearsley, the Published Writings: Gender, Patriotism and Resistance," *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender*, (Albany: State U of New York P, 1995), 53.

²⁷³ Landry 128.

more particularly, the differences from Young's model.

Significantly, her memories of this being do not appear to take her into the past, but to bring the past into the present moment. It is in "this hour" (22) that she "behold[s]" (23) her mother. In this moment of serenity, when the past is brought into the present, she also dares to look once more into the future. It is not a coherent or progressive view but a somewhat disconnected series of conjectures moving from personal speculations to reflections upon the world of politics, before returning to the self again. The sense gained from reading it is that she rejects a linear view of time which would join the past to the present in a progressive movement into the future. Her personal reflections concern the nature of death and dissolution, and whether she and her mother "may meet in spheres remote" (38) after her death, or whether she would or would not "know / To mourn" (52 - 53) after the "busy winds" had "dissolv[ed]" her ashes (51). She comes to no conclusions, but she is more sure in rejecting "the code / Of statutes form'd by man for future worlds" (29 - 30). She has "found his plan, so pompously display'd, / One lot of heterogeneous fragment" (31 - 32). In contrast to man's inability to construct an ordered teleology for himself or society, "Yon pale moon" (34) moves in unchangeable and quotidian order, "to bring us round / Her renovated splendour" (35 - 36). The thought of the ordered movement of nature offers her the same kind of comfort that she found in her mother's memory. But even this comfort offers no solution to "conjecture without end!" about her own future (54). Thus, while memory brings serenity to her troubled mind, reflections about the future offer little certainty.

Her speculations end suddenly and almost without her will as she cries, "return, return!" (55) to the thoughts that are lost in her increasing "phrensy" (56) and to "the form I love" (57). Her concern with the future has led to the loss of that memory which gives her

peace. Significantly, at this moment she notes that “this watch is down!” (57).²⁷⁴ The connection between her loss of the beloved memory, her concern with the future and the watch are tightly drawn here. There is a sense in which the loss of movement in the watch has determined the loss of her train of thought. Indeed, if her “veins” do “beat to its motion”, then the stopped watch can be considered to have acted as a disciplinarian to her thoughts. However, Yearsley is clear that the disruption to her memories is caused by her thoughts of the future. She only notices that the watch has stopped after memory has fled.

The stopped watch works in different ways here. On the simplest level, it indicates how long Yearsley has been sitting in meditation. At the beginning of the poem, when we are introduced to the patiently toiling watch, there is a sense that it can continue to mark the passing of time for many hours. If it has now unexpectedly wound down, and Yearsley’s use of an exclamation point indicates her surprise, than a meditation which has taken a few moments to recount, and perhaps even experience, has lasted in fact for much longer. This in itself would not be a surprising construction, as narratives often imply longer periods of duration than reading time, except here Yearsley has been at pain to convey the impression that the poem’s narrative is taking place in real time.

Indeed, her conclusion questions whether mechanisms constructed by man as “tell-tales of his doings” (59) are capable of measuring eternity. She argues that the watch is “fallacious in [its] working” (61) because, for a watch “the life of man is but a day” (62). Life can be measured by the watch only for as long as the mechanisms keep moving. Each day, when the watch must be rewound, its “points, / attun’d to motion by the art of man” (57 - 58), begin to measure anew as if the past had never existed. For a writer for whom memory is so important a part of her female retreat, this inability to express or acknowledge the past

²⁷⁴ I have taken this phrase to mean that the watch has stopped. It was common to describe clockwork watches as “wound down” when they had stopped. Similarly, the pendulum on a pendulum clock is “down” when it has lost motive power.

is suspicious. We already know that Yearsley is suspicious of man-made laws which seek to impose order on the present and the future. Watches cannot measure eternity because even though they appear to discipline the human body, they really are as abstracted from the rhythm of human life as man-made laws are from nature's laws. Just as a watch cannot truly measure the duration of a moment of contemplation as it is experienced by a human being, so too 'it cannot offer any real meaning to the duration of life or death. "Sacred Time" is not really measured by a watch, but by lived experience and memories of experience.

There are fears of the future and of death in this lived experience, but mechanical time and the teleologies of men offer no solution to those fears. The only solution offered in the poem, and, by implication in the epigraph, is the personal attachments that connect person with person. Intimate memories thus become an important part of these connections within the quotidian world of family life. Yearsley's interaction with her son has led to the memories of her interaction with her mother, and, while the watch has provided the immediate "circumstance of the moment," it does so as a tool and not as a governor. Thus, the moment contains past, present and future, not as a function of time, so much as a function of familial connection. This conception is very different to Wordsworth's "spots of time" in *The Prelude*, for example, or the way he invests his moment on the cliff near Tintern Abbey with the past and the future. As Mellor notes, the past is separate from the present for Wordsworth. He sees himself as a different being from the being in the past.²⁷⁵ Yearsley sees herself as being intimately involved in the past. It invests her concept of *beata femina* with the roots of community that prevent her retreat from becoming a solipsistic escape.

II. Anna Laetitia Barbauld.

Yearsley may have claimed an association with other women in her poetry, but when

²⁷⁵ Mellor 19.

we review the details of her life, we nevertheless gain a strong sense of her real isolation. Anna Laetitia Barbauld, however, articulates a sense of community with other women that reflects her actual experience. Born into a close-knit dissenting community in the north of England, she was constantly surrounded by family, friends and communal associations. Many of these relationships were, of course, with the men in her life. Her father was a tutor at Warrington Academy, a dissenting college with a distinguished reputation, so she was brought up with close attachments to an academic community whose aim was to promote scholarship and civic engagement through social intercourse.²⁷⁶ Women were not taught at Warrington, of course, but because of the nature of its educational mandate, and perhaps because several of the Warrington tutors, unlike their establishment colleagues at Oxford or Cambridge, were married with families, Barbauld became friendly with several eminent male intellectuals in a way almost impossible for most young women. Joseph Priestley, for example, was a particular friend. Nevertheless, many of her most intimate relationships were with women. It is, perhaps, significant that her first publicly-circulated poem was written to her friend, Mary Priestley, when Priestley and her husband left Warrington. Indeed, so many of the poems in Barbauld's first book of poetry are addressed to female friends and relatives that her modern editor, William McCarthy, claims that "'woman' is literally written all over them."²⁷⁷

As well as these personal relationships, Barbauld's writings, both poetry and prose, establish a connection with her female readers that echoes the mentoring relationship both

²⁷⁶ Anne Janowitz, "Amiable and Radical Sociability: Anna Barbauld's 'free familiar conversation,'" *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770 - 1840*, ed., Gillian Russell and Claire Tuite, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 62 - 63.

²⁷⁷ William McCarthy, "'We hoped the *Woman* was going to appear': Repression, Desire and Gender in Anna Letitia Barbauld's Early Poems," *Romantic Women Writers: Voices and Counter-Voices*, ed., Paula R. Feldman and Theresa M. Kelley, (Hanover and London: UP of New England, 1995), 116.

Chudleigh and Yearsley tried to construct with their readers. McCarthy notes the number of her female contemporaries, such as Mary Scott, Hannah Cowley, Elizabeth Montagu or Mary Robinson, who felt that Barbauld was “a woman speaking to women.”²⁷⁸ Barbauld was not admired by all women, of course, as the attacks by Mary Wollstonecraft show, and she was not only writing to women. Much of her poetry, such as “Corsica” and *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, or her prose pamphlets, such as *Civic Sermons for the People*, concerned political and civic matters aimed at a general readership. However, a significant number of her poems construct a philosophy of the life of *beata femina* that echoes the views of earlier women writers. Perhaps even more importantly, her more general and political works were argued from a position constructed within that philosophy.

Unlike that of Yearsley, but like that of many earlier women writers, Barbauld’s understanding of *beata femina* was rooted in her religious faith, as well as in the largely domestic nature of her life. Her Presbyterian and Unitarian background encouraged a belief that social connection, amiability and active benevolence were as important a means of accessing the divine as more spiritual or intellectual ones. Indeed, in many of her poems spiritual exploration is enacted out of a sense of social connection, and the divine presence is figured as an accessible being like a friend. As her writings throughout her life attest, Barbauld was a highly intellectual woman, but the nature of her faith, buttressed by the ethos of Warrington, enabled her to balance an intellectual and rational understanding of the world with a response to the world based on intuitive perception and affective connection to others. This balance changes over the course of her career, and even from poem to poem. However, even the most intellectually driven of her poems evince a strong reliance upon feeling and a belief in the importance of benevolent social concern. When she constructs a philosophy of *beata femina* within her poetry, she describes a female retreat where emotional connection

²⁷⁸ McCarthy 114 - 115.

and rational understanding are linked. Barbauld echoes the concerns of earlier women writers that the female retreat should not be seen merely as a feminised and trivialised version of the life of the *beatus vir*, but should articulate its own validity as a site of feminine understanding and connection.

The desire to negotiate a balance between a supposedly feminine emotional response to the world, and a rationality which was believed to be restricted to men had become part of an active social discussion in the late eighteenth century. The Bluestocking agenda largely consisted of an attempt to provide *fora* in which intellectual women could connect to other women and to sympathetic men, and demonstrate through public discussions their ability to comprehend the universe rationally. Indeed, part of the *animus* directed against the Bluestockings by several male writers, most notably Byron, was a belief that this attempt deprived women of the feminine attributes of emotional responsiveness and domestic submission. As unreasonable as these attacks were, women writers associated with the Bluestockings, such as Hannah More or Elizabeth Carter, were themselves concerned to refute this accusation by advertising their domestic ties and abilities. Elizabeth Carter was not only a gifted scholar but was known to be an expert maker of pies. Hannah More famously asserted her beliefs in the primacy of the domestic role for women. Even radical women writers, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Helen Maria Williams, attempted to negotiate a role for women that would enable them to bridge the divide between feminine sensitivity and masculine rationality without losing the attributes that gave women value in their society. Claudia Johnson argues that male appropriation in the late eighteenth century of the sentimental behaviour normally ascribed to women, meant that women were required to become even more refined and extreme in their expression of sensibility in order to maintain gender difference.²⁷⁹ Wollstonecraft has this extreme expression of sensibility in mind when

²⁷⁹ Claudia Johnson, *Equivocal Beings: Politics, Gender and Sentimentality in the 1790s*, Wollstonecraft, Radcliffe, Burney, Austen, (Chicago and London: U of Chicago P, 1995), 11- 16.

she laments that too many women believe their femininity to be defined by demonstrations of excessive fragility or debility. Intellectual women, rejecting this extreme view, nevertheless refused to reject the importance of an affective and intuitive role for themselves. Indeed, the social demand for women to become, in Johnson's phrase, "hyperfeminised," seemed to stimulate a discussion within the female literary community, concerning the singular nature of women's emotional response to the world around them.

This discussion, while it was stimulated by the cult of sensibility, nevertheless had its roots, I would argue, in the construction of an ideal female retreat at the beginning of the eighteenth century. Writers like Winchilsea, Fyge and Chudleigh were concerned to disprove claims of female irrationality even as they portrayed a life of the *beata femina* that relied upon affect and connection. Winchilsea, in particular, expressed her rejection of widespread stereotyped beliefs in women's disabilities. Her poetry demonstrates her own intellectual gifts at the same time as she vindicates her affective attachments to nature and friends. I think it is fair to claim that Barbauld was as influenced by this earlier tradition as by more recent discussions. She was certainly aware of the works of earlier women writers, as indicated, for example, by her poem to Elizabeth Singer Rowe, and by the echoes of other women writers that can be found throughout her work.

The belief that rationality in women coexisted with a greater capacity for emotional and intuitive connection to the world around them seems to have allowed Barbauld to feel a degree of comfort with the restriction of women to the domestic sphere that was significantly lacking, for example, in Wollstonecraft's approach to women's issues. Indeed, Barbauld's acceptance of a separate domestic role for women, despite her own literary and professional activity, has been criticised both in her own time and ours. But I think it is important to understand that Barbauld's view of this separate role is invested with earlier philosophies of female retreat which envision the life of the *beata femina* as a place of superior understanding. Winchilsea might credit Theanor with greater empirical knowledge of

Longleat's tapestries, for example, but she nevertheless asserts her own intuitive understanding of them which results from her life within retreat. Chudleigh acknowledges the importance of the active male world of politics and history, but it is her particularly feminine site of retirement that offers access to the divine. Even Leapor and Collier privilege female empathetic connection over male-authored constructions of georgic philosophy. Barbauld invests the separate sphere of women with this same sense of superior understanding. In her poetry, we see that the private world of the *beata femina* allows women greater access to civic knowledge, social connection, and even transcendent understanding than masculine involvement in the public world.

Indeed, Harriet Guest argues that "Barbauld seems to believe that women can best contribute to public life by adhering to the 'bounded sphere' of what is feminine and private; a sphere in which she suggests the 'virtues flourish' because the separate rights and professional specialisms that define middle-class masculinity are excluded."²⁸⁰ Barbauld was not alone in that belief, but she was probably the most eminent woman writer to articulate it. It was in some ways a transgressive move because it reconfigured the view of earlier male writers in the georgic tradition that civic virtue, disinterested, and rational understanding are to be found among a class of gentleman free from professional or particular interests. Barbauld's belief that women's separate sphere worked in a similar manner to inculcate social and personal virtues, equipping women to meditate upon public life, undoubtedly lay behind much of her political commentary and such poems as "Corsica." It also led, of course, to "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven," which was widely viewed as an unsuitable poem for a woman to write and was savagely criticised. As Maggie Favretti points out, "The very 'disinterested' composure and vision necessary in a gentleman who could claim to interpret

²⁸⁰ Harriet Guest, "Eighteenth-Century Femininity: 'a supposed sexual character,'" *Women and Literature in Britain, 1700 - 1800*, ed., Vivian Jones, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000), 65.

the 'interests of Europe' was somehow threatening, emerging as it was from the pen of an old woman."²⁸¹

This possibility of engagement outside the retreat is also rooted in the way the *beata femina*, constructs friendship. As we have seen, the philosophy of female retirement contains a paradox in that it not only advocates solitude but also the importance of female connection within that solitude. These connections are not the unnamed and generic friends that a writer like Pomfret imagines inviting to his country estate, but named intimates who form what McCarthy, in writing of Barbauld, calls "a gynetopia" of deep affection and support.²⁸² Even when particular friends are not named, as in Yearsley's "Clifton Hill," a loving connection to other women is often assumed to be an essential part of female retirement. Thus, the life of the *beata femina* had always offered the possibility of social connection even from within a "bounded sphere." Barbauld extends this possibility outside of her intimate family connections, as Deirdre Coleman notes, to a concept of "social friendship" which "assume[s] the shape of a socially useful and healing skill."²⁸³ Like Yearsley, Barbauld connects her philosophy of female retirement to a desire to be of benefit to others and to a strong ideal of service.

Despite distinctive similarities, there is a difference between this philosophy and the ideal of service rooted in the cult of domesticity. Domestic ideology always assumed a woman's active promotion of family and neighbourhood concerns. Hannah More's

²⁸¹ Maggie Favretti, "The Politics of Vision: Anna Barbauld's 'Eighteen Hundred and Eleven,'" *Women Poets in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730 - 1820*, ed., Isobel Armstrong and Virginia Blain, (Houndsmills, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), 108.

²⁸² McCarthy 127.

²⁸³ Deirdre Coleman, "Firebrands, Letters and Flowers: Mrs Barbauld and the Priestleys." *Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770 - 1840*, ed., Gillian Russell and Claire Tuite, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 83.

involvement in the Bluestocking and Sunday-School movements, as well as her indefatigable publishing of religious and political tracts, pamphlets, and poetry, is perhaps the most vivid example of this ideology in action. Barbauld was herself an active woman. She ran the Palgrave school with her husband and wrote children's stories and hymns, as well as political articles, literary criticism and poetry. It was this kind of activity, arising out of the work of domestic women, that led Wollstonecraft and other radical women to credit the potential renewal of the political process to the domestic affections. But the philosophy of the life of the *beata femina*, while it has strong links to this cult of domesticity, is ultimately rooted in a process that is much more visionary, reflective and intuitive than the self-conscious busy-ness of the domestic activity advocated by writers such as Hannah More.

Part of the visionary nature of this philosophy, as articulated by Barbauld, was in her construction of temporality. This was somewhat different to the immersion in the quotidian that has been identified in women's romantic writing, although it bears an affinity to it. It shares significant links to Yearsley's interest in the processes of memory, and it has a tendency to ignore, diminish or dislocate established temporalities, including representations of mechanical time. Instead, Barbauld, in a very similar manner to Winchilsea, privileges the present moment within the restricted female community, which then gives access to experiences that seem to exist independently of the accepted movements of time. Perhaps because of her religious background, she places a stronger emphasis than Yearsley upon a transcendent element in these experiences. However, like most other writers in this tradition from Winchilsea to Yearsley, Barbauld's construction of a poetic female community is as much a reflection of a psychological state of mind as it is a celebration of geographic space.

I will examine two very different poems by Barbauld, one from her early career, and one written at the end of the eighteenth century, which seem to me to illustrate the importance to her of the idea of the *beata femina*. "The Invitation" was published in Barbauld's first collections of verse, the widely acclaimed *Poems* of 1773. To a certain extent, I will be

discussing this poem in terms of its relationship to other poems in the same collection, particularly “Corsica” and “A Summer Evening’s Meditation.” I chose to focus primarily on “The Invitation” as opposed to “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” because “The Invitation” is clearer introduction to her ideas about the significance of the separate female community. The “Meditation,” in many ways a more powerful poem, has been thoroughly examined elsewhere. It concentrates more upon the self, although it also contains interesting and suggestive connections to Winchilsea’s “A Nocturnal Reverie,” and Fyge’s “The Extacie.” I also analyse “Washing-Day,” a poem published at the end of the eighteenth century in a journal edited by John Aikin, Barbauld’s brother. “Washing-Day” is a mock-georgic, with very obvious echoes of Pope’s satiric style. Nevertheless, the transcendent conclusion of this poem not only celebrates the very special female community first described in “The Invitation” but emphasises the connection between that female community and the visionary experience that is described in the “Meditation.”

*Poems*²⁸⁴ begins with a work that stands out from every other poem in the volume because it concerns the doomed fight for independence of the Corsican people. “Corsica” is a poem that concerns itself with the active male world of political struggles and war. Barbauld originally wrote it in 1769 when it was generally believed that the Corsicans would win their independence from the French. By the time she included it in *Poems* the independence movement had been crushed, and Barbauld added a conclusion acknowledging this defeat. The final lines of the poem seem to me to highlight an important element in the rest of the text:

There yet remains a freedom, nobler far
Than kings or senates can destroy or give,

²⁸⁴ Anna Laetitia Aikin [Barbauld], *Poems*, The Third Edition, corrected, (London: Joseph Johnson, 1773). All citations are from this text, unless noted, and are identified by title and line number.

... The freedom of the mind.

197 - 201.

“The freedom of the mind” is shown to be an important, even a “noble,” part of the poems which follow, describing the visionary, and also the everyday, world of the bounded female community. Like the Corsicans, women must construct a freedom not dependent on political rights or public concepts of independence. Thus, “The Invitation” which immediately succeeds the heroic blank verse of “Corsica” also emphasises a spiritual freedom enjoyed by Barbauld and her friend. The sense of poignancy engendered by Barbauld’s description of the doomed independence movement is intensified by her portrait of the spiritual freedoms of the women’s separate sphere in “The Invitation” and gives a heightened meaning to the female freedom described there. The final work in *Poems* extends this “freedom of the mind” to the individual woman who can soar into the far reaches of the universe and connect with the divine through the action of her own imagination. The connection between “Corsica” and “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” is emphasised by their positions as the first and last poems of the volume and by the fact that they are the only two poems in the volume to be written in blank verse. This is the poetic diction of Shakespeare and Milton, and Barbauld is thus giving the same significance to the individual woman in her restricted life as she gives to the Corsicans in their heroic struggle. The two poems balance each other, bringing a different perspective, male and female, to describe the “freedom of the mind.”

In between are a variety of poems detailing the lives of women in their constricted sphere. Some reflect upon the quotidian activities of women and their characters and relationships. A considerable number are addressed to close female friends. McCarthy notes that all of these “invite a biographical reading, even as they also slightly repel it by making the signs of the personal only partly intelligible.” He believes that Barbauld designed this ambiguity deliberately “to make the poems seem not really meant for the public eye: our relation to them seems that of overhearers [*sic*] of private musings.” As such, he argues, the

effect on the volume itself is to throw a veil of gendered reading on it, as “privacy itself may signify gender because in gender convention (and in much social practice) the private was the realm of women.”²⁸⁵ This sense of a gendered reading is emphasised in poems that address such virtues as wisdom or contentment, invariably personified as female, and in poems that explore Barbauld’s own Christian faith in lyric meditations or hymns. There are also several secular songs in the pastoral form so popular with women. Even those poems that do not self-evidently concern the lives of Barbauld and her friends can be seen to be conflated with them. “The Groans of the Tankard,” for example, humorously portrays the non-alcoholic dining practices of a Presbyterian family like Barbauld’s own. “The Mouse’s Petition” positions the mouse as a domestic figure in Joseph Priestley’s household, trembling on the hearth as she gathers “the scatter’d gleanings” (17) of a dinner table. Significantly, she is threatened, not by a housewife, but by the masculine world of Priestley’s scientific experimentation. “Ovid to His Wife” imagines the dying poet reflecting upon the tragedies of his life, and concludes with his belief that even after his death his wife will continue to care for him, keep his memory alive, and cause his “silent dust [to] glow at [her] command” (107). As we have seen, the volume concludes with “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” in which the visionary life of the *beata femina* is portrayed with elevated seriousness. *Poems* can be seen to present the separate sphere of women as a place of warmth, support and companionship extending across time and space, and the volume concludes with a depiction of women’s visionary access to the divine.

If this depiction of women’s separate sphere is the purpose of the volume, what is “Corsica” doing there? I believe it is there as a point of comparison between the world of men and of the world of women, and I also believe that within this volume it is meant to be read in tandem with the following poem, “The Invitation.” “The Invitation” is addressed to

²⁸⁵ McCarthy 117.

“Miss B****,” that is Elizabeth Belsham, Barbauld’s cousin and closest lifelong friend.²⁸⁶

It is, at the beginning, a poem of retreat, and the full title indicates that, like many other writers in the *beata femina* tradition, Barbauld does not advocate complete solitude in her retreat but privileges intimacy with a chosen named companion. This declared companionship is underscored by an epigraph taken from Virgil:

Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori;

Hic nemus: hic ipso tecum consumerer aevo.

VIRGIL

The untranslated citation from Virgil’s *Eclogues* draws attention to Barbauld’s knowledge, unusual for a woman at this time, of Latin and Latin authors, and to her assumption that Belsham shares this knowledge. In this way Barbauld signals that the friendship between herself and Belsham is not only emotional and sentimental, but also intellectual and learned. The epigraph itself seems chosen to emphasise the love between the women that animates the first half of the poem and illuminates the joy they share in nature. Kraft and McCarthy supply the 1999 Loeb translation in their edition of Barbauld’s verse: “Here are cold springs, Lycoris, here soft meadows, / Here woodland. Here with thee, time alone would wear me away.”²⁸⁷ However, as Michael Putnam points out, this phrase “is particularly hard to interpret.”²⁸⁸ He gives two possible meanings: “I would pass the time of this whole age with you,” and “I would be consumed with love for you for this whole age.”²⁸⁹ C. Day Lewis’s translation offers another version: “Soft meads, cool streams you would find here, and

²⁸⁶ William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, ed., *Anna Letitia Barbauld: Selected Poetry and Prose*, (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2002), 49.

²⁸⁷ McCarthy and Kraft 49.

²⁸⁸ Michael C. J. Putnam, *Virgil’s Pastoral Art: Studies in the Eclogues*, (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1970), 366.

²⁸⁹ Putnam 367.

woodlands, dear Lycoris; / A Paradise where we could grow old together.”²⁹⁰ These translations indicate the possible range of Barbauld’s understanding of the citation. Almost any reading suggests the rest and refreshment to be found in nature and in the speaker’s love for Lycoris.

A more contextualised reading, however, can complicate our understanding of what the epigraph is saying about the poem. The voice in this particular citation is not that of the poet, but of his friend, the Roman general Gallus, who imagines himself addressing his faithless mistress. This does not in itself make Barbauld’s use of the citation unusual. Women’s pastoral poetry of the eighteenth century often employed almost unchanged the amorous language of Virgilian pastoral. What is unusual, perhaps, is the full sense of the citation that Barbauld employs. Gallus is not represented in “Eclogue X” as a shepherd but in his real character of soldier and imperial administrator. This extract is part of Gallus’s lament that he has never been an Arcadian shepherd, living forever with Lycoris in the country. If he had, he implies, Lycoris might not have betrayed him for another man, or he might instead have won “a Phyllis, [or] an Amyntas” who “would pick me garlands, [or] sing for me” (37 and 41). “But,” he continues, he cannot enjoy this idyllic life because he is a soldier, forced by “insensate zeal for the War-god / To go where weapons fly and the foe’s in battle formation” (44 - 45). It is worth considering why Barbauld chose to allude to this particular poem to illuminate her own poem of retreat. If she had merely wished to emphasise the pastoral joys that she and Belsham would share, she could have chosen from amongst many other more appropriate extracts that lack the disturbing imagery of a faithless love and the elegaic sense of loss that characterise this poem. Barbauld, of course, might have assumed the citation’s more overt reading as an illustration of the loving yet intellectual relationship of

²⁹⁰ Virgil, “Eclogue X,” *The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. C. Day Lewis, (London: OUP, 1974), 43. All subsequent references to “Eclogue X” are from this edition and are identified by line number.

the two women would be most widely accepted amongst those readers able to translate the citation, or have it translated for them. To what extent Barbauld could expect the generality of her readers to identify the source of her epigraph, is questionable. It is probable that amongst the general population, only male readers with a classical education would be likely to understand fully the negative implications of the epigraph. Nevertheless, Barbauld was associated with several members of the Bluestocking movement, many of whom, including Elizabeth Carter, Hester Chapone, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More and Anna Seward could read Latin and were familiar with classical literature.²⁹¹ I would argue, therefore, that Barbauld could expect an elite and, in some ways, an intimate community of women to translate and contextualise the epigraph with a more nuanced interpretation than that of invitation and affection.

This more nuanced interpretation depends, to a certain extent, upon the position of the poem within the volume. "The Invitation" immediately follows "Corsica," and while I would not wish to overstate the importance of sequencing, it seems to me that "The Invitation" is in many ways a response to "Corsica," a response signaled by the epigraph. As we have seen, "Corsica" is the only poem in the volume to concern itself wholly with the masculine world of action, politics and revolution. Indeed, its blank verse composition and elevated tone give it the feel of a minor epic. The subsequent portrayal in rhyming couplets of female friendship in a pastoral landscape might almost seem trivial by comparison, if not for Barbauld's insistence in the last line of "Corsica" that the "freedom of the mind" is "nobler" than political freedom and if not for her inclusion of the epigraph at the beginning of "The Invitation" voicing the lament of a general for an unattainable life of peace and happiness. Barbauld does not, of course, intend to denigrate the fight for independence in "Corsica,"

²⁹¹ Anna Miegou, "Biographical Sketches of Principal Bluestocking Women." *Reconsidering the Bluestockings*, ed., Nicole Pohl and Betty Schellenberg, (San Marino, California: Huntingdon Library, 2003), 25 - 37.

which she describes in the most heroic and approving terms. But she does signal to those of her readers who can fully interpret her epigraph that the life of female retirement in "The Invitation" is a desirable and visionary alternative to the active life of men, however heroic. It emphasises the life of women in a separate sphere from men, a separation that Barbauld wrote of approvingly elsewhere. She and Belsham are not Gallus and Lycoris, as an initial reading of the epigraph might imply, but the Arcadians whose lives Gallus envies but cannot adopt.

The pastoral world of women stands in juxtaposition to the harsh world of men portrayed in "Corsica." "The Invitation" can be read, therefore, as a threshold poem that welcomes both Belsham and an educated female readership to the life of the *beata femina*. Read in this way, the structural oddities of "The Invitation" are largely resolved. I have described "The Invitation" as a poem of retreat, but in fact, like Chudleigh's "On the Death of His Highness," it encompasses other important elements, some of which seem to have little connection with one another. The first half of the poem does indeed operate as a retirement poem, with some idiosyncracies that I will examine. But, as the poem develops it becomes a topographical panegyric, first upon the Duke of Bridgwater's canal, built to carry coal from his lordship's mines in Worsley to Manchester, and then upon Warrington Academy. It is not unusual, of course, for a poem that eulogises a landscape to employ elements within that landscape as a means to praise human achievements. McCarthy and Kraft describe "The Invitation" as a "topographical poem celebrating a place in the manner of Alexander Pope's *Windsor Forest*,"²⁹² while John Guillory argues that Barbauld situates the poem "in relation to the generic tradition of Denham's *Cooper's Hill*."²⁹³ But it seems to me that both these

²⁹² McCarthy and Kraft, *Selected Poetry and Prose*. 49

²⁹³ John Guillory, "The English Common Place: Lineages of the Topographical Genre," *Critical Quarterly* 33:4 (Winter 1991), 19.

analyses ignore the invitation into a female retirement that begins the poem and forms such an important part of it. Guillory, who uses as a source text an eighteenth-century anthology which edits out the first half of the poem, seems unaware, in fact, that the section on Warrington Academy is not the complete work. Yet, this early division of the poem is significant because it indicates that even eighteenth-century editors were unsure what to make of it. Delia (Belsham) is invited into a pastoral world of pleasure, ease, and female companionship, which suddenly becomes a landscape of georgic labour featuring the fruits of masculine toil: the canal and the male academy. By the end of the poem, all references to Delia have disappeared.

These structural difficulties may be due, in part, to the fact that the poem was, according to McCarthy and Kraft, “written in pieces at different times.”²⁹⁴ But, even so, Barbauld was obviously content to leave the various sections as relatively separate entities when she revised the poem for inclusion in what would be her first major publication. This must have been because she felt that the poem, as it stood, said something important about female retreat and male georgic achievement. That statement and the poem’s structural problems become clear if we read the poem as a response to “Corsica” and as a threshold poem to the rest of the text. Barbauld believed, as we have seen, that women’s sensitivity and retirement from public activity allowed them to comprehend the events of the wider world with greater clarity than men involved in public affairs. Thus, she feels authorised to write “Corsica” because of her position as an educated, rational and sensitive woman living within a sphere of life removed from the battles and politics of the male world. Then, in the following poem, she invites us, with Delia, into that privileged sphere of women, which she compares to the active life of men, both in echoes at the beginning of the poem to “Corsica,”

²⁹⁴ William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, ed., “Notes and Variants,” *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, (Athens and London: U of Georgia P, 1994), 226. McCarthy and Kraft also note that this poem probably originated as a letter to Elizabeth Belsham, 224.

and at the end with her portraits of the canal and the academy. Her portraits of these masculine endeavours seem both commendatory and somewhat critical, as I shall demonstrate, and this objectivity of vision can be seen to flow from the life of retirement she shares with Delia. "The Invitation," then, invites us to become the invited Delia. We are asked to leave the busy world of masculine struggle and activity so that we can experience the life of the *beata femina* in all its varied forms in the poems that follow.

Of course, this reading of the complete text relies on the assumption that Barbauld herself organised the selection, revision and arrangement of the poems. McCarthy and Kraft note that Lucy Aikin, in her 1825 "Memoir" of her aunt, claims that Barbauld was reluctant to publish and had to be persuaded by her brother, John, who was then intimately involved in the editorial process. McCarthy and Kraft point to the "studied ambiguity" of Aikin's account, which seems to deliberately obscure whether Barbauld or her brother was the principal revisor and editor of *Poems*. The reason for this ambiguity seems to have been Aikin's sense of "decorum," which resisted portraying Barbauld as an active participant in the business of publishing her own work.²⁹⁵ Despite significant changes in the position of women writers through the eighteenth century, a sense of discomfort with their public position remained, and, by 1825, of course, Barbauld's memory would have been tainted by the critical reaction to "Eighteen Hundred and Eleven." Lucy Aikin might well have felt the need to protect her aunt's reputation by subordinating her to her brother in the editorial role process.

Because of that sense of decorum and because Aikin's account is the only one describing the editorial process behind *Poems*, it is impossible to state with certainty that Barbauld alone was responsible for the selection and positioning of the works within it. However, McCarthy and Kraft point out that while "the exact nature and extent of John

²⁹⁵ McCarthy and Kraft, "Introduction," *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, xxx.

Aikin's contribution to *Poems* in unlikely ever to be known," Barbauld herself was known to reject editorial suggestions with which she did not agree in other works in which she collaborated with her brother. It seems to me that if Barbauld insisted on her own editorial choices in relatively minor works such as *Lessons for Children*, then she would almost certainly insist on her own organisation for her most important poetic work before 1813. It is important to remember that while Barbauld subscribed in print to a view of women as submissive, domestic beings, her letters, essays and, indeed, her poems, do not give us a portrait of a submissive or a passive woman. Her relationship with her brother, as is evident in her letters to him, was deeply affectionate and even admiring, but it was not subservient. I would argue that while John likely played a major role in encouraging Barbauld to publish and in offering editorial suggestions, as McCarthy and Kraft show, the final decisions were always made by Barbauld.

This argument is borne out by the generic ventriloquism of "The Invitation." Barbauld's revision here displays a certain caution in its critique of masculine achievements and its transgression of literary proprieties. It nevertheless introduces changes that contain distinctive echoes of earlier women writers. The first of these is the blessing that begins the poem. Neither poems of retreat nor topographical poetry normally begin this way, of course, although Barbauld may have been introducing an influence from formal pastoral here which often involves an oration to another. Indeed, the initial prayer, which calls down blessings on Delia, emphasises the expressed intimacy of the connection between the narrator and her friend. However, the blessing also signals a variation in both of the conventions, eclogue or retreat, with which "The Invitation" nominally begins, a variation that places the relationship in the context of other female friendships celebrated in women's verse. The echoes here, of Singer Rowe's "To Mrs. Arabella Marrow in the Country" both in the blessing and in the invitation that begins the poem are distinctive. We know that Barbauld was familiar with Singer Rowe's work, and, in many ways, the first section of "The Invitation" can be read as

an extended reworking of Singer Rowe's poem. Like Singer Rowe, Barbauld first blesses her friend, and then draws a comparison between the corruption of the city with its "mimic grandeur and illusive light" (10), and the "pure pleasures rural scenes inspire" (14). But, whereas Singer Rowe was content to remain largely within the confines of retirement conventions, Barbauld uses the convention with Rowe's embellishment of a blessing, as a springboard for a much more ambitious poem.

The nature of this ambition can be found in the language of the blessing. The prayer with its calls for "long unbroken years, / By storms unruffled and unstain'd by tears" (1- 2), and for "peace eternal" (6) seems to stand in counterpoint to the description on the previous facing page of Corsica's sons, "Less vanquish'd than overwhelm'd, by numbers crush'd" (187), living in a world where "storms roll'd on storms" (191). The difference between the two worlds portrayed in each poem is stark. A public world of men which involves struggle, effort and disaster is compared through the sequencing of the poems to the intimate world of love and supportive affection between the two women. The blessing itself seems designed to protect Delia from the potential horrors of the masculine world.

The invitation following the blessing indicates that the difficulties which might affect Delia in the masculine world are not all as extreme as those described in "Corsica." Indeed, there is a sense in which the problems of the public world in England could be temptations to which Delia might succumb. The "glittering scenes" dazzle the sight (9), but it is a "mimic grandeur" (10) which only highlights "hollow friendships" and "sickly joys" (12). In this characterisation, Barbauld is emulating Singer Rowe fairly closely. But, then Barbauld breaks with convention by admitting that in winter the attractions of the city are indeed stronger than the virtues of the country. While "rural scenes" may inspire "pure pleasures," in winter "Pleasure, like a bird of passage, flies / To brighter climes" (21 - 22) where "the artificial blaze" of the city (25) supplements "the sickly sun's declining rays" (26). This more nuanced representation, which modifies Singer Rowe's conventional opposition between city

and country, signals Barbauld's willingness to view the public world with tolerant and realistic clarity. The "gold and gems" (25) of the city might only be a simulacrum of the genuine delights of the country, but when "winter's hand the rough'ning year deforms" (19), it is understandable that Delia would follow Pleasure there.

This clarity of vision gives a greater validity to Barbauld's subsequent portrait of spring in the country. Without that sense of validity, Barbauld's narrative of the two friends following the "smiling goddess" Pleasure "thro' the tangled forests or enamel'd meads" (33 - 34) and tracing "her fairy footsteps" in "silent glades" (36), while "FLORA . . . by some transforming power, / . . . chang[es] an icicle into a flower" (43 - 44), becomes a mere fantasy. To a certain extent, of course, the image of the narrator and Delia "sweetly wast[ing] the careless day" (52) is intended to convey the idyllic lives of the Arcadians described by Gallus in "Eclogue X." But it is also meant to describe real women in a real landscape. Thus, although Barbauld describes the countryside through which she and Delia roam in terms of fairies and goddesses, she also conveys a portrait of a recognisably English landscape and an English spring with "daisied turf" (31) and "early primroses" (32) warmed by "the western winds" (40). Her description of the snowdrop, a quintessentially English flower, is deliberately fanciful, but it successfully conveys the real delight of its early appearance while snow is still on the ground. Similarly, the progress of spring is accurately marked by the subsequent appearance of violets, and finally, roses, which in the eighteenth century were a late spring, rather than a summer flower.

The effect of this passage is to emphasise a certain relationship with nature which changes when Barbauld turns to the achievements of the male world. The women are votaries of nature. Both goddesses in the natural world lead them through and demonstrate to them the changing delights of the landscape. There is a strong sense that the women worship the nature they are shown and the emphasis is upon pleasure and connection, rather than historical or moral lessons. When "Flora cries exulting, See my Rose!" (50) Barbauld does

not take the rose, or improve it, or use it to represent some abstract virtue. It is a free gift, freely accepted. For Barbauld, the natural world has a reality which outshines the illusionary brilliance of the city, a reality that provides all the magic and transcendent beauty that the city can only promise and approximate. Pleasure can reside in the city or in the country, but it is only in the country that she becomes a goddess rather than a "bird of passage." To live in the separate sphere of women is to enjoy a visionary view of the world which even the revolutionaries of Corsica cannot access.

In the second half of the poem, Barbauld invites Delia to look at male achievements in the landscape. Here, the image of the two women "sweetly wast[ing] the careless day" (52) is set in opposition to images of the "labouring plow" (54) and the "sons of toil," who, "with many a weary stroke" (59) create the "smooth canals" (57) that bisect the landscape. Indeed, the transition from the "gentle summits" (52) and "cool vales" (55) of Barbauld's retreat and her initial description of the "labouring plow" is almost non-existent, as the pastoral flows into the georgic with effortless grace. It is only when Barbauld describes the extreme physical effort of canal construction, that we realize we are in the middle of what appears to be a very different poem. Unlike Leapor or Yearsley, Barbauld does not overtly denigrate masculine georgic values. She links them instead to a female pasteurality that is very different and yet is portrayed as complementary. Both the Duke of Bridgewater's canal and Warrington Academy are described in commendatory terms which evoke her admiring description of Corsica's struggle for independence. The men building the canal have worked with "many a weary stroke" (61) and produced an engineering marvel. In a description of the canal's aqueduct which carried shipping thirty eight feet over the River Irwell, Barbauld describes how "the traveller with pleasing wonder sees / The white sail gleaming through the dusky trees" (67 - 68). Barbauld even invokes some of the supernatural quality of her own feminine experience of the countryside when she notes "the magic scenes which round [the traveller] rise" (70) as "like a flock of swans, above his head / Their woven wings the flying vessels

spread" (71 -72). Unlike the women in their Arcadian idyll who experience the beauty of the landscape as a visionary delight, the men "work with steady patience" (62) to "alter[]" the landscape (69), so that "The ductile streams obey the guiding hand, / And social plenty circles round the land" (77 - 78).

Tempering this panegyric upon georgic improvement, Barbauld introduces a cautious element of criticism. The land is figured as female, so that in building the canal "the sons of toil" appear to be attacking an entity that resists them. They strike (59) and "scoop the hard bosom of the solid rock" (60) in order to "work their gradual way" (62) through "stiff opposing clay" (61). The language and imagery here seems deliberately ambiguous. It is, of course, possible to understand these images as part of Barbauld's eulogy of georgic labour and improvement, particularly as nature is here portrayed through a male perception as an obstacle legitimately to be overcome and a resource to be exploited. But, connected as the whole passage is to her previous imagery of female connection with nature, the images of injury, compulsion and horror, as brief as they are, seem to imply something more than hard work. Thus the water of the canal is no longer admired as an element of nature, but has been refashioned into an object of almost domestic consumption: the contents of "a silver urn" (65), which pours a commodity like tea, to "cheer the barren heath or sullen moor" (66). The once "unwilling flood" has been disciplined into a "ductile stream" which, in an image which evokes the elaborate landscaping of Versailles or Hampton Court, "now . . . in artful mazes glide[s]" (73).

Penny Bradshaw has noted "the hint of force, and of a violation of nature" in Barbauld's description of the building of the canal.²⁹⁶ She links this hint to Barbauld's programme of gendering the Enlightenment, so that the ideals of the Enlightenment are figured as feminine and the works of the Enlightenment, such as scientific experimentation

²⁹⁶ Penny Bradshaw, "Gendering the Enlightenment: Conflicting Images of Progress in the Poetry of Anna Laetitia Barbauld," *Women's Writing* 5:3 (1998), 358.

and development, are figured as masculine. Thus, the canal, according to Bradshaw, is “a complex metaphor for the progress associated with the industrial changes taking place during the Enlightenment,” while the later portrayal of Warrington utilises “the discourse and methodology of eighteenth-century scientific journals.”²⁹⁷ In both cases, masculine action works to dominate nature, while the idealised female icon of the Enlightenment acts as a friend to nature. Bradshaw concludes that the Enlightenment engenders conflicting responses in Barbauld and that she “occupies a split position in relation to this project.”²⁹⁸ Bradshaw’s analysis is an interesting one, and some of it is echoed in my own analysis of the poem. However, I believe that Bradshaw does not give enough attention to Barbauld’s evident and overt admiration for the canal, and later, for Warrington. Nor does she place the poem in its original published context of *Poems*. I would argue that Barbauld’s attitude in “The Invitation” is not so much conflicted as clear-eyed. The canal has brought “social plenty” to the land, but it has done so at a certain cost to nature itself. Barbauld’s ability to see this dichotomy does not suggest the kind of resentment that Bradshaw implies. I would argue that the reader is meant to associate the untrammelled, visionary and pastoral landscape with the female friends that take pleasure in it, and the altered, imprisoned and working landscape with the men who labour to contain it. Barbauld would later in her career express more overt criticisms of “the desire of science to master, manage and possess nature,”²⁹⁹ but in this early poem we are meant to view the masculine containment of nature with a clarity of vision that not only critiques but admires, and to associate that objective clarity with the narrator in her separate sphere.

Her position in that sphere is made evident in her description of the canal. Her poetic

²⁹⁷ Bradshaw 357.

²⁹⁸ Bradshaw 359.

²⁹⁹ Favretti 105.

eye encompasses all of the landscape surrounding the Irwell and the Mersey, in the same way that Pope and Denham extend their poetic eyes over the widespread landscapes they describe. In other words, she claims the same kind of poetic authority over the scenes she describes as a male poet in a traditional topographical poem. However, she derives her authority from a very different source. Denham's or Pope's authority derives from their association with political and social privilege. Pope, for example, is writing on behalf of the Marquis of Lansdowne in *Windsor Forest*, and ultimately on behalf of the nation.³⁰⁰ He feels authorised to do this because of his connections to aristocratic statesmen and because of his own situation as a gentleman of taste, genius and education. Barbauld, as a woman, was excluded from participation in a public life that even Pope, as a Catholic and an invalid, could enjoy. Thus her authority to position herself over the landscape does not come from a sense of entitlement but from her belief in her role as an exemplar of the separate, and pastoral domain of the feminine. She moves without tension from the pastoral world of women to the georgic world of men in this poem because she credits that separate world of women, as Winchilsea and Chudleigh did, with special powers and insights denied to men in their busy lives.

These special powers and insights are made even more evident as Barbauld directs Delia's eyes to Warrington Academy on the banks of the River Mersey. In some ways her portrait of the Academy appears even more approving than that of her portrait of the canal. This is not really surprising. Barbauld was still very much part of the Warrington community when she wrote this poem. Her father, John Aiken, her husband, Rochemont Barbauld, and her friend, Joseph Priestley, all taught there. Her letters and the memoirs of her niece, Lucy Aiken, all show that she felt a considerable sense of loyalty and affection for the place and its ideals. Thus her portrait of Warrington initially describes it as a site of "nobler praise" (79)

³⁰⁰ *Windsor Forest* is dedicated to Lansdowne, and the epigraph and the first lines of the poem suggest it was written at his "command[]" (line 5) to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713.

than that of the canal and as a new Parnassus, where “the Muses . . . have fix’d their sacred seats” (80).

John Guillory goes so far as to argue that Barbauld uses all the conventions of the topographical genre to situate Warrington Academy as a privileged alternative to both Eton and Oxford. As we have seen, one of the strategies of topographical poetry is to portray cultural knowledge, particularly literary knowledge, as a form of property.³⁰¹ For middle-class dissenters like Barbauld, Guillory notes, vernacular literacy, in particular, as opposed to classical literacy, was the preferred means to claim gentility and refinement.³⁰² These dissenters represented the “distinction between classical and vernacular literacy [as] the difference between two relations to property, to wit, entitlement and acquisition.”³⁰³ Vernacular literacy, the treasure house of English literature, was cultural property that could be acquired, particularly in the new dissenting institutions, which emphasised a more liberal curriculum than established institutions.

Guillory identifies several echoes of Grays’s *Elegy in a Country Church Yard* and Denham’s *Cooper’s Hill* in the Warrington section of the poem. These echoes, he claims, juxtapose the dissenters, refused entry into establishment institutions because of the Test and Corporation Acts, with Gray’s peasants – both deprived of access to knowledge and opportunity. Barbauld then reverses that deprivation by celebrating the acquisition of the new form of literary capital, not dependent on the established role of Eton, which is, states Guillory, “always over the horizon of Gray’s landscape.”³⁰⁴ Barbauld also describes the Mersey in terms of Denham’s Thames, lacking its fame and longing to “emulate [its] classic

³⁰¹ Guillory. 6.

³⁰² Guillory 16 - 17.

³⁰³ Guillory 18.

³⁰⁴ Guillory 21 - 23.

tide” (90). Barbauld thus employs two classics of vernacular literature as a means of situating Warrington Academy and the dissenting community associated with it as a place where cultural property is acquired rather than inherited. That both classics situate Warrington “in the space of a locodescriptive poem” which is itself a vernacular genre, highlights for Guillory Barbauld’s awareness that with this genre, “the new class of literate professionals found one way in which to stand together in a common place, a place which was, at the same time, private property.”³⁰⁵

Guillory’s analysis does not take account, as we have seen, of the rest of Barbauld’s poem, and part of his analysis rests on the fact that the Warrington passage, retitled “Warrington Academy,” is situated next to Gray’s *Elegy* in the anthology in which he discovered it. Guillory’s reading, nevertheless, offers a valuable understanding of this part of the poem, although the excised portions complicate his reading in interesting ways. There is no doubt that Barbauld portrays Warrington as an idealised academic environment in which young men, “panting for fame, impatient of controul” (120), study to acquire all the knowledge needed to become the statesmen, soldiers, scientists and religious leaders of their nation. At the same time the work of acquiring cultural capital is, essentially, georgic and masculine, labour in this poem. Barbauld’s conclusion at the end of this passage that her muse is “unequal far such bright designs to paint” (185) seems to admit that this kind of property is difficult for a woman to encompass.

However, because of Guillory’s lack of access to the rest of the poem, his reading of the section on Warrington tends to universalise the dissenting experience of obtaining cultural capital in a way that assumes Barbauld’s inclusion in that experience. Yet the thrust of the poem as a whole, while it does not affect her admiring portrayal of Warrington, insists on a separate lived experience for women. Indeed, there is something ironic in Guillory’s use of

³⁰⁵Guillory 23 - 24.

the images of property and acquisition in the access to culture when we consider Barbauld's particular disabilities as a woman. Significantly, while Guillory argues that dissenters like Barbauld employ allusions to vernacular literature in order to symbolise their acquisition of cultural property, Barbauld herself employs classical epigraphs and genres, together with more vernacular allusions and motifs, in a way that appears to declare her own freedom from the restraints of cultural property. Admittedly, McCarthy and Kraft note that the classical epitaphs in *Poems* may have been included at the insistence of John Aiken, and that Barbauld employed them only rarely elsewhere. I would nevertheless argue that, at the very least, Barbauld concurred with their inclusion here and that having concurred, she employed them in highly significant ways. Here, Barbauld's use of "Eclogue X," together with her ventriloquism of a mixture of genres, both classical and vernacular, emphasises her own ability to soar above the masculine divisions of cultural property and, clear-eyed, examine its topography. Thus, however admiring her view of Warrington, and to whatever degree she feels involved in the cultural acquisition of Warrington's pupils, we gain a sense of her own separation from it.

As she directs Delia's eyes to "the nursery of men for future years" (82), the language she initially uses has the effect of questioning the praise she seems to offer. Warrington is not a site of "distant spires [and] antique towers" as Gray admiringly describes Eton,³⁰⁶ but a small child's nursery where "callow chiefs and embryo statesmen lie, / And unfledg'd poets short excursion try" (83 - 84). She is, of course, referring to the untried potential of the students at Warrington, but the imagery of unformed fetuses and naked baby birds, particularly with the echoes of Pope's "embryo" hints and "new-born Nonsense" from the

³⁰⁶ Thomas Gray, "Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College," *Thomas Gray and William Collins: Poetical Works*, ed., Roger Lonsdale, (Oxford and London: OUP, 1977), 20 - 23

Dunciad,³⁰⁷ suggests a potential that is not unreservedly brilliant.

This awareness is further developed later in the passage. She acknowledges that the boys possess

... quick affections, kindling into flame
At virtue's or their country's honour'd name;

....

And conscious honour's quick instinctive sense;
And smiles unforc'd; and easy confidence;
And vivid fancy; and clear simple truth

And all the mental bloom of vernal youth. 123 - 124 and 129 - 132

Yet she suggests that for all their virtues, the boys are unaware and careless of their blessings. Debarred herself from the "golden days . . . [and] bright unvalued hours" (115) of sustained intellectual endeavour, she needs to remind the boys, "What bliss (did ye but know that bliss) were yours?" (116). There is an echo here from the second book of the *Georgics* where Virgil addresses the rural farmer who enjoys a way of life envied by the narrator but who is unaware of the extent of his good fortune: "O happy husbandman, if you but knew your happiness" (II: 457). By equating the boys with Virgil's happy husbandmen, Barbauld is able to both praise the boys and suggest her sense of exclusion from the unappreciated benefits they enjoy.

Similarly, when Barbauld examines the students' varied futures, her overall sense of admiration is occasionally salted with criticisms that originate in the disinterestedness of her separate sphere and which allows her to question the roles that the boys will play. Thus, the future is not one glorious scene of brilliance, but a "temper'd harmony of light and shade" (140). There is a deliberate sense of ambiguity in this line which initially appears to suggest

³⁰⁷ Suggested by McCarthy and Kraft, "Notes and Variants," *The Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld* 227.

the eighteenth century ideal of order arising out of chaos but also hints at the heterogeneous nature of the lives the boys will follow. Some will “adorn the state” (142), while others “the sequester’d shade shall cheaply please, / With learned labour, and inglorious ease” (144). Yet others will serve their country abroad as merchants. But while they will

Tell each land . . .

. . . .

MAN is the nobler growth our realms supply,

And SOULS are ripen’d in our northern sky, (151 and 153 - 154)

they will also “from every land the various harvest spoil, / And bear the tribute to their native soil” (149 - 150). Those students who are interested in nature will not enjoy it, as Barbauld and Delia do, but will desire to penetrate and possess it. Thus they will “unfold the silky texture of a flower; / With sharpen’d eyes inspect an hornet’s sting” (156 - 157) without pleasure, but with the need to “trace with curious search the hidden cause / Of nature’s changes, and her various laws” (159 - 160). In doing so they will commit a kind of assault against nature: “untwist her beauteous web, disrobe her charms, / And hunt her to her elemental forms” (161 - 162). Barbauld then imagines the way that this hunt will “quench disease and cool the burning wound” (164) and may even “call back the flitting soul” (166), but her initial imagery of assault prompts her reader to evaluate the cost of these benefits.

In the same way, Barbauld praises the future soldier who will “with lips of fire . . . plead his country’s cause / And vindicate the majesty of laws” (169 - 170), but also draws the reader’s attention to the way he will “spread alarms / Thro’ the wide earth, and shake the pole with arms” (171 - 172). He might find his sacrifices will “enshrine his name in some immortal verse” (174), but Barbauld seems to question whether he will have found it worthwhile to have paid “a life of hardships by a line” (176) of poetry. Indeed, the only middle-class profession available to the Warrington pupils that does not invite her incisive commentary is that of cleric. He will be “consecrate to higher aims” (178) than the other

boys, and will “launch our souls into the bright unknown” (182). In concluding this section of the poem with her uncritical portrait of a religious leader, Barbauld gives enough of a gloss to the rest that we are left with an overall impression of unmitigated approbation. This sense of approbation is, I believe, dominant, but the subversive commentaries emphasise Barbauld’s ability fully to comprehend all aspects of the male world.

Bradshaw’s argument here is instructive, but, as with her critique of the passage concerning the Bridgwater canal, she fails to take account of every element of Barbauld’s depiction. Bradshaw notes that the “first version of science we encounter” is an abstract ideal of science figured as a female eagle (98 - 110).³⁰⁸ This idealised female figure “does not control and manipulate nature,” Bradshaw argues, “instead Nature, also feminised, actually connives with Science, sharing her secrets, as she ‘opens all her secret springs’ (97).” While I agree that the gender of the eagle of science is significant here, Bradshaw ignores the larger context of its representation. It is not to the eagle that nature “opens all her secret springs” (97) but to Warrington itself, and it is at Warrington that “heav’n-born science plumes her eagle wings” (98). In other words, Barbauld portrays Warrington as a place where the female figure of abstract science and the male figures of active scholarship can meet. While Warrington does stand on one side of a gendered divide from Barbauld and Delia (neither Barbauld nor Belsham would have been permitted to study there), it is not necessarily the inimical divide represented by Bradshaw. Barbauld appears to consider that there is a place for the feminine and the visionary even at Warrington. This possibility is emphasised when we consider that, for the classically-trained Barbauld, the eagle of science is not necessarily representative of the hard sciences only, but of all knowledge: *scientia*. *Scientia* is, of course, a feminine word, and, in its wider meaning, signifies everything that Warrington tried to achieve for its pupils: a traditional humanistic education that included elements of the newer,

³⁰⁸ Bradshaw 358.

more experimental arts. If the female world Barbauld describes signifies that which is reflective as opposed to that which is active, then *scientia* can be seen to represent that feminine element of scholarship which involves intellectual exploration, and which is welcomed at Warrington.

Following this passage, Barbauld looks forward, as we have seen, to a future in which Warrington's pupils can follow their "high designs" (119). Here again, Bradshaw tends to misread Barbauld's fullest meaning. Focusing only on Barbauld's discussion of the pupils who will become natural philosophers, Bradshaw argues that Barbauld's gendering of the Enlightenment project portrays these philosophers as both masculine and violently penetrative. She claims that Barbauld constructs this portrayal because eighteenth-century scientific discourse defined research in sexualised metaphors, and because such discourse reflects the way that "the masculine version of science" excluded women and "worked against" them.³⁰⁹ While I would not completely disagree with this reading, I would argue that it misrepresents the complexity of Barbauld's attitude. As we have seen, she undoubtedly portrays a feminised figure of nature being hunted and disrobed by scientists. Nevertheless, we should not ignore her description of the disease and pain cured by these same scientists. Nor should we ignore a sense, which is not overtly stated but which is nevertheless present in the context of the poem as a whole, that it is not only nature who suffers from the way she is regarded, but the scientists themselves. They lose something important in their georgic labour: the unalloyed joy that Barbauld and Delia experience in "the silky texture of a flower."

Thus, while Barbauld might feel excluded from full participation in the Enlightenment experience and while she expresses criticism of certain aspects of masculine activity in that experience, she also understands the benefits that result from masculine activity. More

³⁰⁹ Bradshaw 359.

importantly, she represents her exclusion as a privileged place of visionary pleasure from which all aspects of nature and the Enlightenment can be viewed. It is important to note that Barbauld does not, as Bradshaw implies, discuss only science in this poem, but, as we have seen, all the potential public offices in which men might be employed. In describing each of these she offers in equal measure both criticism and admiration, and in doing so, highlights her own position outside of that georgic activity. But she does not convey any real sense of resentment because of this exclusion. We have to assume that her description at the beginning of the poem of her own delight in the pastoral world to which she invites Delia conveys her genuine belief in the value of that world.

The visionary nature of women's role in this world is made particularly evident through Barbauld's manipulation of time. We have already seen how, in traditional topographical poetry, time is compressed so that named sites in the viewed landscape bring historic narratives into the present. There is also a progressive element to the temporality of this genre, so that the narrator on his hill employs his elevated perspective to prophecy a glorious future for the nation or the estate whose history is recalled. Barbauld does not reverse generic expectations in "The Invitation" in quite the same subversive manner as Yearsley, but she does introduce enough variations to establish a sense of women's time particular to the *beata femina*. She initiates this through her evocation of a pastoral world at the beginning of the poem. Pastoral is a generic form that often assumes a depiction of timelessness. While the Arcadian shepherds and nymphs, particularly in Virgilian pastoral, offer contemporary social commentary, they nevertheless seem to exist in an idyllic world largely untouched by time. To a certain extent, Barbauld proceeds with this understanding. There is a sense of being free from the linear compulsions of time, as well as being free from the demands of the world, as she describes the way that she and Delia will "follow where the smiling goddess leads" (33). At the same time, however, Barbauld emphasises her existence within time in this section. The blessing and invitation that begin the poem situate the rest of

the poem within the temporal moment that Barbauld issues them, and that moment is specifically defined as Spring. This moment is fashioned as an address or a letter to Delia and operates in the same manner as Yearsley's insistence upon the "lone hour" of her composition. Everything else in the poem is speculation and reflection arising from the moment of Barbauld's composition of her address to Delia.

Thus, the pastoral world that Barbauld evokes is self-consciously situated within her imagination, but that imaginative experience is then placed in a particular moment of time. It is significant that Barbauld asserts a temporal reality when she shows a movement of time from winter to spring within that pastoral world. Her acknowledgement that the pastoral world is less than idyllic in winter grounds her description of Arcadian pleasures in a reality which is important for her overall argument. The separate world of women in this poem is associated, as we have seen, with the pastoral idyll to which she has invited Delia. That world is portrayed as both pleasure-filled and visionary. But Barbauld does not want to portray it as a fantasy world with no connection at all to the working reality of the male world. Thus, she subsumes both the idyll and the reality into the temporal moment of her imaginative connection with Delia.

Barbauld's emphasis upon the imaginative nature of her address to Delia accentuates her refusal of the traditional temporal movements of topographical poetry. Barbauld does not pretend to encounter historic sites in the landscape and transform them into temporal narratives. Both sites and narratives are self-consciously conjured from within her own "fancy" (133). This emphasis upon the imagination operating in retirement is given an added significance by Barbauld's detailed examination of the changes brought about by spring:

Now the glad earth her frozen zone unbinds
And o'er her bosom breathe the western winds.
Already now the snowdrop dares appear,
The first pale blossom of th'unripen'd year. 39 - 42.

This temporal emphasis then expands from the particular image to the sweeping observation when the poem's pastoral passage develops into a georgic survey. Barbauld and Delia appear to fly over the landscape as Barbauld points out to her the various beauties that she will see when she comes to visit: "Here gentle summits lift their airy brow" (53); "Here bath'd by frequent show'rs cool vales are seen" (55); "Here smooth canals, across th'extended plain, / Stretch their long arms" (57 - 58). The historical narrative of the building of the canal that follows these descriptions appears to abide by the conventions of the topographical survey, except that, as we have noted, Barbauld does not construct a narrative fiction of actual presence when she describes the scenery or the canal. Thus, the topographical survey and narratives which follow are both placed within the temporal period of Barbauld's address to Delia.

Similarly, the historical narrative of the building of the canal is positioned in the present tense, and appears to be taking place at the same time that the traveller "views the alter'd landscape with surprise" (69). The movement of water through the canal is also described as a series of present moments:

Now like a flock of swans, above his head
 Their woven wings the flying vessels spread;
 Now meeting streams in artful mazes glide,
 While each unmingled pours a separate tide;
 Now through the hidden veins of earth they flow,
 And visit sulphurous mines and caves below. 71 - 76.

Of course, Barbauld's description is accurate here. The water of the canal would naturally be present in all these locations at once. But the reiteration of temporal signifiers like "now," with the inclusion of "while," highlight instead a constant temporal emphasis upon the present, the same present moment in which "the sons of toil with many a weary stroke / Scoop the hard bosom of the solid rock" (59 - 60).

The repetition of “now,” “now,” “now,” seems to match the repetition of “here,” “here,” “here,” that begins the same passage. A reference to “here and now” seems beyond coincidence and is repeated in the next passage describing Warrington Academy, Here and now, the “Muses . . . have fix’d their sacred seats” (80) at Warrington, where, beneath the Mersey’s willows “rove th’inquiring youth, / And court the fair majestic form of truth” (95 - 96). We might expect that this place, in particular, would stimulate an historic narrative. But Barbauld confounds generic expectations when she refuses to offer such a narrative. Instead, she is at pains to emphasise its lack of history. It has a future, but no apparent past, while even the river on which it sits has been “by fame neglected, and unknown to song” (86).

This concern to diminish historical narratives and highlight speculative ones becomes intensified in the following passage. In a complex temporal movement Barbauld imagines the Warrington pupils as adults in the future looking back in time to the present moment:

How bright the scene to fancy’s eye appears,
Thro’ the long perspective of distant years,
When this, this little group their country calls
From academic shades and learned halls. (133 - 136)

Here, she places those future adults upon some temporal high place, gazing at the prospect and reflecting upon their own histories. She also constructs future narratives for them in a tone of speculation and conjecture. As she does this, she maintains her manipulation of temporal movement by describing their potential lives in a mixture of present and future tenses. Thus, the natural philosophers “hunt [nature] to her elemental forms” (162) in what appears to be the present, whilst the soldier “shall” in some future period feel “patriot passion” (167).

The effect of this kind of speculative manipulation is to foreground the reflective voice of the narrator. As with Barbauld’s description of the canal, it is not the view of Warrington from some high place that has prompted these reflections, but the self-conscious

act of imagination that conveys the images of Warrington in Barbauld's address to Delia. Even the fact that Delia has disappeared from the poem intensifies this emphasis upon the action of the narrator's imagination. In the same way that Barbauld rejects a narrative fiction of actual presence when she describes the canal and the Academy, she also rejects the narrative fiction of Delia's actual companionship. Instead, Barbauld wishes she could be present in some speculative future, and describes what Delia might see if she were present.

The final passage confirms this emphasis upon Barbauld's visionary imagination. In what is apparently an apology for straying into public matters which require a "master's pencil and a poet's fire" (183 - 184) rather than the pen of a woman, Barbauld describes her "drooping Muse fold[ing] up her fluttering wing, / And hid[ing] her head in the green lap of spring" (187 - 188). She conveys a sense of exhaustion, as she claims she is "unequal for such bright designs to paint" (185). Yet, the apology seems disingenuous because Barbauld has indeed undertaken the "arduous themes" (183) she claims her "lines [are] too faint" (186) to delineate. Like Winchilsea at the end of "A description of a Tapestry," Barbauld has successfully accomplished the act of composition she declares she is unfit to attempt, and proves her own contention wrong. As a woman she might feel the need to claim her own weakness for the benefit of her male critics, but as a poet she is confident in her own ability. Indeed, Barbauld's exhaustion underscores the labour involved in visionary reflection. It is, in fact, the proper labour of women in their separate sphere, as Winchilsea claimed sixty years before. The pastoral world of women and the connection between women is a place and a relationship of visionary delight which enables them to reflect upon the universe. This might not be the active labour of the world of men, but it is nevertheless labour, and it gives meaning to the life of women in the *beata femina*.

In some ways, this reading of the poem can be understood in terms of Julie Ellison's argument that self-conscious references to the imagination in eighteenth-century poetry, particularly in the topographical genre, represent a means for women to explore wider

political issues than was normally allowed to them. As she points out, the self-conscious use of imagination or “*flight of fancy*” was not restricted to women. But women could use the topographical genre as a way of portraying the “panoramas of the progress of empire . . . the big pictures of civilisation’s ebb and flow.”³¹⁰ Both men and women, Ellison argues, employed elements of the cult of sensibility, such as “melancholy, the reflexive imagination, and the representation of the other” in order to fuse “imperial and lyric consciousness” in prospect poetry. But, she states, “the activities of ‘fancy,’ ‘reflection,’ ‘meditation,’ and ‘imagination’ that structure the reader’s progress through a text have different meanings depending on the gender and position of the speaking subject.”³¹¹ She does not discuss the ways that gender differentiates the meaning of prospect poetry in terms of male writers, but argues that “the prospect often furthers the female author’s quest for a reading audience or for critical respect earned by taking on public matters.”³¹²

Barbauld’s description of the canal and of Warrington position her poem in this way within the mainstream of topographical poetry. Even her refusal of historic narratives as they concern Warrington can be associated with a political, as opposed to a lyric, impulse. As John Guillory has shown, the dissenters who built Warrington were very aware that their possession of culture was a matter of acquisition rather than inheritance. In asserting that Warrington and the Mersey had no history and no traditions, Barbauld supports the dissenters’ claim that they must acquire culture rather than inherit it. Nevertheless, I would argue that Barbauld’s use of imagination in the poem goes beyond an ambition to “take on public matters.” I believe she is claiming a particular kind of imaginative vision for the

³¹⁰ Julie Ellison, “The Politics of Fancy in the Age of Sensibility,” *Re-Visioning Romanticism: British Women Writers, 1776 - 1837*, ed., Carol Shiner Wilson and Joel Haefner, (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1994), 229.

³¹¹ Ellison 229 - 230.

³¹² Ellison 230

female sphere. This imaginative vision is somewhat different to the male vision in a similar genre. A male poet, like Thomson, for example, employs “fancy” to extend his view over a geographic site in which he implies he is present and claims the history, the present and the future suggested by that prospect for his nation, and, more particularly, for his patron. There is often a strong suggestion that the interests of the nation, the patron and the narrator are conflated, and that the poet sees himself, as well as his patron and the nation, as part of a continuum of temporality that runs progressively from the past to the future. Barbauld’s poem, while it partakes of these conventions, is positioned outside them, and while her ambitions can be said to involve her in the public world, as Ellison argues, they also position her in a way that emphasises the present moment rather than the past and the future.

For Barbauld, as for Yearsley, it is as much time as place that leads into imaginative reflection. Like other writers in the *beata femina* tradition, the time that interests Barbauld is the present moment or the present hour, from which a visionary experience can be explored. In this moment within the separate sphere of women, Barbauld is able to reach out to the narratives of the male world and reflect upon them. Thus the geographic sites that she describes are self-consciously part of her visionary experience within that moment. She does not have to claim that she sees them in order to be able to use them to comment and reflect upon the male world. Her ambition is not so much to establish a position within that male world but to establish a position for the female sphere which offers women a means to connect to the male world as respected commentators.

As I have already noted, this early construction of the ideals of the *beata femina* tradition did not remain static throughout Barbauld’s career. Nevertheless, if we briefly examine a late poem, “Washing-Day,” we can see that many of the ideas expressed in “The Invitation” remained important for Barbauld, even as she became a more public and politically active figure. “Washing-Day” is a very different poem from “The Invitation.” Instead of a serious, reflective poem of retreat and survey, we find a mock-georgic that

appears to satirise the domestic world to which many women, including Barbauld, were supposed to be confined. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate, even within a mock-georgic, Barbauld constructs an image of the *beata femina* from which women could soar above the mundane world and access the male world of action and achievement.

Elizabeth Kraft, in her authoritative and exhaustive study of this poem, notes that Barbauld does not use the georgic form here in order to privilege domestic labour in opposition to male labour. Indeed, her use of a mock form ensures that "Washing-Day" cannot be read as a didactic attempt to garner sympathy or appreciation for women's work. According to Kraft, "Washing-Day" does not celebrate the sense of cosmic order associated with conventional georgic but recounts "the chaos, the disorder imposed by washing-day."³¹³ Kraft believes that "the poem is not so much a celebration of women's labour as an illustration of the way that the imagination can both flourish in and transcend the domestic context."³¹⁴ My own analysis forms something of a dialogue with Kraft's findings, which are so comprehensive that I do not use any other secondary source.

Barbauld is concerned in this poem to draw attention to the mode that she rewrites and to the specific changes that she will make. Indeed, the echoes of Pope, Gay or Wortley Montagu, are resonant. However, there is a difference in that the mock forms of these earlier writers are often social satires, designed to highlight the triviality or venality of the present day in comparison to the past. Barbauld's poem might appear to trivialise washing-day and the household routine that is disrupted because of it. Yet, I would argue that, ultimately, the labour itself is not trivialised and out of it arises that possibility of connection which leads to the serious and visionary conclusion of the poem. Even the playfulness of the first half of the

³¹³ Elizabeth Kraft, "Anna Letitia Barbauld's 'Washing-Day' and the Montgolfier Balloon," *Literature and History* 4: 2 (Autumn 1995), 31.

³¹⁴ Kraft 33.

poem avoids the satirical bite of the true mock form. No social structures are subjected here to the reforming eye of the satirist. Barbauld does not appear to suggest, as Pope does even in the light and amusing *Rape of the Lock*, that the social world is diminished because of the actions of her protagonists. Indeed, as I will show, Barbauld, like Leapor in "Crumble-Hall," evinces a great deal of affection for her subjects, despite the mockery she directs at them.

What Barbauld truly mocks here are the cultural attitudes that would relegate the separate sphere of women to a minor position in society. Domestic ideology in the late eighteenth century had certainly privileged the domestic world of women, but it did so as an end in itself. Despite the arguments of Wollstonecraft and other female radicals, domestic ideology never allowed women a role in society beyond that of wife and mother, and while those roles were given far greater social significance than in the early eighteenth century, they were still characterised as less significant than masculine roles. To a certain extent this attitude extended to women's writing. Despite women's publication of serious literature and scholarship in the late eighteenth century, many literary critics continued to dismiss their work on the basis of gender as trivial, unlearned or transgressive of their proper roles as women. While Barbauld's *Poems* of 1773 was widely praised, for example, established critics nevertheless denigrated the book for being too masculine in tone and for minor errors of scholarship.³¹⁵ While appearing to concur in these attitudes, "Washing - Day" undermines them both with mockery and with serious intent.

This ventriloquism is signalled in the epigraph to "Washing-Day." This is a citation from perhaps the most authoritative of the male writers available to Barbauld, Shakespeare. The citation from Jacques' famous speech about the seven ages of man in *As You Like It* is, in fact, the kind of misquotation for which Barbauld had been criticised in *Poems*:

. . . . and their voice

³¹⁵ McCarthy "We thought the woman was going to Appear," 113 - 115.

Turning again towards treble , pipes

And whistles in its sound. — ³¹⁶

The original speech refers to men and their deeply masculine voices, and “rehearses,” as Kraft notes, “the stages of life, implying a universal cyclical pattern that we can all expect to enact in out time upon the stage of existence.”³¹⁷ This particular epigraph reflects the poem, she argues, because it “invokes the ‘ages’ of woman, the child who wonders why washings are, the mother who supervises the wash, the grandmother who supervises the children.” The sense of inevitability that the preface and the poem promotes then “forms the condition of possibility for change.”³¹⁸ While I would agree with this, I would also argue that Barbauld is making a further argument. She indicates that she will be taking an established genre and altering it to suit her own purposes as a woman poet. She thus emphasises the irony in her introductory lines:

The Muses are turned gossips; they have lost
 The buskin'd step, and clear high-sounding phrase
 Language of gods. Come then, domestic Muse,
 In slipshod measure loosely prattling on
 Of farm or orchard, or shoe lost in the mire
 By little whimpering boy with rueful face;
 Come Muse, and sing the dreaded Washing Day. (1 - 8)

Reading the epigraph together with these first lines indicates that the change from

³¹⁶ Anna Letitia Barbauld, “Washing-Day,” *The Complete Poems of Anna Letitia Barbauld*, ed., William McCarthy and Elizabeth Kraft, (Athens, Georgia: U of Georgia P, 1994), 133. All citations are from this edition and are identified by line number.

³¹⁷ Kraft 35.

³¹⁸ Kraft 36.

Shakespeare's masculine voice to "their voice" refers not just to Barbauld's substitution of women for men, but to the changing nature of the muses as well. Barbauld appears to perform a conventional act of deprecation for women poets. She claims that she has no access to the youthful and powerful muses available to Shakespeare, who are represented wearing the buskins defining tragic drama and who inspire the "clear high-sounding phrase" (2). Her muses are old women, "their voices / Turning again towards treble," gossiping about the trivial and domestic concerns of women's lives.

Yet, in performing this act of deprecation, Barbauld also complicates it. She shows herself very aware, for example, of the long-standing argument in the eighteenth century that women's entry into publication had compromised standards throughout the literary world. Her reference to the "slip-shod measure" (4) of her muse not only indicates the difficulty that women were supposed to feel in the disciplines of poetics, such as the construction of appropriate iambic feet, but also recalls Pope's *Dunciad*. This bitter mock-epic blames, amongst others, "slip-shod sibyls," female poets, for the ruination of the elite literary universe advocated by Pope.³¹⁹ Women poets can only "loosely prattle" (4) of trivia. They cannot submit to the discipline of tightly constructed verse on serious subjects. The list of what this slip-shod muse supposedly inspires Barbauld to write is a compendium of what was often conceived to be the limits of women's themes in poetry – not the grand sweeping survey of the georgic with its epic overtones, but the local farmyard, or the intimacies of daily life as a wife and mother. But Barbauld is not claiming this muse only for herself here. She seems to imply that the domestic muses are significant for everyone. In fact, her use of *As You Like It* for her epigraph, not one of Shakespeare's great tragedies but an early pastoral comedy which eschews high drama for intimate *minutiae*, suggests that the domestic muse has always been available and even Shakespeare did not despise her.

³¹⁹ Alexander Pope, *The Dunciad*, Book III:15.

Barbauld's apparent deference to prevailing masculine attitudes is made even more ironic by the structure she employs. In spite of her claim that her muse is "slip-shod" and therefore incapable of moving her iambic feet properly, Barbauld composes "Washing-Day" in the blank verse of Shakespeare's plays and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. She even employs Miltonic inversions consistently throughout:

. . . for to that day nor peace belongs
 Nor comfort; — ere the first gray streak of dawn,
 The red-armed washers come and chase repose.
 Nor pleasant smile, nor quaint device of mirth,
 E'er visited that day: the very cat,
 From the wet kitchen scared and reeking hearth
 Visits the parlour, — an unwanted guest. (12 - 18).

Of course, Barbauld is employing the mock-form in the way that it is intended here: using the elevated language and structure of epic to describe a trivial incident, and thus forcing a comparison between the trivia and the weighty issues normally conveyed in epic. The actual effect in passages like this is not just amusement at the juxtaposition between language and subject, however, but admiration at Barbauld's command of language and poetics. Her muse might be an old gossip, she seems to be saying, but, despite Barbauld's self-deprecation, she is certainly not "slip-shod."

Nevertheless, Barbauld's jocular tone as wash day is described does seem to "assert the way the day trivialises other activities and . . . suggest that the activities of the day are themselves are relatively trivial," as Kraft argues.³²⁰ Yet, Barbauld's emphasis upon the details of the day highlights the actual labour and trouble involved. We know from Mary Collier that washing day normally began in the early hours before dawn and lasted until late

³²⁰ Kraft 33.

at night, and that it took the combined efforts of the women of the household and of visiting washer women to complete. It must have disrupted all normal routine, and while Barbauld, as a middle-class woman did not experience the physical nature of Collier's labour, she conveys enough of the details for us to be sure that she was far more involved than Collier's mistress. "All hands [are] employed to wash, to rinse, to wring, / To fold, to starch, and clap, and iron and plait" (76 - 77) she states. Thus, even as Barbauld claims stature for herself and her muse in her use of a satirical genre closely associated with the authoritative male voice, she also claims a recognition for her women readers who might feel that wash day demands as much labour and ingenuity as tilling the soil or shearing sheep, or even improving an estate.

Barbauld directly addresses the women who

. . . beneath the yoke of wedlock bend
 With bowed soul, full well ye ken the day
 Which week, smooth sliding after week, brings on
 Too soon. 9- 12.

These are colleagues, members of an associated group, who know washing day as well as Barbauld. In this they become analogies to the privileged landowners addressed by Pope or Thomson in their georgics: those who speak the same language, claim the same knowledge and stand in the same social positions. Barbauld even invokes the georgic with her use of the word "yoke" to describe the duties of marriage. Everything that follows this address is governed by this assumption. Barbauld thus gives significance to privileged readers who already know and understand her domestic georgic. Kraft notes that "we can well imagine the female reader of the time, overly familiar with the routine, smiling or groaning in recognition as she reads Barbauld's lines."³²¹

³²¹ Kraft 31.

The details of washing day are undoubtedly amusing, and Barbauld is not ungenerous in allowing her readers to feel a sense of fun in “all the petty miseries of life” (28) that accompany that day. But like all true comedy, it takes its humour from that which is real. It is, of course, hyperbolic when Barbauld claims that,

Saints have been calm while stretched upon the rack,
And Guatimozin smiled on burning coals:
But never yet did housewife notable
Greet with a smile a rainy washing day. (29 - 32)

But, in an era in which all hot water had to be boiled in coppers, all washing had to be done by hand, and all drying had to take place out of doors or in front of a fire, a rainy wash day must have been viewed as a disaster. Indeed, the lines speak to another truth, and one familiar to most women: the almost greater reserves of patience needed to cope with quotidian, domestic disasters than with more cosmic traumas. Similarly, Barbauld’s description of a husband attempting to find some corner of the house or garden free of wet sheets, or of an uninvited guest receiving a very cold welcome, are lightly comic portrayals of believable situations.

Thus, while the first half of the poem seems to concur with cultural beliefs that the domestic sphere lacks the significance of male activity in the world, we find that Barbauld asserts an authority for the separate sphere of women that must, finally, be taken seriously. Kraft argues that while there is a “decidedly masculine air” to the first half of the poem which arises from its satiric form that appears to mock the women’s activity, “‘Washing-Day’s’ derision encompasses as well the man of the house” who is belittled for calling himself “the master here” (34). He is, as Kraft demonstrates both the “passive beneficiary and the helpless victim of female domesticity.”³²² He is told by Barbauld to

. . . ask not, indiscreet,

³²² Kraft 32.

Thy stockings mended, tho' the yawning rents

Gape wide as Erebus, nor hope to find

Some snug recess impervious. 36 - 39

He cannot even walk in his garden unmolested by "the wet cold sheet" (45) hanging on the washing line, nor welcome a friend to dine without "looks, blank at best and stinted courtesy" (49). The work of the women may, as Kraft argues, be presented as relatively trivial, but it orders the life of the master who is presented as completely aimless as he wanders from study, to garden to dining-room in an attempt to escape from wash day.³²³ In contrast, the women of the household work as a group to perform a task both necessary and difficult.

In a way, Barbauld has reversed her usual construction of the separate spheres of existence. In this poem, women work, while men watch. Yet, even as Barbauld playfully reverses her own conventions, she continues to assert her beliefs. The aimlessness of the man in the poem places him very much outside the world of women, even as he appears to inhabit it. At the same time, both the mistress's and the maids's irritated attitude towards "the master" on wash day seems to enhance the sense of companionship between them. Their joint refusal to mend his stockings, sweep his study or brush his coat collapses class difference and emphasises the gendered connection between them. Similarly, when the uninvited male guest is treated to "stinted courtesy" (49), Barbauld is ambiguous about the source of this lack of welcome. The implication of the poem is that it is the mistress who can barely force herself to be polite, but the phrase is not particularly associated with her at the time it is made. It is likely that both mistress and maids would be deeply resentful at such an intrusion at such a time, and united in expressing that resentment.

Kraft argues that the ridiculous position of the men in "Washing Day" points to the

³²³ Kraft 33.

way that women's work is not only trivial in itself, but also trivialises other activities.³²⁴ Yet, the men's activities, as they are described here, could scarcely be said to be productive, even if they were not interrupted by wash-day, and it is this very lack of activity on the part of the men in the poem that points to what Barbauld is undertaking in this first part of the poem. There is indeed chaos here, as Kraft argues, instead of the cosmic order that georgic labour normally signifies.³²⁵ This kind of generic reversal is usual in mock forms, and, as we have seen, was a common practice for women ventriloquising standard conventions. But I would argue that the chaos of washing day in this poem is more associated with the man's perception of what is happening in his home than with the actuality of the women's activities. Indeed, Barbauld's listing of all the various tasks of wash -day, "to wash, to rinse, to wring, / To fold, to starch, and clap, and iron and plait" (76 - 77), emphasise the orderly progression of the multitude of tasks the women must accomplish. However, because the master of the house cannot obtain his normal level of service and attention while all these tasks are being undertaken, the effects of the wash day would appear to be chaotic to him. Similarly, the unexpected male guest would, of course, react unfavourably to the inability of the women of the household to produce a roast chicken or relaxed companionship on this day. Barbauld's address to the master of the house, warning him not to expect attention or welcome for his friends, forms the greater part of the first half of the poem, while the anxiety with which the women approach their tasks is not presented as chaotic so much as daunting. The masculine voice of the mock-georgic in which she frames these discomforts, underscores this sense that the apparent chaos of wash day, is a male-authored perception rather than a reflection of her own understanding of the day.

If we examine the kind of cosmic order that Kraft claims is associated with the

³²⁴ Kraft 33.

³²⁵ Kraft 37.

standard georgic, we can see that this sense of transcendence is not necessarily an implicit part of the labour described. It is a construct imposed by the poet. There is no truly logical reason why the cosmic order celebrated in *The Georgics*, or *Windsor Forest* or *The Seasons* should emanate from rural pursuits, except insofar as such pursuits generally follow the movement of the seasons. The association also benefits from the fact that the poets celebrating these pursuits are generally not themselves involved in the work of agricultural labour. But when the labouring poet, Stephen Duck, describes the filth and sweat associated with threshing, or the exhaustion associated with harvest, we gain very little sense that such activities partake of the order of the universe. Indeed, some of his activities might even be described as “mundane” and all of them must certainly have been monotonous, which is why Duck uses the analogy of Sisyphus to describe agricultural labour. Unlike her male contemporaries, Barbauld was involved as a housewife in the labour she describes. It is not surprising that she does not partake of the distanced viewpoint of the male writers of georgic, but conveys much the same sense of detail and involvement as Duck. At the same time, her use of a mock-georgic form to describe this labour does not so much trivialise the labour itself as it mocks the distanced masculine viewpoint of georgic, which allows a man to feel pleasure in the images of rural labour which do not affect him, and disgruntlement in the actuality of domestic labour which does.

But, perhaps one of the most significant ways that Barbauld manipulates the genre and highlights the essential seriousness of her subject is to fracture the genre completely. From line 58, as Barbauld’s narrative of washing day changes to a memory from her childhood, the tone of the poem shifts dramatically from lightly amused irony to serious reflection. There is no attempt to maintain a sense of linguistic flow from one section to another, such as Barbauld undertakes in “The Invitation,” for example. The break in tone is immediate and absolute. Yet, despite this break, Barbauld maintains a much stronger thematic link between the two sections of the poem than in “The Invitation.” The memory of her childhood is

prompted by her reflections upon wash day, and is directly linked to it. Barbauld “well remember[s], when a child, the awe / This day struck into” her (58 - 59). She recalls with love the times she sat with her “dear grandmother, eldest of forms” (68), while her mother and the maids laboured to complete the laundry. The effect of this break in tone and continuation of narrative is to convey the seriousness of the second half of the poem back to the humorous first half, and soften the satirical force of her representation there. On the other hand, we are not tempted to continue the ironic amusement of the first half of the poem into this reflective narrative. By the end of the poem, as we look back at the whole through Barbauld’s memories of her childhood and the transcendent reflections upon Montgolfier’s balloon, the initial irony of her narrative of wash day is almost negated. Despite this negation, we might have some difficulty in recognising a life of *beata femina* in the first half of this poem. However, it share an affinity to the notion of female connection through labour that both Collier and Leapor employ. Barbauld’s women are not, perhaps, inhabiting the same comforting kitchen as Leapor’s servants, but nor are they suffering quite the same torments as Collier’s washerwomen. The playful construction does make the labour seen less traumatic than in Collier’s poem, and it also makes that labour seem part of a community of effort between women in which they congratulate each other on shared hardships overcome. Indeed, Barbauld’s direct address to her women readers, as we have seen, assumes a female community who will immediately recognise every element of washing day, from “sad disasters — dirt and gravel stains / Hard to efface, and loaded lines at once / Snapped short’ (25 - 27), to the agreement that it would be easier to remain “calm while stretched upon the rack” (29) than smile at a rainy wash day. Kraft points out that “washing day activity brought together women of three distinct classes — the washerwomen, the mistress of the house and the household maids.”³²⁶ Thus, “Washing -Day” can be seen as an attempt to bring a variety

³²⁶ Kraft 34.

of women into community: both the women who labour and the women who read.

This sense of community is taken into the next section of the poem, when Barbauld remembers the intimacy she shared with her grandmother as she wondered why the maids, "I scarce knew why, looked cross, and drove me from them" (60). This particular rejection might seem to deny a sense of female community, except that Barbauld immediately describes the ways that the maids normally indulged her with affection and treats: not only with a "soft caress" (61), but also with

. . . jelly or creams,
 Relique of costly suppers, and set by
 For me their petted one; or butter'd toast,
 When butter was forbid; or thrilling tale
 Of ghost, or witch, or murder. 62 - 66

When the maids have to leave her to attend to the community of labour, she is then invited into an even more intimate and tender interaction with her grandmother who "Tended the little ones, and watched from harm, / Anxiously fond" (69 - 70). Yet even this idyllic scene is not separated from the labour taking place in the kitchen, because, as she sits with her grandmother, she hears her mother's voice, "Urging dispatch" (75), and is made aware of the stress of washing day. Thus, although washing day forces the maids to temporarily abandon their interaction with the child, their apparent defection leads to an even more emotive interaction with her grandmother and an awareness of the wider female community in the home. Kraft points out that "while generally the maids point to the child's own specialness . . . on washing day they signify the importance of the household itself, and more specifically the duty of the women of the house."³²⁷ The child's connection with her grandmother and with the maids and her mother link the women of the house in a community that encompasses both

³²⁷ Kraft 34.

labour and delight.

This kind of female community is somewhat different to the *beata femina* imagined in “The Invitation,” but it shares certain qualities. One of the most important, of course, is the intimacy shared between the women, which in this poem even crosses class boundaries. As we have seen, we have a very different portrait of washing day here from Collier’s *Woman’s Labour*, and not just because Barbauld is writing from the perspective of the mistress of the household. Collier’s mistress does not get up in the early morning with her maids, but allows them to begin working while she stays in bed. When she does eventually come into the kitchen, she might perhaps bring some breakfast ale with her, but she does not become involved in the activity of the day herself. Instead, she gives them their orders and criticises their work. There is a very strong sense of separation between workers and householders in Collier’s poem, as indeed, there is in Leapor’s “Crumble-Hall.” It is evident from Barbauld’s poem, however, that, as a housewife, she rises before dawn and breakfasts with her maids and washerwomen and is intimately involved in every aspect of washing day. This joint immersion in communal labour seems to be part of Barbauld’s tradition of the separate sphere of women. Thus, when she remembers her mother’s voice “Urging dispatch,” she does not appear to suggest the detached and carping criticism of Collier’s employer, but the urgent concern of someone involved in the speedy resolution of a difficult task. Barbauld’s continuation of this sentence into a list of the jobs that “all hands” (76) had to perform even indicates that her mother not only gives orders to the maids, but physically partakes in the actual work. The fact that only those females too young or too old to engage physically with the work, are absent from the kitchen indicates that active involvement is required. The rest of the women, mistress and maids, are united in their task. At the same time, Barbauld’s childhood memories link the women of the household in a warmer and more emotional bond: one that is reminiscent of Barbauld and Delia in “The Invitation.”

A more significant connection than female intimacy can be found in Barbauld’s

portrayal of what Kraft calls “the spirit of transcendence” which concludes this final section of the poem.³²⁸ The child Barbauld remembers would sit by the fire during wash day “and ponder much / Why washings were” (79) as she blows soap bubbles through a clay pipe (80). In a complex and tension-free movement, the memory of this reflective moment leads into a current reflection upon Montgolfier’s balloon:

. . . Sometimes thro’ hollow bowl
Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft
The floating bubbles, little dreaming then
To see, Montgolfier, thy silken ball
Rise buoyant thro’ the clouds — . (79 - 83)

The Montgolfier hot air balloon was first launched in France in 1783, and was followed by several other ascensions both in France and England. As Kraft insists, it is important that we remember that these launches were not viewed “as mere recreation” but as serious scientific experiments.³²⁹ As we have seen in “The Invitation,” Barbauld was fascinated by scientific development and for her, and for her readers, there would have been “a resonance [of] . . . the excitement, awe, fear, disappointments and victories of the first human flights” in her use of this image, even though her poem was not published until 1793. She does not critique the balloon as she critiques the Duke of Bridgwater’s canal, but employs it as a symbol of the visionary experience as it is accessed by both men and women. Men in the active world imagine possibilities and create the balloon, which, like the soap bubbles, “aspires to higher

³²⁸ Kraft 34.

³²⁹ Kraft 36. See also 26 - 29. Kraft records that Barbauld had viewed at least one balloon ascension in 1784, and was, by her own request, introduced to a noted balloonist, M. de Morveau, in 1785. Her interest was undoubtedly piqued by the fact that the experiments of her friend, Joseph Priestley, into the properties of oxygen were used by the Montgolfiers as part of their development of the hot air balloon.

and higher elevations.”³³⁰ But, it is women in their separate sphere who reflect upon that development and explore the different possibilities the reflection offers them within their minds.

As Kraft notes, both the balloon and the bubbles suggest upward movement as “achievement as well as a journey to another and a (presumably) better world — heaven, the moon, the planetary spheres, and it is in this way that we can associate “the sports of children and the toils of men” (84).³³¹ At the same time, I would argue, it is also important to remember that “the sports of children” in this poem are linked directly to the labour and community of women. The bubbles that the child blows from her pipe undoubtedly come from the soap of wash day, and are closely associated by Barbauld with her memories of that day. If Montgolfier’s balloon symbolises a transcendent movement here, then the bubbles, not just of children, but also of the women labouring at the laundry are also significant of the possibilities of transcendence. It seems unlikely that the labour of wash day could lead to such a possibility, but it is the community of women involved in that labour, and the memories that Barbauld evokes from it that create the “bubble” of this poem (85). In calling her poem a bubble, Barbauld is not dismissing it as trivial, but associating it and its subject with the transcendent movement of Montgolfier’s balloon. For Barbauld, the acts of imagination and reflection that arise from wash day are as much women’s labour as the development of flight is for men.

The sense of transcendence that Barbauld is able to evoke from the labours of women is emphasised by her use of temporal movement in this poem. She roots the first half of the poem in a quotidian sensibility which matches both the labour she describes and the mock-georgic form she employs. Most mock forms, as we have seen, are constructed with a

³³⁰ Kraft 36.

³³¹ Kraft 36.

quotidian temporality in which the action of the poem takes place over one day. This particular construction reflects the detailed trivia with which writers like Pope satirise their societies. The quotidian and its trivia, in this formulation, stand in opposition to the great movements of seasonal or progressive temporality which illustrate the weighty themes of the standard georgic or topographical poem. In "Washing-Day," Barbauld appears initially to use the quotidian in this way. All the minor details of wash day — the cat fleeing the kitchen, the dog knocking the clothes-horse down, the husband unable to get his stockings darned — seem to emphasise, as Kraft argues, that the labour of women has significance only for the day, as opposed to the labour of men which aspires to the skies.

Yet, even as she appears to be employing the quotidian in this way, Barbauld subverts this formulation. Her quotidian is not a limited period of meaningless succession, but has a continuity that almost reflects the recurring movement of the seasons. It is a day, "Which week, smooth sliding after week, brings on / Too soon" (11 - 12). The fact that the day is unwelcome and heralds a recurrent period of intense labour and disruption, does not in itself diminish its significance. The labour of the day is described in terms which evoke a multiplicity of such days, not only for Barbauld but for the community of her women readers to whom she appeals. All the events are described in a universalising present tense, or in a speculative future tense. This strategy suggests that the day's events, such as an untimely shower or the arrival of an unexpected dinner guest, which may not have happened yet, but have probably happened, or are likely to happen, are omnipresent to all of her readers. Barbauld's description of the day, therefore, acts as a means of connection for women through time and through geographic space. It is a day which has importance for Barbauld's household, for the households of her readers, and, as we have seen, has a particular importance for Barbauld in her construction of her understanding of a *beata femina*.

This significance is signalled through the epigraph and the introductory lines. The epigraph points to a universal life of man, or woman, made up of quotidian events, which

gain validity through their very universality. The following lines introduce us to Barbauld's domestic muse, who is also the muse of the quotidian, recording the commonplace events of the quotidian and giving them a narrative. This might be a narrative despised by writers such as Pope, but Barbauld refuses to let us despise washing day. Out of this recurring quotidian period and the labour associated with it, Barbauld constructs the memories and reflections that allow her to soar with Montgolfier's balloon.

Like Yearsley, Barbauld employs memory in this poem as a means to access transcendence. This is very different to her temporal construction in "The Invitation" which refused the historical perspective normally employed in the genre she uses. "Washing-Day" describes a temporality that, from a moment or a day, can collapse the established forward momentum of time to produce a sense of transcendence. As Barbauld reflects in the present moment of her poem upon the recurrent quotidian events of wash day, she is reminded of her own history with that day: not only the labour that she describes in such detail, but a memory of love and intimacy with her grandmother. The two memories interconnect to produce a third: her memory of Montgolfier's balloon. This particular memory is not placed as clearly within time as her memory of her grandmother. We do not know from the poem when Barbauld saw the balloon or how distant a memory it might be for her. It seems to exist in a temporal duration that is as free from the discipline of forward momentum as the balloon is free from the earth. We know it is distant from the little girl who "ponder[ed] much / Why washings were" (79), and enjoyed blowing bubbles, though "little dreaming then" (81) that she would one day see Montgolfier's balloon fly through the clouds. Yet Barbauld insists we synthesize the two memories in a transcendent movement which allows her and her readers to "Ride buoyant through the clouds" (83).

The true importance of women's work in their separate sphere is conveyed through this evocation of transcendence, for without the community of women labouring through at their quotidian task, Barbauld seems to imply, she would not have had her joyous experience

of remembering Montgolfier's balloon. This importance is then emphasised in the last two lines of the poem: "Earth, air and sky, and ocean hath its bubbles, / And verse is one of them — this most of all" (84 - 86). Kraft notes that the "prosaic and insistently deprecatory" implications of these lines, as well as the eighteenth-century association of "bubble" with "scams, shams and fanciful schemes of projectors," have affected many commentaries of "Washing-Day" which tend to "devalue both the balloon and the poem."³³² Yet, as she points out, the lines are a paraphrase from *Macbeth*: "The earth hath bubbles as the water has, / And these are of them." Banquo is here speaking dismissively of the witches who have prophesied MacBeth's future and his. But, in Kraft's words, "Banquo's disdain is itself ironic because we know the prophecies of the witches in *MacBeth* come true. Their words transform Macbeth's imaginative longings into tragic action." According to Kraft, Barbauld celebrates here "the transformative power of the creative imagination" in which "the trivial . . . becomes both the scene and the source of inspiration."³³³ To a certain extent, I agree with this conclusion, but I would add that I cannot agree that Barbauld herself views women's work as trivial. She only agrees that others view it as trivial, in the same way that Banquo views the witches' work as mere bubbles. Indeed the paraphrase from *Macbeth* seems to warn that those who dismiss the work of women over their cauldrons as trivial, such as the male writers of georgic, for example, are in as great an error as Banquo. In beginning and ending her poem with paraphrases from Shakespeare, Barbauld seems to claim a significance for her "slip-shod verse" about the labour of women that equates it with the works of authoritative male authors.

Kraft argues that Barbauld is able to transform trivial experiences into cosmic possibilities because of a power she claims within herself, "a prophetic insight," that can

³³² Kraft 36.

³³³ Kraft 37.

undertake this difficult process.³³⁴ I would argue that Barbauld's claims are less personal. In almost all of her poems, she presents herself as a member of a community, whether it is a community of two, as in "The Invitation," or as part of a larger community stretching across time, as she does here, and she represents her poetry as arising from her membership in that community. Kraft compares her to Wordsworth and Coleridge in her ability to discover cosmic possibilities in trivial circumstances. It seems to me, however, that Barbauld's emphasis upon community makes her work very unlike the poetry of Wordsworth or Coleridge. The nature of transcendent reflection is similar, of course, but it is a significant detail, I feel, that both romantic poets consistently position themselves as solitary individuals, often detached from the everyday world. In "Washing Day," Barbauld conveys the sense that it is the community of women who have enabled her to reach her insights. Without the little girl sitting with her grandmother, and listening to her mother and the maids work, there would be no woman reflecting upon Montgolfier's balloon.

³³⁴ Kraft 37.

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