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THE POETRY OF PHYSICAL LABOUR 1730-1800: THE DUCKIAN TRADITION

STEPHEN VAN-HAGEN

SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Abstract

The thesis argues that poets throughout the eighteenth-century (initially from the labouring classes and latterly from other backgrounds) poeticised labouring experiences and even mimetically evoked them in verse. It is argued that this experiential, narrative mode results from a growing awareness that there was a rural subject matter emerging unavailable in pastoral (or georgic) verse, and that a crucial early manifestation of this 'new' way of writing about labour is found in Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1730). It is argued that this poem functioned as a catalyst, encouraging others to poeticise their own labouring experiences, and that numerous of the works in which this poetic medium initially appeared allowed labourers to claim poetic identities for themselves *as* labourers and to represent their experiences and those of their workmates as worthy of respect and dignity. Exploring the ways in which the poets of labour are influenced by, but also simultaneously react to canonical models of the age, the thesis then examines the work of subsequent poets throughout the century compelled by the same or similar impulses to aestheticise labour, focusing on the techniques employed to mingle labouring experiences with existing verse conventions, up to and including Robert Bloomfield and James Woodhouse. Alongside the above considerations, the thesis conceptualises the simultaneous co-existence of complicity and critique in the work of labouring poets by applying both Žižek's work on individual collusion with ideology and Nietzsche's work on religion to the poets whose work it discusses. It subsequently argues for the recurrent presence of a levelling theology in the beliefs and works of a number of poets considered that both licenses a belief in greater social and political equality yet that, because of its adherence to what Nietzsche would later term 'slave morality', also precludes the overt taking of this greater equality by force. It then plots the evolution of this levelling theology throughout the century, culminating in its sponsorship of radical (though not revolutionary) political beliefs in Woodhouse's work.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Matthew Van-Hagen.

Prefatory Note

Rather than use the original – almost always widely inaccessible – editions of the primary works discussed by this study, I have wherever possible used editions actually available to the general reader, such as recent anthologies etc. Where I do make reference to original editions this is usually to those widely available electronically, such as those accessible through the Chadwyck-Healey *English Poetry Full-Text Database* or The Gale Group's *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online*; where this is the case I have always clearly indicated it in the relevant endnote.

On account of the relative rarity of many of the poems I discuss, I have indicated line numbers of these poems (though not of canonical works) alongside quoted extracts. The endnotes and bibliography follow the conventions laid out by the *MHRA Style Guide* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2002).

Introduction

The poetry of physical labour in English dates back to Walter of Henly's thirteenth century *Book of Husbandry*, and Langland's *Piers the Plowman*. Later came the sixteenth-century versifiers Edward Fitzherbert and Thomas Tusser. Yet it was the early to mid-eighteenth century that witnessed the first sustained flourishing of plebeian (or, as they are often termed, 'labouring-class') poets. Stephen Duck was the catalyst for a proliferation of such individuals. After Duck and his approximate contemporaries Henry Nelson and Robert Dodsley, came (in no particular order) Mary Collier, John Bancks, Mary Chandler, Robert Tatersal, Mary Leapor, John Frizzle, Peter Aram, Henry Jones, Joseph Lewis and George Smith Green. Later in the century William Falconer, John Frederick Bryant, James Woodhouse, Ann Yearsley, Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, Ann More Candler, Elizabeth Bentley, Janet Little, Anne Wilson, William Brimble, John Bennet, John Lucas and Robert Bloomfield followed.[1] Amongst them, virtually every kind of conceivable labouring-class occupation was represented.[2]

This study is not concerned, however, with labourer poets as such, but with the emergence and progress of a mode of poetic writing *about* labour. Most labouring poets, particularly in the second half of the century, do not poeticise labour at all, let alone by means of this mode. It does originate within labouring class poetry, however, and particularly in Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* which served to inspire a wider flourishing of labouring-class verse. It is developed by those who, like Duck, attempt something brave and new, intriguing both in literary and social terms, who have to battle against financial and educational deprivation and are obliged to make use of poetic models only partly appropriate for their purposes. Although later in the century it is found within poetry by the non-labouring classes, it persists within the work of (some) labourer poets. In his recent *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, David Fairer explains that "the term 'genre' itself, with its suggestion of fixed categories, has often given way to 'mode', a concept that allows for greater mobility, and responsiveness to poetic voice."[3] I use the term in this spirit. The mode concerned is experiential *narrative* (a key point, to be returned to), descriptive verse, depicting the vigorous performance of physical labour. In doing so it mingles the orthodox characteristics of neo-classical versification with an everyday vocabulary of manual labour. It adopts the informal tone of friend to friend (rather than of poet to public);

hence questions of poetic voice and register will be repeatedly relevant throughout the study. The mode depicts both labourer and labour with respect and dignity. It does not just describe everyday objects or processes but mimetically represents them, *evoking* the sights and sounds of physical labour.

This study aims to engage with this material *as poetry*, and to examine why those concerned felt impelled to write poetry about their labouring experiences rather than, for instance, keep a diary. What was the range and quality of poetry describing labour during the eighteenth century? What were the lasting achievements of such verse? As John Goodridge has written, with reference to labouring-class poets in general, "... one thing these writers have rarely been allowed to be is poets ... Historically, the considerable interest there has been in labouring-class poetry has not always extended to a recognition of literary merit."[4] This study aims to contribute towards the welcome recent redress of this balance through a concern with a hitherto little examined aspect of the material it engages with: technique. What were the technical challenges of trying to write formal verse about physical labour in the period concerned?

The following passage from *The Thresher's Labour* describes the invigoration at being a part of the whirlwind of activity at the culmination of the harvest:

> Our well-pleas'd Master views the Sight with joy, 258
> And we for carrying all our Force employ.
> Confusion soon o'er all the Field appears, 260
> And stunning Clamours fill the Workmens Ears;
> The Bells, and clashing Whips, alternate sound,
> And rattling Waggons thunder o'er the Ground.
> The wheat got in, the Pease, and other Grain,
> Share the same Fate, and soon leave bare the Plain: 265
> In noisy Triumph the last Load moves on,
> And loud Huzza's proclaim the Harvest done.[5]

Various common features of neo-classical versification are present. All ten lines are end-stopped. Duck is compelled, as practitioners of the heroic couplet often are, to tamper with 'natural' word order in order to make the rhyme, as in l.259. Ll.260 and 263 contain the conventionally 'poetic' contraction, "o'er". Primacy is given to the abstract nouns "Confusion" and "Clamours". As is common in pastoral verse, Duck alludes to "the Plain", when he means 'fields'. However, the Duckian mode involves a *mingling* of such characteristics with more specific, mimetic evocation of the sights

and sounds of vigorous field labour. More than this, there is an excitement at just being involved, a sense of triumphalism at having completed a long, arduous, honest job. There is an adrenaline rush in this frenzy of activity, as if Duck is swept along by this tide of exertion. He features particular, everyday vocabulary – "Bells", "Whips", "Waggons", "wheat", "Pease", "Grain" – and highlights onomatopoeic "clashing Whips", "rattling Waggons" and "Huzza's". These "Huzza's" signal a kind of respite, not just from labour, but from this visual and aural overload. There is a momentum throughout engendered by the resources of verse; above all there is a certain sequential energy, since both subject matter and local sense tacitly establish that the passage is to be read cumulatively as a single unit.

The neo-classical heroic couplet is central to the Duckian mode, which is hardly surprising, since, according to Margaret Anne Doody,

> Asked what is the most characteristic sort of verse employed by the Augustans, any reader of moderate experience would reply "the couplet." Despite the example of Milton, the Miltonic imitations, and even the great experiments in blank verse like Thomson's *Seasons*, the Augustans on the whole disliked parting from rhyme.[6]

Similarly, J. Paul Hunter claims, "... if the poem we are reading is a typical eighteenth-century poem it is probably in couplets", which provided "the expected, almost obligatory mode for serious poetry."[7] The enduring influence of the couplet (and of Pope, its most masterful practitioner) upon the labouring poets with whom the Duckian mode originates and persists, is treated below, and throughout the thesis.

The issues of Duck's readership and his influence clearly intersect. A number of critics have commented on the 'double-voiced' nature of labouring-class verse, seemingly addressed to the educated 'middle' and 'upper' classes as well as fellow labourers.[8] Whilst the poetic responses addressed to him demonstrate that at least some members of the labouring classes became acquainted with Duck's work, it would appear mistaken to assume that labourers who read and responded to the verse of other labouring-class poets were other than unusual.[9] Duck's case was atypical, insofar as a patron was not directly responsible for his initial publication in 1730, the pirated *Poems on Several Subjects* (even if it was partly the exalted nature of his patrons that presumably inspired the pirate edition in the first place). It was this patronage, seen in the subscriber lists to Duck's (authorised) *Poems on Several Occasions* in 1736 – which sold a healthy 623 copies to 598 different subscribers –

that surely, and apart from his poetry's intrinsic merits, helped to bestow upon him the celebrity that made him "the cultural model of the patronized plebeian poet until his fame was eclipsed by Robert Burns at the turn of the century."[10]

That at least some labouring-class readers acquired knowledge of Duck's work remains of great interest in itself. Subscribers and readers were not, within today's parlance, uniformly 'upper class', although there is little doubt that the majority of subscribers to volumes of verse were of the monied, educated classes.[11] It is not just subscriber lists that give the impression that much of the readership of labouring poetry must have been by those of exalted social position.[12] For the labouring classes, just being able to read was no guarantee of access to published poetry, either: there was also the challenge of physically obtaining volumes.[13] Unless they were like Mary Collier, who heard and memorised Duck's verses, for the labouring classes, obtaining access to such poetry must have been no easy or inexpensive task. It seems reasonable to suppose, however, that many who were exposed to poetry got it second hand through a literate friend, as the young Robert Bloomfield read to his shoemaking brothers.[14] Of those to *hear* the verse many, like Bloomfield, must have found it easier to remember rhyming couplets than blank verse. Keegan's suspicion that the popularity of the couplet amongst the labouring classes was attributable to its 'memorability' (quoted below) seems well justified.

The Thresher's Labour provoked not just numerous poems addressed to Duck by other labourers, but also repeated comment in the literary journals and magazines of the day,[15] and 'answering' poems by labourers in other occupations, both rural and domestic, seeking to similarly poeticise their labours. These poems included Collier's *The Woman's Labour*, Robert Tatersal's "The Bricklayer's Labours", Mary Leapor's "Crumble Hall" (Dodsley's epistle "The Footman" also attempts something similar, though in a 'lighter', more humble mode). Leapor, in particular, writes a number of further poems featuring labour in this way. All were aware of Duck and either address a poem to him of some sort (like *The Woman's Labour* itself) or discuss him in letters.

Yet Duck's lingering influence also extended into the second half of the century and he is often mentioned in poetry during this period. In 1762, six years after his death, Mary Collier published "An Elegy upon Stephen Duck".[16] William Vernon, Cuthbert Shaw, James Woodhouse, and George Crabbe were also among those to allude to Duck in verse (and even later we know that John Clare read him).[17] Davis, meanwhile, makes a case that Duck's *Caesar's Camp*[18] influenced Gray's *The Bard*,

and Duck's poetry was periodically reprinted throughout the century. In 1781, for instance, *The Gentleman's Magazine* republished Duck's "Extempore Verses" on the occasion of his son William being admitted to Eton.[19] "The Shunamite" was even republished (in its entirety) as late as 1830 (for the benefit of the Canterbury Penny Charity).[20] Duck was not only mentioned in Johnson's *Life of Savage*, but at least one critic has suggested that Johnson considered Duck for inclusion in his own right in his *Lives of the Poets*.[21] Duck also received the first "fair and unbiased criticism" of his work by the end of the century, as a result of Andrew Kippis' attentions in *Biographia Brittanica*, V (1793).[22] Goodridge has even made a claim for an unbroken tradition of Duckian poetry, arguing that

> ... *The Thresher's Labour* inspired a tradition of workplace poetry which survives to the present day: one need go no further than Fred Voss's factory poems, collected in *Goodstone* (1991), to see that this is a living tradition: the realistic descriptive style, the grimly comic view of the bosses, the rueful and ironic self-deprecation of the worker-poet, are all palpably Duckian.[23]

The mode of writing in which I am interested can be further identified by reference to what it is *not*. There are a number of other currents of influence and tradition at work in poetic writing about labour during the chronological span of the study. In the first half of the century, both pastoral and georgic poetry come under this heading, and due to their enormous influence, and the fact that the mode in which I am interested is born out of a necessary negotiation with them, I have devoted my first chapter to this topic. In the second half of the century as well, though, there is writing (ostensibly) about labour that does not feature the mode with which I am concerned. Since Burns' poetry is clearly derived from a very different tradition, both it and the substantial flourishing of Scottish verse that resulted from his influence fall outside my topic. One might say the same of the proto-socialist verse of such late-century poets as John Learmont and Joseph Mather: firstly the poetic mediums they appropriate are very different to those that have interested me, and secondly their work frequently consists of radical political polemic. Whilst these poems are patently on a 'labouring' theme, they do not describe the experience of performing labour.[24]

There are other English poems that at first glance might appear to be relevant to my concerns, but that on closer inspection emerge as being outside them. Neither Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* nor Crabbe's *The Village* poeticises *physical, manual* labour: *The Deserted Village* includes lengthy passages depicting the affairs

of the vicar (ll.137-94) and the schoolmaster (ll.195-238), but these hardly extend to the performance of manual labour. A rare – in fact, probably the only – exception, that *would* bear comparison with the passages in Blamire's "Stoklewath" depicting the old widow gathering fuel (see chapter four), is Goldsmith's description of the

> ...wretched matron, forced, in age, for bread,
> To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,
> To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
> To seek her nightly shed, and weep till morn[25]

Even this hardly approaches the mimetic evocation of labour in the heroic couplet throughout the century. Goldsmith's aims and priorities are different. One might say something similar about Cowper's brief (blank verse) vignette describing the thresher in Book I of *The Task*.[26] Elsewhere, Goldsmith's poem features descriptions of the outward appearance of the village (ll.9-34) and numerous polemical attacks on 'luxury'; but no detailed description of labour. In light of Crabbe's "stern commitment to 'truth' " and "ugly realism",[27] one might expect him to give an account of work in *The Village* (particularly in view of the poem's praise of Duck himself in I: ll.27-8). Yet although he does elsewhere – notably in *The Borough*, which, published in 1810, is beyond this study's chronological parameters – *The Village* does not describe physical labour in detail. Instead the poem – an anti-pastoral response to Goldsmith's pastoral elegy[28] – includes numerous passages cataloguing "the gap between pastoral convention and rural reality"[29] (e.g. I: ll.93-108) and, elsewhere, a lengthy depiction of the "drooping weary sire" (I: ll.178-227) and descriptions of the appalling physical conditions of the poorhouse, culminating in a vignette documenting a man's death and funeral (I: ll.228-51, 264-322). Whilst these latter passages mingle particularity with the characteristics of neo-classical versification, there are none of the descriptions of actual labour that are the focus of this study. A number of other poems that patently touch on labour, labourers, or labouring themes are outside the scope of the study for the same reasons: Joseph Warton's "Ode to Evening" (written in an any case in *abcb* quatrains) does not poeticise the *work* of its "swain" or "Stout plowmen";[30] and Ellen Taylor's "Written by the Barrow Side, Where She was Sent to Wash Linen", for instance, does not feature a detailed account of the physical act of the washing.[31] Many more examples could be found.

Despite Hunter's assertion that during the eighteenth century blank verse was "never ... more than a minority taste",[32] there is undeniably, particularly in the second half of the century, an increasing amount of blank verse depicting physical labour. Whilst I have intermittently included some for the purposes of contrast and comparison where concentrated depictions occur, the aesthetic challenges faced by the poet, and the aesthetic effects upon the reader are generally different enough to have persuaded me to omit it from my main argument. A major preoccupation throughout the study is with the mode's incongruity, as seen in its attempts to introduce an informal tone and vocabulary into 'formal', elevated verse. Hence I have generally chosen to omit consideration of its presence within the informal epistle (a popular and successful genre with labouring poets in the eighteenth century).

In short, my aim is to study a sustained experiment (inaugurated, unconsciously, by Duck) on the part of certain eighteenth-century poets, most of whom, though by no means all, were labourers themselves, to dignify working life by making it the subject of experiential, evocative, narrative poetry. I will be particularly concerned with examining the nature of the challenges faced by those attempting to write in this vein, and with demonstrating its successes, often achieved against considerable odds. I will also, however, take in a number of additional concerns, including a particular kind of religious writing that recurs in the oeuvres of those labouring-class poets with whom I am concerned, and questions of agency in their work. The latter, in particular, have been to the fore in recent critical discourse concerning the labouring poets.

Further preliminary explanations and definitions may be in order. To ascribe a definitive starting point to a poetic mode is fraught with dangers. Nonetheless the mode concerned – the attempt to provide an experiential but dignifying account of manual work through the medium of the heroic couplet – begins with Duck insofar as it begins with anyone, and therefore, and because the need for a common descriptor is apparent, I will use the phrase 'Duckian tradition'. Throughout, this term delineates a body of poets who wrote works displaying the characteristics briefly sketched above. Both 'mode' and 'tradition' are convenient short-hand forms. The use of this term does not imply *generically* identical poems (hence my preference for Fairer's term 'mode'): the mode is nomadic, often featuring in poems inter-generic in nature. As a further convenient shorthand, I often refer to poets within this tradition as the 'poets of labour'.

The mode does not disappear by 1800, its influence / legacy being felt in the nineteenth century in the works of, for instance, John Clare and Ebenezer Elliott. However, Robert Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy* and James Woodhouse's *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* (both completed at or just before this date) both seem, in different ways, to powerfully revivify the mode and to at least partially consummate certain initiatives in Duck's writing about labour. This is particularly so in Woodhouse's case, who also seems to make explicit more fully than any other poet in the study religious tendencies dimly visible from Duck onwards, and therefore I have devoted the whole final chapter to him. With these factors in mind, 1800 has seemed an appropriate, if necessarily arbitrary, point at which to close.

A recurring term throughout scholarship concerned with the eighteenth-century labouring poets is 'labouring-class', which obviously risks anachronism. I use it, however, on the justification given by William J. Christmas' chapter on "Terminology and Methodology" in *The Lab'ring Muses; Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry 1730-1830*, which provides a thorough discussion of the available descriptors and of why "plebeian" and "labouring-class" are arguably less objectionable than the alternatives.[33] I have also elected to use several terms that have become controversial within recent scholarly discourse. Although the term 'Augustan' has been subjected to what Nokes calls "a good deal of critical knockabout"[34] I retain it, above all for critical convenience. As Claude Rawson asserts, 'Augustan':

> ...doesn't even mean 'eighteenth century', which it can't therefore be replaced by. We use it of Dryden, who did not live in that century, and not of Defoe or Richardson, who did. It points loosely to features common to some writers (Dryden, Swift, Pope, Fielding) and not others. Like 'Romantic' or 'Victorian' it suggests broad categories, not fine distinctions. It should not be abused: but to give it up is to limit discourse by reduction of options.[35]

It is in this spirit that I use the adjective.[36] Another contentious term that I have decided to retain is 'real(istic)'. When I use it – sometimes an alternative such as 'particular' or 'specific' has seemed more appropriate – I do so within inverted commas, as when referring to attempts to evoke 'the real'.[37]

II

The individuals I am concerned with *wanted to write verse.* They therefore faced the general difficulty of transposing diurnal life, the ordinary, into art – which must by definition be in some sense extraordinary. Ellen Dissanayake's "recent cross-cultural study of artistic behavior, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes from and Why*" defines just this phenomenon, mounting "an impressive argument for the category of "making special" as a universal in cultural life…"[38] The early eighteenth-century labouring-poets need not have felt frustrated at any inappropriateness in the available medium; presumably they would have relished actually seeing fragments of everyday life suspended within Augustan versification. This was precisely the nature of the exercise: to mingle their experiences with other verse 'ingredients' in order to produce *poetry* (with the accompanying status that would be bestowed upon both subject matter and author) rather than a diary entry or documentary sketch. Ann Messenger makes a very similar point in writing about Mary Leapor, arguing that as she imagines her, Leapor

> wanted to express her truth in the high art she so much admired. Her truth meant the perceptions and feelings of a working-class woman, intimately acquainted with the realities of village, farm, and kitchen, yet speaking for herself as an individual, not simply as a representative of a category of people. The high literary art she aspired to is an art of conventions, forms, and 'numbers' fine-tuned by her admired Pope. To bring the two together was her problem.[39]

The "problem" – or challenge – was one that characteristically faced labouring-class poets, apparent within the verse investigated by this study.

The challenge was to find a way of introducing specificity, particularity and intimacy into their work whilst preserving enough of the recognisable 'ingredients' of art to dignify their subject matter by "making it special". Plainly – and as illustrated throughout the thesis – Pope was an influence on the first of the poets in whom I am interested (and on many of the later ones). His medium was at least partially enabling. Pope offered (for instance) a fixed and simple pattern of rhyme and meter, (potentially) easy to at least mimic. He set standards of mellifluousness and taut concision. His example could encourage the learner to proceed securely, one couplet at a time. If much of the 'pastoral' vocabulary he used to describe (supposed) rural

life (see next chapter) did not fit rustic actuality, it contained further vocabulary – e.g. "woods", "shepherd", "trees", "fields" – far less objectionable in this regard. Potentially formless day to day experience could be ordered into manageable units at the level of both couplet and verse paragraph. His formalised vocabulary could be assimilated and applied, even if underlying 'classical' usages and allusions had not been fully grasped. In short, there was a 'manner' which a sensitive reader, even of limited education, could readily acquire. 'Matter' was to hand, part of the time at least, and as Messenger argues above, in the shape of the worker-poet's experiences. As a result of the above situation, and as Keegan summarises, "labouring-class poets of the mid-eighteenth century write both *in response to and in reaction against* poetry produced by" the canonical poets of the age (my italics).[40]

That the poets of labour write in a mode at least partially *different* from that of their models (notably Pope) is observable with reference to a number of key points. The labouring poets only intermittently attained the "polish" of Pope to which some evidently aspired, partly because they often attempt *poetic narrative*. Pope's poetic medium had a variety of unquestionable strengths, but writing narrative was seldom one of them. Even *The Rape of the Lock* – which in theory narrates a story – repeatedly forsakes it for set-piece. The first six lines of Canto I form a brief set-piece – a stylised self-contained sequence, often determined by convention – in this case the opening (mock-) epic invocation. Ariel's speech (beginning in I: ll.27 fol.)[41] is another set-piece, explaining the 'machinery', offering a mock divine warning (as from an oracle) in ll.107-14.[42] The absence of narrative is illustrated by the fact that Belinda does not even wake until l.115. What follows is again a set-piece of epic parody, mixed in nature, incorporating the worship of a god (Belinda herself) and the arming of a heroic warrior for battle. The 'narrative', such as it is – i.e. Belinda getting dressed – could be delivered in a single line. So the poem continues through the succeeding four cantos, additional well-known lengthy set-pieces including Ariel's speech to the other spirits (II: ll.73 fol.);[43] the 'Coffee / Ombre' scene (III: ll.105 fol.);[44] and the 'Cave of Spleen' (IV: ll.19 fol.).[45] Amidst the 178 lines of Canto III, the essential narrative 'action' takes place in just one couplet – "The meeting Points the sacred Hair dissever / From the fair Head, for ever and for ever!" (ll.153-4).[46] The 'story' deducible from the poem is for Pope a means to a series of brilliant parodic ends. Narrative is not Pope's aim; his allusiveness (see below) is a way of

infusing every line with extra significance. What he chooses to forego in terms of narrative energy he more than gains in allusive *density*.

Ideally suited to the poetic essays and epistles he often wrote, Pope's neo-classical couplets facilitate the making of discrete points (as discussed by Hunter and alluded to below). These couplets are conducive to brilliantly compact epigrams, short, tight, self-contained units, unsuited to capturing the narrative 'flow' of events. Each unit is definitively separated from its predecessor and events cannot easily run into one another. This is far from ideal if one wishes to describe the rapid, sequential unfolding of events. Pope then, emerges as a questionable stylistic model for a poet like Duck, who writes a number of narrative poems and wanted, like all the poets examined by this study, to convey the sequential flow of continuous experiences. Even Duck's most celebrated religious poem, "The Shunamite" is, like many religious poems by labouring poets, narrative in form. The issue is one of *fitness for purpose*: Pope's style was ideally suited to *his* various purposes, but less so to Duck's different aims.

Another key difference between the poetry of Duck, Collier *et al* and their apparent model, is that when actually describing labour their verse is far less allusive than Pope's, surely again because the former often write *narrative*, descriptive verse. This issue goes right to the heart of an explanation of why Pope's medium was suited to his particular needs. A reading of any of Pope's most 'formal' poems – such as the *Moral Essays* – amply demonstrates the point. In any well-annotated edition, the footnotes at the foot of a page can comfortably occupy more space than the couplets above. No single example could be considered adequately representative, but in, for example, *Epistle to Burlington*, Pope writes:

> He buys for Topham, Drawings and Designs,
> For Pembroke Statues, dirty Gods and Coins;
> Rare monkish Manuscripts for Hearne alone,
> And Books for Mead, and Butterflies for Sloane.[47]

In the space of only two couplets, Pope alludes to Richard Topham, who "bequeathed his art collection and books to Eton College", Thomas Herbert, the eighth Earl of Pembroke, a collector of sculpture and paintings, Thomas Hearne, the Oxford historian, and Richard Mead, Physician in Ordinary to George II, and Sir Hans Sloane, President of the Royal College of Physicians whose "vast collection ...

formed the core of the British Museum".[48] Furthermore, because he is painting a satirical portrait Pope is able to fit the material comfortably into two couplets, which together form a discrete link in the chain of his thesis. In *The Dunciad* also, the range of reference, allusion, intimation and suggestion contained within a single couplet is bewildering (and impressive). For example:

> She saw old Pryn in restless Daniel shine,
> And Eusden eke out Blackmore's endless line;[49]

Pope alludes, in a single couplet, to the Goddess Dullness ("She"), the puritan pamphleteer William Prynne, Daniel Defoe, the Poet Laureate Laurence Eusden and Sir Richard Blackmore, "Whig city poet and physician to William III and Anne".[50] Again, Pope's concern is with making a satirical case, to which his poetic medium is well suited since it allows him to pile (self-contained) points / propositions one on top of another. This actually helps to explain why Pope's couplets are relatively static (and not, therefore, amenable to the transmission of narrative); the reader is not led forward by his couplets, but rather invited to linger over resonances of allusion.

One of the reasons it was necessary earlier to claim the use of the term 'real(istic)' is because of a recent critical argument that the poetry of the early to mid-eighteenth century was rich in its incorporation of 'real', everyday physical objects. A. J. Sambrook has written, albeit drawing attention to the counter-argument to his own claim,

> Poetry in the 'Augustan' period was much concerned with the goings-on of the ordinary world, full of real, tangible objects. Critics may be correct in adducing the Bibles on Belinda's dressing-table as symbols of their owner's moral confusion, but the Bibles (plural) are undoubtedly heavy, physical, functional objects, their function being to keep ribbons pressed; they are part of *The Rape of the Lock*'s real, everyday world of things, like the amber snuff-box, clouded cane, sword-knots, chocolate mill and horse-hair fish lines.[51]

There is an oddity about the claim, in that to argue for the solidity of everyday objects in *The Rape of the Lock*, of all poems, is to argue against the very grain of the text. Pope's strategy throughout – as befitting the mock-heroic mode – is to (humorously) 'epicise': hence a dressing table stands for an altar; a game of ombre for a battle. Sambrook's comment uses a dozen words to ascribe a notional usefulness to the Bibles in the poem, but the latter itself contains no additional supporting material –

we are simply told, in a single couplet, that they rest on the dressing table.[52] The miscellaneous and omni-plural list – of which the Bibles are a part – simply suggests that these elements have equal status in Belinda's regard (or an equal lack of it). A number of additional everyday objects are *included* in the poem, but not evoked in the way Sambrook's comment seems to suggest. An exception is the snuff-box which is "amber", and is to be "opened" and "tapped". Beyond this, what detail is there about the size and shape or colour of the Bibles, or the texture of its pages? They are undescribed, unused, and as such, inertly allusive. What reader could begin to visualise, let alone describe, the boat in which Belinda goes down river? Unlike the poets of labour, Pope is *not attempting* to literally describe, let alone evoke, a world of everyday physical objects. Another way of illustrating the point is by reference to the *Moral Essays* – the "dirty smock" (l.24) and the "pimple" (l.36) in *An Epistle to a Lady*.[53] These objects are 'real' enough, but they are adduced not to bring a context to circumstantial life, but to make a satirical point. By contrast, the poets of labour want to evoke a given object within the reader's imagination, since it is an *end in itself.* Hence Leapor or Blamire might, for instance, attempt to suggest the 'powder puff' qualities of pastry by using repeated soft 'f' sounds (see chapters three and four); implements used in field work as described by Duck, Collier or even Woodhouse contain multiple sounds and syllables difficult or awkward of pronunciation and rugged of texture.

J. Paul Hunter's influential "Couplets and Conversation" brings together a number of the points made about Pope's mode. On the subject of the allusiveness, and enigmatic nature of much eighteenth-century poetry, Hunter states that poets "expected active readers who would respond to their formulations of policies, ideas and opinions". He cites the first fourteen lines of *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, continuing:

> There's a lot here to figure out from an eighteenth-century point of view ... Who is the "good John" addressed by the speaker of the poem? Where is this door that shields the private poet from the public figure, and what does the speaker need protection from? Why does the door-answerer need to make up social lies to turn the seekers away? Who are the "they" who seek to intrude, and why are they described as both invasive and insane? ... The poem starts by assuming that readers already know something about ... the contemporary world of writing and rivalry ...

In order to get to grips with the poem "even on an elementary topic level ... a modern reader needs a quick tutorial in a variety of historical issues and assumptions."[54] The

similarities with the examples given above from *Epistle to Burlington* and *The Dunciad* are clear. The contrast with the mode under investigation in this study will become clear. Poets like Collier, Leapor and (especially) Woodhouse could and did write in this multi-allusive 'argumentative' way (even in poems in which work features, as at the beginning of Collier's *The Woman's Labour*). Their writing describing labour, however, is focused on helping the reader to *understand* what it would have been like to engage in particular acts of labour. Rather than finding it is assumed that we already know a good deal, we are often *inducted into* the world of the poetry of labour, as when Duck or Collier makes us one of a circle of workers receiving instructions from a Master or Mistress, or (literally) when Leapor kindly leads us on a 'tour' of the house in which she works as a maid. We are shown, rather than told.

In elaborating on how it is uniquely suited to advancing argument, Hunter also draws attention to precisely the attributes of the heroic couplet that make it less than ideal for realising the above aims of the poets of labour, including the couplet's "concision, balance, and pointedness",[55] and its reliance on thesis and antithesis.[56] He writes that couplets were often used for longer poems because of "... the building-block possibilities of two-line units – their gathering, ruminative, cumulative functions", adding, "Its habits of brevity and conciseness – the art of focusing quickly on the crucial issues and terms – created its cumulative usefulness for argument and debate".[57] Hunter continues, "...if you look carefully at the way the building blocks are laid (usually couplet by couplet) until the edifice stands fully built, you will see a conversation being created, a persuasive argument made".[58] Pope himself noted that *Epistle to Arbuthnot* was "a Sort of Bill of Complaint, begun many years since, and drawn up by snatches";[59] arguably it is *expressed* in (largely) self-contained snatches as well. By contrast, a stream of continuous experiences cannot be neatly sub-divided into concise, discrete units.

Noting "stylistic" differences between "polite and plebeian poets", Keegan observes that "the couplet persists as the dominant verse form in labouring-class poetry well into the nineteenth-century".[60] If the heroic couplet was less than ideally suited to the needs of a labourer-poet writing about everyday experiences, the question understandably arises of why so many labouring poets used the medium (even when its popularity gradually declined over time). At least one eighteenth-century labouring poet, Samuel Law, did *not* want to write in couplets, but was

compelled by patrons. He recorded that he would have preferred to write in blank verse,

> ... because the Winter is too grand, and too nervous a topic to be handled in chiming strains. A poem of this nature ought to be adorned with admirable pieces of striking imagery, lively picturesque, strong expressions, and towering thoughts; but imagination is continually imprisoned, bound, and cramped in with jingling rhymes.[61]

Another labouring poet, James Woodhouse, recorded his recollections in a passage in *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* (written in the 1790s) of what was expected from 'a poet' at the time of his emergence in the 1760s (" 'Twas then suppos'd no Clown could thrum a verse").[62] His account also suggests, despite his eventual successful harnessing of such a medium decades later once the period of his public fame was over, a pressure to conform to a dominant poetics that he saw (at the time at least) as confining. Arguing that "None without Latin stilts" (IV: l.201) could write poetry, he adds that none could:

> ... chaunt choice strains but Horace' Art must prune,
> *Confined*, by modern scale, to time, and tune (IV: ll.203-4, my italics).

He goes on to list "mellifluous Pope" as an example of a practitioner of this medium.[63]

Other than coercion, and the reasons for the potential usefulness of Pope's medium briefly summarised earlier, a number of theories have been advanced as to why the couplet is so influential within labouring verse. Keegan argues that the persistence of the medium in labouring verse

> may be due to the 'memorability' of the couplet (... many labouring-class poets were often compelled to compose in their heads, either due to a dearth of paper or because they were composing while performing manual labour.)[64]

There is a variety of supporting anecdotal evidence. Collier, for instance, never claimed to have actually *read* Duck's *The Thresher's Labour*, but only to have *heard*, and memorised it.[65] Bloomfield recollected composing *The Farmer's Boy* in rhyme because it was easier to memorise than blank verse:

> Nine tenths ... was put together as I sat at work ... I chose to do it in rhime ... because I always found that when I put two or three lines together in blank

> verse, or something that sounded like it, it was a great chance if it stood right when it came to be wrote down, for blank verse has ten syllables in a line, and this particular I could not adjust, or bear in mind as I could rhimes.[66]

It is tempting to infer that he might not have been the only one to employ couplets for such reasons, given the accounts we have of other poets composing whilst at work.[67] Similarly, numerous stories abound about labouring poets composing by counting out syllables on their fingers as they go about other business.[68] One doubts very much that whole works were composed in this fashion – the intricate allusions, for example, to other, often classical verses in many of the poems examined by this study are just one reason for this – but nonetheless an impression is created that the reasons for the initial adoption of the couplet may have been at least partly practical.[69]

III

Much scholarly work has been done on the labouring poets recently. This project seeks to contribute and react to scholarly work done in this area over the twenty years or so since Lonsdale's pioneering Oxford anthologies, notably by (in no particular order) Ferguson, Landry, Greene, Waldron, Goodridge, Keegan and Christmas. A key debate that has emerged concerns the relationship of the aesthetic and the ideological perspective, and whether the two are reconcilable. Goodridge has provided a summary of the risks of reading labouring verse evidentially at the expense of its 'literary' qualities. His work sets an agenda to which the present study has attempted to respond in recognising the need for a critique of the poetry of labour that reconciles the plainly experiential nature of this material with its undoubted 'literary' status. He examines how critics who champion Duck and Collier have effectively patronised Thomson, just as the latter's advocates have Duck and Collier, quoting comparative judgements about the work of the three poets by critics including Unwin, Klaus, Warner and Landry.[70] As Goodridge shows, Thomson is repeatedly portrayed as producing work of 'literary' merit, whilst Duck and Collier produce 'verse' read as evidence of what agricultural labour was 'really like'. Thomson is not allowed to have any knowledge of the realities of working conditions, whereas Collier and Duck are not allowed to produce verse possessing 'literary' merit. Thomson's treatment here is similar to John Dyer's. Pigeonholed as a 'polite' poet, his depictions of labour have been derided, whilst he seldom receives credit for his conviction that physical labour

merited literary dignity. To suggest that Dyer's depictions of labour lack authenticity would be ridiculous; he was a farm manager for many years and had experience of many of the activities he describes in *The Fleece* (see Chapter One).

Goodridge continues:

> The view of Collier and Duck is the more worrying. A poet is not a social historian, though s/he may incorporate this role ... Duck's poem includes epic similes ... prosody and dramatisation, epithets, alliteration ... Collier uses parody, imitation and elements of satire ... heroic and mock-heroic in sophisticated and equally clearly literary ways.[71]

As established by Goodridge and Keegan, the intertextual allusions of Duck's and Collier's poems ought not to be in doubt. Goodridge acknowledges that "Their social class and labouring experiences" are "crucial" in Duck's and Collier's compositions but points out that this hardly means they had no other intention than to document social history. "The issue", he concludes,

> ... is class. The professional, middle-class poet may not be trusted to give an accurate view of what farm work is like, because he has probably never done any; a worker is a worker, and a poet is a poet, and neither can write 'out of' their role; social class determines and delimits human capability.[72]

Goodridge seems to suggest that the critics he refers to are guilty of imprisoning labouring poets within the limiting identity of 'truth-teller' just as much as any eighteenth-century observers who refused to let them escape from the role of 'peasant'. In both cases, these figures are a long way from attaining the recognition they patently desired as poets. The implication is that a critical consensus has effectively emerged whereby literary merit and authenticity are mutually exclusive. Yet why should one not acknowledge all the literary techniques Goodridge lists, yet *also* examine their subject matter? The purpose of the epic similes to which Goodridge alludes is the aggrandisement of Duck's *topic of manual labour*; the alliteration is often deployed to mimetically evoke the sensations experienced. The critical fear would seem to be that writing about one's own experiences is somehow not 'imaginative' enough to confer the status of 'poet' upon Duck (or Collier); yet *poeticising* experiences rather than simply noting them down in a diary or notebook *is* a creative, imaginative act.

Goodridge raises another important issue in his treatment of Thomson. Why should non-labouring poets be patronised by the assumption that they cannot write accurately and sympathetically of physical labour (not to mention with genuine poetic merit as well)? Accordingly, I have examined numerous poets from non-labouring backgrounds in the second half of the century who, moved by the same or similar impulses to mimetically evoke labour in verse, demonstrably employ the Duckian mode. Non-labourers increasingly write of labour with both detail and empathy as the century wears on, and Goodridge's arguments about Thomson might apply equally to any of Susanna Blamire, Richard Jago and / or James Bisset. As the sociologist Frank Furedi argues, "being part of a culture does not give the individual greater understanding of that culture than those who study it from the outside."[73] This is not the same as arguing that anybody can write with validity about anything they choose; but Jago, for instance, writes knowledgeably and experientially about the changing industrial landscape, is sensitive to its enormous implications both for labour and labourer alike, and believes in its dignity as a subject fit for verse.

In a recent 'Editorial Commentary' in *English*, Peter Barry notes that Furedi's *Where Have all the Intellectuals Gone?* condemns the trend in contemporary literary studies whereby "the literature of the past is made palatable by 'presentist' themes (assertive medieval women, Shakespearian tragic heroes enacting Lacanian metaphors of identity, and so on)."[74] Furedi never actually uses the term "presentism", although Barry's summation of his concerns is accurate, concerns which, with a variety of other critics, I share.[75] Furedi bemoans the widely-held view that sees "Aesthetics ... as a mere cover for cultural domination", and the repeated questioning of "many customary criteria of quality and aesthetic value" by organisations and individuals, condemning "This self-conscious marginalization of artistic standards and quality" as "feeble and philistine".[76] This judgement is harsh and uncompromising – many of those who argue that aesthetic excellence as an indicator of value needs to be reconceived have themselves broadened the canon of eighteenth-century verse, making a study such as this possible in the first place – yet Furedi correctly identifies a contemporary tendency to reject, or at least dispute the importance of, aesthetic consideration of texts. The claim that 'conventional' or 'standard' criteria of aesthetic judgement need to be re-evaluated is not uncommon in criticism devoted to the labouring-class poets.[77] Not only are "Aesthetic excellence" and radicalism not mutually exclusive (as might be demonstrated with reference to a great number of

writers or artists), but to state that aesthetic criteria need to be redrawn before the significance of the labouring-class poets can be appreciated risks implying that their work cannot be seen as worthy of study if judged by 'conventional' standards. Although, in writing poetic narrative, the poets of labour often attempt something different from their non-labouring counterparts, this can be appreciated using 'conventional' enough aesthetic terminology and criteria. Indeed, the application of these criteria is surely *necessary* if they are to be accorded the identity of 'poets' they craved. We read poets precisely *because* they write poetry, which inescapably involves aesthetics.

I wish to argue that some recent theoretical material has been misconceived, even within its own terms, to the extent of doing the labouring poets concerned a disservice. Accordingly I will provide a critique of it, and challenge some existing (mostly Marxist / historicist / materialist) approaches, and particularly their reliance on a conceptual framework consisting of Althusser and Gramsci. It is my contention that more recent work on ideology by Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek provides a more sophisticated and nuanced approach to understanding the relevant ideological issues, particularly with reference to Žižek's work on individual collusion with ideology.

As I have hinted earlier, religion is an important aspect of labouring-class poetry that has received relatively little attention, and bearing in mind that space will only permit that it be a secondary interest, I will attempt a partial redress of this balance. One critic who *has* begun to appreciate how Christianity often functioned in eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry is Keegan, who writes:

> Despite the centrality of religion to labouring-class poetic production, most scholarship about [such] poetry has focused on the articulation of a nascent proletarian point of view, and so elided the very considerable body of religiously-inspired poetry produced by plebeian poets. Such politically-oriented scholarship has failed to acknowledge adequately that there might be more at work in this spiritual poetry than humble self-abnegation.[78]

In fact, Nietzsche's work on what I will term 'New Testament Christianity' as the will to power of the servant class can help to explain how a levelling theology emerges throughout the century as a powerful means of arguing for greater political and social equality. Assisted by the increasing popularity of dissenting movements, including Methodism,[79] this phenomenon reaches its logical conclusion in the final decades of

the century in the verse of poets including Woodhouse and Yearsley. As Keegan explains:

> While church-affiliated education was only one of the many places where members of the labouring classes might learn to read ... it was perhaps the most stable. And although the impetus behind this instruction was often rather repressive (to teach the poor to read scripture which would teach them to be better able to accept their sorry lot), the radical possibilities of learning to read have not gone unremarked ... Beyond simply providing opportunities for literacy, non-conformist denominations often espoused a theology that contributed to more politically radical views that helped forward ... organised political movements ...[80]

Since my topic is the *poetry of labour* rather than labouring-class poetry, the scope for examining this enormous subject is limited. I have little license to incorporate a discussion of poems infused with New Testament Christianity if they do not also focus explicitly on *labour itself*. There are numerous relevant texts that I cannot consider for this reason, including by John Bennet, Samuel Law, and, perhaps most of all, William Brimble's "Deborah and Barak" and John Lucas' "Philo's Garden, or, a Description of the Garden of the Soul" and "The Pharaoh".[81] I have, however, attempted to sketch the phenomenon within the work of poets with whom I am concerned, even where it is necessary to explore works other than those in which they principally address labour. Hence, I have not (for instance) let the fact that Duck describes work most thoroughly in *The Thresher's Labour*, and "A Description of a Journey to Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth, &c." preclude me from recognising that some of his most important religious writing occurs in "The Shunamite". The only poet whose religious writing I consider who does not write of labour in the way in which I am interested is Ann Yearsley, in chapter five, since without recourse to the verse of one of his contemporaries I could not demonstrate that the strategies seen in Woodhouse's poetry are employed more widely.

The relationship between agency and religion in the works of the poets of labour is particularly complex. Nonetheless, I want to do more than address these issues in isolation and wish to suggest a relationship *between* them, even if only in a preliminary way. The theology concerned is markedly doubled-edged at this time. Leapor writes, for example, in "An Epistle to a Lady":

> ... at th' Almighty's Sentence shall I mourn:
> 'Of Dust thou art, to Dust shalt thou return.'

Or shall I wish to stretch the Line of Fate, 55
That the dull Years may bear a longer Date,
To share the Follies of succeeding Times
With more Vexations and with deeper Crimes:
Ah no – tho' Heav'n brings near the final Day,
For such a Life, I will not, dare not pray; 60
But let the Tear for future Mercy flow,
And fall resign'd beneath the mighty Blow.
Nor I alone – for through the spacious Ball,
With me the Numbers of all Ages fall:
And the same Day that Mira yields her Breath, 65
Thousands may enter the Gates of Death.[82]

Here Leapor takes comfort that the death she will meet at the hands of her God will be identical with that simultaneously meted out to countless others, many of different (social) backgrounds. This is obviously a levelling theology of a kind, even if it might imply action to level inequalities between the social orders in this life is unnecessary, since death will level at the physical point of decease, and those who have suffered in this life will reap proportionately greater rewards in the next. Central to Žižek's theory of individual complicity with ideology, however, is the contention we are *not* (in Althusserian terms) 'interpellated' by any sinister political elite, but 'fill in the gaps' left by ideology to interpellate *ourselves* into believing ideology to be reliable and consistent. The very theology that in the longer term led to a levelling earthly politics might also, paradoxically, be seen in the first half of the century to inhibit such a politics: this theology itself can be seen as a means of 'self-interpellation'. At the least it acts as a check on the limits to which labouring poets will go in articulating the injustices of their situation, for reasons I explore in greater detail in chapter two, in reading the religious beliefs suggested by eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry in the light of Nietzsche's concept of 'slave morality'. Why withdraw one's complicity with ideology when one can persuade oneself that the same ideology advocating earthly resignation to divisions between the social 'classes' sponsors the view that injustices will be rectified at the point of death (and forever after)? The same paradox can be discerned in the works of other early poets of labour, such as Duck and Collier. In the (later) works of a Yearsley or a Woodhouse, the same levelling religious beliefs are extrapolated to their logical conclusion that if all souls are equal, so must be all earthly bodies, since the transient physical body pales in significance next to the eternal soul. Even at the century's end, however, this paradox

is an ethical check upon the poets, not just permitting but *sponsoring* radical criticism of the existing social order, yet simultaneously precluding actual revolution.

Whilst there are other relevant theoretical considerations,[83] the above are the principal issues on which I will concentrate. Taking Duck as a diagrammatic starting point, the thesis will feature chapters on Duck himself; Duck's immediate poetic respondents and successors during the period 1730-51; the poetry of labour (rural and industrial) during 1767-1800; and the most ambitious and successful poet of labour at the century's close, James Woodhouse. To begin, however, the first chapter will consider the possibilities created – and precluded – by the genres that might theoretically seem to offer opportunities to a labourer-bard seeking to poeticise working experiences in 1730, the pastoral and georgic.

[1] Others included Mary Masters, Thomas Blacklock, James Eyre Weekes, Robert Ashton, James Maxwell, William Vernon, Cuthbert Shaw, Michael Bruce, Samuel Law, David Service, Gavin Wilson, N. Elliot, Thomas Olivers, Christopher Jones, John Freeth, Edward Rushton, David Love, William Job, William Newton, Gavin Campbell, John Walker, David Sillar, James Wheeler, Alexander Wilson, William Lane, Ellen Taylor, Samuel Thompson, Thomas Spence, Edward Williams (known by his bardic name of 'Iolo Morganwg'), John Forster, Robert Anderson and William Gifford.

[2] Duck's immediate predecessors such as Ned Ward, Jane Holt Wiseman and Constantia Grierson were a tavern keeper, domestic servant and midwife, respectively, Nelson was a tailor, Dodsley a footman, Bancks a former apprentice-weaver, Chandler a milliner, Tatersal and Jones bricklayers, Frizzle a miller, Aram a gardener, Bryant a maker of clay pipes, Smith Green a "tradesman" (see Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p.54), Lewis an ivory turner, Woodhouse and Bloomfield shoemakers, Bennet, Brimble and Lucas cobblers, Hands and Harrison domestic servants, Candler a "Suffolk cottager" (*ibid.*), Bentley a cordwainer's daughter, Yearsley a milkwoman, Little a milkmaid (these last two occupations *were* different), Falconer a sailor and Brimble a carpenter. About Wilson we know next to nothing.

[3] David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Harlow and London: Longman, 2003), p.x.

[4] John Goodridge, 'General Editor's Introduction', *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. I: 1700-1740*, ed. by William J. Christmas (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp.xiii-xv.

[5] Stephen Duck, *The Thresher's Labour*, ll.258-67, *Eighteenth-Century Poetry, an Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.255.

[6] Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.232.

[7] J. Paul Hunter, 'Couplets and Conversation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11-35 (p.21).

[8] See, for instance, *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. II: 1740-1780*, ed. by Bridget Keegan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p.xvi.

[9] See Terry Belanger, 'Publishers and Writers in Eighteenth-Century England', in *Books and Their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (Leicester and New York: Leicester University Press and St. Martin's Press, 1982), 5-25. Despite increasing industrialisation throughout the century that meant labourers were educated in unprecedented numbers (see Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), pp.62-5), there is a danger of overestimating the literacy of the age. On these dangers see Haslett, p.51 (who provides an account of recent empirical research showing the limited scope of the reading community in the early century), and John Rule, *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), p.140.

[10] Christmas (2003), p.127. Duck's subscription figures come from F. J. G. Robinson and P.J. Wallis, *Book Subscription Lists: A Revised Guide* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Harold Hill and Son Ltd., 1975), p.19. For an account of how subscription functioned, see Belanger, p.19, and Barbara M. Benedict, 'Publishing and Reading Poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 63-82 (p.75). Rewards could be considerable – Johnson's efforts in collecting subscriptions for Anna Williams' *Miscellanies in Prose* (1766) earned her more than £300, and Elizabeth Carter's translations of Epictetus (1758) earned her 1200 subscribers and more than £1000 in profit (*ibid.*) By no means all of those most successful in publishing in this way were labouring-class – Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) and Pope's translations of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were published by subscription. (See Haslett, p.184, W. A. Speck, 'Politicians, Peers, and Publication by Subscription 1700-50' in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, 47-68 (p.48), and Benedict, p.75, for various figures relating to the sales and profits of Pope's translations). Nonetheless, some of the most successful subscription volumes between 1730-51 included Mary Masters' *Poems on Several Occasions* (1733), (which sold 879 copies to 721 different subscribers), and Leapor's *Poems on Several Occasions*, vol. I

(1748), (655 copies to 598 subscribers). Less successful, in comparison, were Leapor's *Poems on Several Occasions*, vol. II (1751), (320 copies to 284 subscribers), and Robert Dodsley's *A Muse in Livery, or the Footman's Miscellany* (1732), (240 copies to 197 subscribers). See Robinson and Wallis, pp. 17, 27, 29, 16 respectively.

[11] On one hand subscribers to Leapor's first volume included Lyttleton, Sewallis Shirley, John Hill, members of the Isham family, two dozen M.P.s or their wives, Archbishop Trimnell, Issac Hawkins Browne, four dukes, eleven earls and countesses, twenty three lords and ladies, two viscounts, four honourables, a bishop, and Bluestockings like Mrs. Delany, Lady Sophia Carteret, Lady Pomfret and the Duchess of Portland. On the other, "A few Brackley tradespeople ventured", such as "Mrs. Garland, John Whitmore the shoemaker, and Edward Yates the grocer". Duck also subscribed (Betty Rizzo, 'Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence', *The Age of Johnson*, 4 (1991), 313-43, p.325). Many subscribers to Duck's 1736 volume were members of the government (Speck, p.60), and "at least a fifth" of M.P.s subscribed (*ibid*.,.p.63). Although Duck was something of a special case, "The widely accepted notion that the reading public in eighteenth-century England was overwhelmingly middle class is one such generalization which an analysis of subscription lists substantially qualifies ... The market for the kind of title that was published by subscription was cornered by 'the quality' " (*ibid.*, p.65). Providing extensive figures to demonstrate that the peerage in particular dominated subscription lists, Speck summarises, "Far from demonstrating the rise of a middle-class readership, therefore, subscriptions to books document that a significant section of the book trade was dominated by the upper classes of Augustan Britain." (*Ibid.*, p.66).

[12] Despite all the poems notionally addressed to Duck, and the fact that the reception poems of Leapor and Elisabeth Hands do not necessarily suggest an exclusive reception by the privileged orders, the latter at least suggest poets perceived readers as being of the middle or upper orders (see Leapor, "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame", *The Works of Mary Leapor*, ed. by Richard Greene and Ann Messenger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.175, and Hands, "A Poem, On the Supposition of an Advertisement appearing in a Morning Paper, of the Publication of a Volume of Poems, by a Servant-Maid" and "A Poem, On the Supposition of the Book having been Published and Read", *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, an Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.425-9. See also Haslett, pp.54-7, for a discussion of such 'reception' poems. Labourers alluded to by Leapor, like Cressida and Sophronia in "An Epistle to Artemisia: On Fame" (ll.85-118, Greene and Messenger, pp.178), and Deborah in "The Epistle of Deborah Dough" (*ibid.*, pp.186-8), are aware of Leapor's status as a writer of verse but do not, or cannot be made to actually read and engage with it (see also "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame", ll.87-90, *ibid.*, p.178). Furthermore, the 'apologies' by patrons for the verses of uneducated poets, designed to protect them from the mockery of educated audiences, clearly suggest that the latter were a substantial part of the anticipated readership. Mary Waldron relates this phenomenon to the eighteenth-century preoccupation with 'natural genius' (see Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806*, Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996, pp.32-5). Bridget Freemantle's 'apology' for Leapor (see Greene and Messenger, p.xli) is even headed "To The Reader", emphasising that it was envisaged that this "Reader" would be (well) educated. A number of other such 'apologies' are quoted in the introductory pages to poets anthologised by the *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets* series. For a further (brief) survey of the apologetic statements often made, see Keegan, 'Lambs to the Slaughter: Leisure and Laboring-Class Poetry', *Romanticism on the Net*, 27 (August 2002), http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2002/v/27/006562ar.html, who refers to "*the largely aristocratic and middle-class audience*" of labouring poets (p.2 of 15, my italics).

[13] 1725 saw the birth of the modern lending library in Bath and Edinburgh, which after the first London library (1739) became "a wide-spread means of disseminating books." (Haslett, p.23). The "middle-classes, and even some domestic servants" paid between half a guinea and a guinea per annum to borrow from them, though novels were expensive throughout the century, costing "usually 6-10 shillings ... more than a labourer's average weekly wage or the day's wage of a skilled craftsman." (*Ibid*). Other ways of obtaining printed matter cheaply included pirated editions, serialisations in newspapers (available in coffee houses) or book clubs (*ibid.*, pp.23-4). On newspapers, periodicals, public reading spaces – e.g. coffee houses – and circulating libraries, see also Benedict, pp.76-8, but domestic servants tended to serve those who took advantage of such options, rather than do so *themselves*.

[14] See George Bloomfield's account of his brother's early life, cited in Capel Lofft's preface to Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy; A Rural Poem*, 7th edn (London: Vernor and Hood and Longman and Rees, 1803), p. viii.

[15] See Rose Mary Davis, *Stephen Duck, the Thresher-Poet* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1926), pp.40-93.

[16] See Christmas (2003), pp.340-1.

[17] See William Vernon, "Epistle to a Friend", (first published in 1758's *Poems on Several Occasions*) in Keegan (2003), pp.98-100, and Shaw's *The Race* (1765; 2nd edn. 1766), ll.505-10, in Keegan (2003), p.240. See chapter five for Woodhouse's allusion to Duck in *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*. The most well-known late eighteenth-century poetic reference is arguably in *The Village* I ll.27-8: "Save honest DUCK, what son of verse could share / The poet's rapture and the peasant's care?" Goodridge notes that "Greg Crossnan's invaluable survey of Clare's debt to the poets in his library reveals that Clare owned at least an extract from Duck's "The Thresher's Labour." " (See John Goodridge, 'John Clare and Eighteenth-Century Poetry: Pomfret, Cunningham, Bloomfield', *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), 264-78, p.272). Goodridge credits Crossnan's "Clare's debt to the Poets in his Library", *John Clare Society Journal*, 10 (1991), 27-41 (p.31; item 11).

[18] Davis, pp.170-1.

[19] See *The Gentleman's Magazine*, LI (1781), 39. The poem was originally published in the *London Magazine*, VII, 1738, 461. (Davis, p.94).

[20] *Ibid.*, pp.140-1.

[21] See Turner in *Notes and Queries*, 11 Ser., VIII, 101, cited by *ibid.*, p.118.

[22] *Ibid.*, p.173.

[23] John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.88.

[24] See John Learmont, *Poems Pastoral, Satirical, Tragic and Comic* (Edinburgh, 1791); and Joseph Mather, *A Collection of Songs, Poems, Satires &c.* (Sheffield, 1811); and *Songs*, ed. by L. Wilson (Sheffield, 1862). For Learmont's most anthologised individual composition, see "An Address to the Plebeians", *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. III: 1780-1800*, ed. by Tim Burke, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp.205-7; and for Mather's, "The File-Hewer's Lamentation", *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.789-90. The latter is believed to have been written in 1792, a dozen years before Mather's death.

[25] Oliver Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, ll.133-6, Fairer and Gerrard, p.423.

[26] See Cowper, *The Task*, I: ll.356-65, Fairer and Gerrard, p.496. As the latter note, Cowper's depiction of the scene is rather less convincing and sustained than Duck's (*TTL* ll.31-63), befitting Cowper's different aims. It does, however briefly, bear comparison with the poetic descriptions with which I am chiefly concerned, but whilst I have considered labour in topographical poetry, I have done so where a concentrated focus on the nature of this labour seems of particular importance to the poet, rather than a fairly brief acknowledgement of its existence within a much larger scheme.

[27] Fairer and Gerrard, p.430.

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] Joseph Warton, "Ode to Evening", Fairer and Gerrard, p.365.

[31] Burke, pp.258-9.

[32] Hunter, p.24.

[33] See William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses; Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry 1730-1830* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2001), pp.41-3.

[34] David Nokes, 'Augustanism', in *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*, ed. by Martin Coyle, Peter Garside, Malcolm Kelsall and John Peck (London: Routledge, 1991), 93-105 (p.93).

[35] Claude Rawson, *Order from Confusion Sprung: Studies in Eighteenth-Century Literature from Swift to Cowper* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), p.243.

[36] Numerous critics agree in dating the start of critical unease to the strain the term comes under in Howard Weinbrot's *Augustus Caesar in 'Augustan' England: the Decline of a Classical Ideal* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978), which prompted a defence of the term's continued usefulness, Howard Erskine-Hill's *The Augustan Idea in English Literature* (London: Edward Arnold, 1983). Doody, a critic apparently devoted to challenging conceptions of 'Augustan' poetry, defends it: "... if it is not ... satisfactory ... it is the term we have, the one we have used for years, the one that inspires recognition." (Doody, p.2). Despite the controversy, the term has by no means vanished from critical discourse: see comparatively recent works like Joseph M. Levine's *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), *Augustan Literature from 1660 to 1789*, ed. by Eva Simmons (London: Bloomsbury, 1994), Blanford Parker's *The Triumph of Augustan Poetics: English Literary Culture from Butler to Johnson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Ann Messenger's *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (New York: AMS Press, 2001). Jennifer Keith regularly uses the term in a recent chapter (see ' "Pre-Romanticism" and the Ends of Eighteenth-Century Poetry' in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 271-90 (pp. 271-2, and elsewhere)). It appears in (the title of) a recent chapter by Karina Williamson ('Voice, Gender, and the Augustan Verse Epistle', in *Presenting Gender: Changing Sex in Early-Modern Culture*, ed. by Chris Mounsey (Lewisburg, Pa.: Bucknell University Press; London: Associated University Presses, 2001), 76-93) and many recent articles titles and articles, including those by Richard Pickard ('Environmentalism and "Best Husbandry": Cutting Down Trees in Augustan Poetry', *Lumen*, 17 (1998), 103-26) and several by Bridget Keegan. Keegan and Burke both use it in their introductions to recently edited anthologies: see Keegan (2003), p.xx, and Burke, p.xxvii. Even this list is highly selective.

[37] Whilst "realism" is obviously widely associated with a nineteenth-century literary movement, it is "applied by literary critics in two diverse ways", the second being "to designate a recurrent mode, in various eras and literary forms, of representing human life and experience in literature" (M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms, Sixth Edition* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993, p.174). There is plenty of critical precedent in recent years for using the terms with reference to eighteenth-century labouring poetry. See, for instance, A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (St. Albans, Hertfordshire: Paladin, 1975), e.g. pp.84, 106, 131, 263 and elsewhere; Jonathan N. Lawson, 'Robert Bloomfield', *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 93: British Romantic Poets, 1789-1832, First Series*, ed. by John R. Greenfield, A Bruccoli Clark Layman Book: The Gale Group, 1990, pp.59-67, *Literature Resource Centre* (hereafter *LRC*), p.2 of 7; Doody, p.27; Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture: Class, Gender, and History in Cultural Analysis, 1730 to the Present* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1989), pp.38-9 (and elsewhere); A. J. Sambrook, ' 'Augustan' Poetry', in *Encyclopaedia of Literature and Criticism*, 253-64 (p.261); throughout Keith (e.g. pp. 276-7, 285-6, and elsewhere); and Goodridge (1995) who titles a chapter "Thomson, Duck, Collier and rural realism" (p.11) and uses the term "realism" / "realistic" on numerous occasions, e.g. pp.14, 22, 88. Other commentators who talk about the 'realism' of eighteenth-century labouring verse include, in no particular order, Unwin, Keegan, Gustav Klaus and Ashraf. Many critics quoted throughout the thesis use the term, in talking about poets from Theocritus to Pope, and this list of its recent usages is *highly* selective.

[38] John Sitter, 'Questions in Poetics: why and how Poetry Matters', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 133-56 (p.153). See also Ellen Dissanayake, *Homo Aestheticus: Where Art Comes from and why* (New York: Free Press, 1992), chapter 3, "The Core of Art: Making Special", pp.39-63.

[39] Messenger (2001), p.174.

[40] Keegan (2003), p.xvi.

[41] Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock* (hereafter *RL*), *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London and New York: Routledge, 1963), p.219.

[42] *RL*, *ibid.*, pp.221-2.

[43] *RL*, *ibid.*, pp.225-6.

[44] *RL*, *ibid.*, pp.229-30.

[45] *RL*, *ibid.*, p.232-4.

[46] *RL*, *ibid*, p.231.

[47] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington*, ll. 7-10, Butt, p.588.

[48] Fairer and Gerrard, p.142.

[49] Pope, *The Dunciad*, I: ll. 103-4, Butt, p.724-5.

[50] Fairer and Gerrard, p.171.

[51] Sambrook, p.261. Similarly, Doody (p.26 and elsewhere) turns her attention to the question of what we can 'see' in Augustan poetry.

[52] "Here Files of Pins extend their shining Rows, / Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux": *RL*, I: ll.137-8, Butt, p.222.

[53] *Ibid.*, p.561. The objects in ll.299 fol. of *An Epistle to Bathurst* provide another example. See Butt, pp.583-6.

[54] Hunter, p.14.

[55] *Ibid.*, p.22.

[56] *Ibid.*, p.26.

[57] *Ibid*, p.22.

[58] *Ibid.*, p.29.

[59] Pope, *An Epistle from Mr. Pope to Dr. Arbuthnot*, 'Advertisement', Butt, p.597.

[60] Keegan (2003), p.xvi.

[61] Samuel Law, 'The Preface', *A Domestic Winter-Piece: A Poem, Exhibiting a Full View of the Author's Dwelling Place in the Winter Season* (1772), Keegan (2003), pp.266-7 (p.267). It is impossible to know whether such an experience made him unusual or not, although Duck underwent a process of 'classicisation' at the hands of Dr. Alured Clarke. See Davis, p.32, for an account of Clarke; and p.35 for Davis' view that his aim was to "Neo-classicize" Duck, which she sees as consonant with

the "severe course in Georgian civilizing instruction" (p.36) Duck underwent before meeting Queen Caroline. Davis also quotes Clarke promising to "correct" Duck's verses for him (p.9).

[62] James Woodhouse, *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*, IV: ll.193, *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, 2 vols., ed. by the Rev. R. I. Woodhouse (London: The Leadenhall Press, 1896), *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992-5). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[63] Labouring-class and / or women poets during the century often characterise "mellifluous Pope" in similar terms. Duck alludes to "harmonious" or "melodious" Pope on numerous occasions: see, for instance, ll.55-60, 134-5 of "On Richmond Park, and Royal Gardens": (Christmas (2003), pp.151, 153). Claudia Thomas Kairoff, meanwhile, quotes Anna Seward extolling Pope's "polished graces"; see "Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Readers", in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 157-76 (p.172). There are many other examples.

[64] Keegan (2003), p.xvi.

[65] See Collier's 'Remarks' in *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck; In Answer to his Late Poem, Called The Thresher's Labour* (London, 1739), Fairer and Gerrard, p.257. As Lonsdale notes, Collier's "remark that 'I had learn'd to write to assist my memory', which meant that her verses could be transcribed for the printer, suggests that she had at first relied on memory." (Lonsdale (1989), p.171).

[66] See Lawson, *LRC*, p.3 of 7. Lawson quotes British Library, Additional Manuscript 28, 266, 85r—85v.

[67] James Woodhouse, for instance, is also described composing at work. See Dodsley's preface to Woodhouse's *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1766), p.xiv.

[68] See Leapor's ironic self-portrayal in "Mira's Picture. A Pastoral" (ll.29-32, Greene and Messenger, p.225), and the alleged fears of Duck's first wife that he was possessed because of the time he spent in the practice (cited by Davis, p.8).

[69] Betty Rizzo offers an (alternative) explanation of why Mary Leapor wrote in neo-classical forms that has obvious pertinence to labouring-class poets as a wider group. Making reference to Harold Bloom, she writes that Leapor:

> ... like the other primitives ... was overwhelmed with an anxiety, not the anxiety of influence but the anxiety *for* influence. As a result her poetry, like that of Duck, could scarcely be more conventional, but of course was never as accomplished as that of Pope, Young, Otway or Rowe ... (Rizzo, p.332).

Whilst Rizzo is surely correct that Leapor greatly admired Pope, the heroic couplet at which he excelled was after all, as Doody and Hunter both argue, the most widely admired and imitated of the age. As such, the medium might seem to have been regarded as an integral part of the process of "making special", to appropriate Dissanayake's useful phrase. The result was not, however, necessarily conventional in the way Rizzo suggests. When the labouring poets incorporate everyday working language into their verse, and / or write continuous descriptive narratives – i.e. project material into the neo-classical couplet for which it was not necessarily ideally fitted – the couplets produced are sometimes most unusual; and even for Leapor, "the language of conventional neo-classical poetry" is sometimes "ineffective." (Bridget Keegan, 'Lambs to the Slaughter: Leisure and Laboring-Class Poetry', p.3 of 15. Keegan alludes to Leapor's "On Winter", ll.35-41). In any case, making use of the dominant poetic model of the age hardly implies, on its own, any great "anxiety" for influence, merely a desire to endow one's work with the status of art.

[70] Goodridge (1995), p.16.

[71] *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.

[72] *Ibid.*, pp.17-18.

[73] Frank Furedi, *Where Have all the Intellectuals Gone? Confronting 21st Century Philistinism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p.63. Furedi subsequently quotes P. Mattick Jr., *Social Knowledge: An Essay on the Nature and Limits of Social Science* (London: Hutchinson, 1986), p.32.

[74] Peter Barry, 'The Editorial Commentary', *English* 54 (2005), 151-5 (p.154).

[75] See, for instance, Greene's criticisms of Kate Lilly and Richard Pickard, neither of whom, he argues, "gives much consideration to the possibility that Leapor shared many of the common attitudes and beliefs of her time." (Greene and Messenger, p.xxxii). See also Elizabeth Kraft, 'Anna Letitia Barbauld's "Washing Day" and the Montgolfier Balloon', Internet, http://www.usask.ca/english/ barbauld/criticism/kraft95.html, who argues, "We have a corollary responsibility as readers, critics, and scholars to recognize that the past is different from the present ... To read "Washing Day" ... as an expression of our own values is to rob the past of its integrity. It is ... to deny the past its "otherness", to assimilate it into the hegemony of the present" (p.9 of 11), a point obviously of wider importance. See also Waldron, pp.3-6 (and elsewhere) who makes, in relation to Ann Yearsley, a powerful case against allowing contemporary considerations to dominate in the study of her work. Frank Felsenstein has similarly attacked anachronism and misrepresentation in the study of Yearsley, accusing numerous critics of presenting Yearsley in a misleadingly "radicalized" light. See Felsenstein, 'Our Patronized Lactilla', in *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 August 2003, p.11.

[76] Furedi, p.135.

[77] See, for instance, a recent review (Donna Landry, " 'But were they any good?' Milkmaids on Parnassus, or, Political Aesthetics", *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38 (2005), pp.535-8) of Greene's and Messenger's *The Works of Mary Leapor* and Susanne Kord's *Women Peasant Poets in Eighteenth-Century England, Scotland, and Germany: Milkmaids on Parnassus* (Rochester, New York, and Woodbridge, Suffolk: Camden House, 2003), in which Landry (p.537) approvingly quotes Kord making this very argument (Kord, p.13).

[78] Keegan (2003), pp.xxv-xxvi.

[79] See *ibid.*

[80] *Ibid.*

[81] See *ibid.* (2003), p.xxvi, for an introductory discussion of these poets and their works. For Harrison, see also *ibid.*, p.375 fol.; for Maxwell, see *ibid.*, p.75 fol.; for Bennet, see *ibid.*, p.273 fol.; for Law, see *ibid.*, p.265 fol.; for Brimble, see *ibid.*, p.123 fol.; and for Lucas, see *ibid.*, p.331 fol.

[82] Mary Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady", ll.53-66, Greene and Messenger, pp.25-6. See also Richard Greene, 'Mary Leapor: The Problem of Personal Identity' in *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), 218-27, (p.226).

[83] Given that a number of critics have commented on the 'double voiced' nature of labouring poetry, and that critics including Haslett, Doody and Hunter have addressed the relationship between poetry and conversation in the period, it seems curious that none have done so with reference to heteroglossia and dialogism as defined in M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981). Since, however, Bakhtin saw only prose as dialogic, (and poetry as monologic), I have refrained from thorough engagement with the issue because of the space needed to consider whether poetry can be regarded as dialogic in the first place. I am not the first to notice the potential of these ideas for reading verse – see Landry (1990), p.5 – and it remains an inviting topic for the critic who can devote to it the space it demands.

Labour in Poetry: The Pastoral and the Georgic

I: The Pastoral

> For centuries the dominance of classical notions of decorum meant that the realistic treatment of mundane tasks was outlawed from western literature. If agricultural life was depicted, then it was usually through the distorting lens of pastoral; and if labourers or craftsmen appeared, they were often comic or lumpen figures.[1]

This was the situation that confronted Stephen Duck when writing *The Thresher's Labour* (1730). "Realistic treatment of mundane tasks"[2] in an agricultural setting was exactly what Duck aspired to, yet the pastoral tradition that provided one of only two models for incorporating agriculture into poetry – the second part of the chapter will examine the georgic – simultaneously inhibited such attempts. I will focus on the practical, rather than ideological restraints the pastoral placed upon Duck,[3] and on the pastoral models specifically available to him. Nonetheless, a brief glance at their origins will prove fruitful.

By common acknowledgement, the pastoral dates back to the *Idylls* of Theocritus (*c*.308-240 BC).[4] Barrell and Bull argue that pastoral

> ... had been from the outset an urban interpretation of rural matters; and, although in comparison with what was to follow, the *Idylls* do exhibit something of an original, non-urban simplicity, the countryside evoked by Theocritus already allows a distinction between the 'real' and the literary, and the Pastoral is already in the process of becoming a way of *not* looking at the country, at least as much as a way of looking at it ...[5]

This might seem, however, to confuse Theocritus, whose writing contained a "hard edge"[6] with his Roman successor Virgil. It might be true that from the first the pastoral was a means of *not* looking at the country, but Theocritus' work was certainly not as stylised and characterised by euphemism as the later English('d) pastorals of the eighteenth century. Even allowing for the difficulties posed by translating texts thousands of years old, most commentators agree that Theocritus managed to write of rusticity with seriousness and respect, and that there was a clear concern with the 'real' and particular in his work.[7] One might consider, in this

context, the detail in lines from "Idyll 1: Thyrsis' Lament for Daphnis" (1: ll.24-37), describing the "deep cup, sealed with a layer of sweet wax, / Two-handled, newly made, still smelling of the knife." (ll.25-6). Whilst the depiction of men competing in song for the affections of a woman (on the inside of the cup here, or in some other variation on the theme later) became familiar, the vocabulary needed to describe the cup itself would later, in Virgilian, rationalist and neo-classical pastoral be replaced with euphemism. The evocative detail that the cup still smells "of the knife" is more reminiscent of Duck's poetry of labour than any of the former, where the main appeal to the senses lies in the mellifluous sounds describing the shepherds' songs. Neo-classical euphemism also deviated considerably from the blunt language and vernacular sometimes found in Theocritus. A passage such as Comatas' address to his goats in "Idyll 5: Goatherd and Shepherd" (5: ll.145-50),[8] for example, would have been unthinkable in neo-classical pastoral. Whilst it would be misleading to suggest that the *Idylls* commonly cultivate such an informal tone, Theocritus repeatedly shifts registers (making translation of his work into modern English hazardous) and had

> an interest in the lives of 'ordinary people'; his rustics are indeed rustics and 'herding' is not (merely) a stylized way of describing poetic composition. Later pastoral (broadly speaking) accepts 'rusticity' as a conventional poetic mode, and one in which allegory flourished ...[9]

As Hunter explains,[10] the 'bucolic' of Theocritus only later (because of Virgil's supposedly imitative *Eclogues*) mutated into 'pastoral', by means of a focus on selected aspects of the *Idylls*. The *Eclogues* "established the enduring model for the traditional pastoral", consisting of "a deliberately conventional poem expressing an urban poet's nostalgic image of the peace and simplicity of the life of shepherds and other rural folk in an idealized natural setting."[11] Pastoral became a stylised presentation of a lost idealised world in which man lived in harmony with nature and the gods,[12] influential in visual art as well as literature. The conventions that Virgil's subsequent 'imitations' of Theocritus established included:

> ... a shepherd reclining under a spreading beech tree and meditating the rural muse, or piping as though he would ne'er grow old, or engaging in a friendly singing contest, or expressing his good or bad fortune in a love affair, or grieving over the death of a fellow shepherd. From this last type developed the *pastoral elegy*, which persisted long after the other traditional types had lost their popularity.[13]

Just as the universalised shepherds, swains, etc. had no individuality, the author was, at least in theory, similarly anonymous, appealing to the Muses in the guise of 'the poet'.[14] Another important idea, later influential in Pope's neo-classical pastorals, was that of the Golden Age, the idea that pastoral was situated in a time when we all worked the land, because there was nothing else to be done (a secularised version, as noted by several commentators, of the Eden myth).[15] Barrell and Bull account for this by claiming that:

> The Pastoral was supposed to be the first state of civilized man once he left behind him the solitary activities of hunting and fruit-collecting, and entered as a shepherd or herdsman; and the first manifestation of art was thought to have been the pastoral songs and ballads produced by the shepherd. A Golden Age suggests a sense of permanence, a world in which values are secure and the social order stable, and where the function of the artist is not threatened by social change.[16]

Hence the enduring popularity of both the 'Golden Age' and the wider pastoral myth is explained by the comfort they provide to those prone to a conservative nostalgia for a past more certain than their present, a reading of the politics of pastoral that has proved popular.

The 'missing links' between the *Eclogues* and the first English pastorals include Longus' 'novel' *Daphnis and Cloe*, written in the fifth century A.D., and the medieval French 'pastourelle'.[17] By "the first important attempt to write an English pastoral"[18] – Spenser's *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1579) – there was practically a 'canon' of pastoral poets whom he was trying both to assimilate and imitate, including Virgil, Sannazaro, Petrach, Mantuan,[19] and Marot. Spenser's poem was perceived as a success, even if he encountered difficulties not easily to be overcome (discussed below), and an English pastoral tradition flourished, subsequently including many prominent names in English verse of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, such as Sidney, Edward Vere, Earl of Oxford, Lyly, Peele, Greene, Lodge, Nash, Marlowe, Breton, Drayton, Wither, Browne, both John and Phineas Fletcher, Jonson, Carew, Milton, Herrick and Marvell. Spenser's difficulties, bequeathed to subsequent generations of English pastoralists, were that he found both the material conditions of English country life and the language spoken by rural workers incompatible with the (apparent) demands of the tradition stemming from Virgil. Accordingly, Spenser developed an artificial medium of his own.[20] As Ben Jonson famously remarked,

"Spenser, in affecting the Ancients, writ no Language".[21] In striving for stylisation he achieved only a pastoral diction of his own devising, which subsequently hung heavy on his successors. The point has been widely discussed, in particular by Samuel Johnson.[22]

By the early eighteenth century, writers of pastoral fell into one of two camps, the so-called 'neo-classical' school, or its 'rationalist / naturalist' alternative, a rivalry culminating in England in the 'pastoral wars' between Pope and Philips / Tickell. In essence, the neo-classical school drew inspiration from Aristotle, Horace and Virgil, and, later, the formulation of the 'rules' on which this conception of pastoral would be built, found in Rapin's *Dissertation de Carmine Pastorali* (1659, English trans. 1684).[23] Lawson characterises this school as "chronological primitivism", explaining that the society of shepherds it suggests is "not immediately in the realm of the possible, and as a cultural and literary tradition ... exists in the imagination of the artist. The very creation of the image requires extensive idealizing, for the image itself is ideal. The intent is *not to improve upon the nature of rural things but to create a reality in art*"[24] (my italics). The 'rationalist' approach, by contrast, derived from Fontenelle's *Discours sur la Nature de l'Eglogue* (1688, English trans. 1695). Even before Tickell 'anglicised' this school of thought,[25] it tended to idealise. Lawson refers to this approach as "cultural primitivism":

> The intent is "Illusion" ... and not a faithfulness to the spirit of rural life ... the point in altering the locus of the poem was to facilitate the deception of the reader who could more easily, then, believe the pastoral creation.[26]

In both neo-classical and rationalist versions, 'pastoral language' tended towards the stylised and generic rather than the particular; pastoral displayed concern with *the idea(l) of* a shepherdess, flower or animal rather than any particular instance, and the subject matter tended to become formulaic.[27]

In the sixth volume of Tonson's *Miscellanies* in 1709, "Where Philips's poems were firmly located in the English countryside, Pope's (in spite of references to Thames and Windsor) belonged in the timeless landscape of neo-classical pastoral." The latter "were written with the critics in mind, and at his shoulder ... [they] were worked at and thoroughly revised to give them simplicity, propriety, and correctness."[28] The intent was *not* to write about everyday country life, but to *universalise*, the emphasis on rhyme and mellifluousness an attempt to find an

English equivalent for the (quite different) beauty of sound and movement in Greek and Latin verse.

Pope nails his neo-classical colours to the mast in a prefatory essay included with the poems. It is implicit in his conception that:

> If we would copy Nature, it may be useful to take this Idea along with us, that pastoral is a version of what they call the Golden age. So that we are not to describe our shepherds as shepherds at this day really are, but as they may be conceiv'd then to have been; when the best of men follow'd the employment.[29]

The poet must "use some illusion to render a pastoral delightful: and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life, and in concealing its miseries."[30] In practice, however, both in his self-proclaimed pastorals and *Windsor Forest* Pope evidently *was* concerned with what English rustics would or would not say, and with the appropriateness of other details to a pastoral set in England.

"Spring; The First Pastoral, or Damon" begins:

> First in these Fields I try the Sylvan Strains,
> Nor blush to sport on *Windsor*'s blissful Plains:
> Fair *Thames*, flow gently from thy sacred Spring,
> While on thy Banks *Sicilian* Muses sing;
> Let Vernal Airs thro' trembling Osiers play,
> And *Albion*'s Cliffs resound the Rural lay....[31]

The language here is strongly stylised. As Fairer notes of Parnell's language in the opening line of an untitled pastoral – "Are these the Virtues which adorn the plain?" – pastoral vocabulary had become "bland rhetoric".[32] The preferred words become those that can engineer a full rhyme, almost irrespective of their meaning. This 'artificial' style, antithetical to the desire to employ a natural rural dialect in Duck's work, shows that in adopting Pope as a stylistic model, he had to work with an inherently prejudicial vocabulary.[33] The emphasis was very much on musicality and fidelity to perceived tradition. Looking at the final words in the lines we find "Strains", "Plains", "Spring", "sing", "play" and "Lay"; at least the first four recur repeatedly throughout the poem. "Plain" and "Strain" provide an 'easy' rhyme, but one does not find many plains in England. A comparable 'pastoral' word is "Groves". All specificity of meaning is lost through over-use. "Rural Lay" is another conventional term. The beginning of the third line, "Fair Thames ... " is a tribute to

Spenser, reprising one of his refrains ("Sweete Themmes runne softly, till I end my song" from *Prothalamion*);[34] Pope wished to be Spenser's heir and successor, and hence the echo. Spenser, however, unlike Pope, had explicitly set his pastorals in England, attempting to "naturalise the form by incorporating ... considerable elements of a native realism derived from Chaucer".[35] In "Fair *Thames*, flow gently from thy sacred Spring" we see the inherent musicality of Augustan pastoral. Its mellifluousness and alliteration (Pope follows Rapin's prescriptions)[36] goes to the heart of the differences between his enterprise here, and Duck's.

A look at the rest of "Spring" allows similar points to be made. Daphnis' first two lines in his speech in ll.23-8 include references to "bloomy Spray", to "joyous Musick" and to the "dawning Day" – each phrase featuring two long vowels. The adjectives are conventional, indistinct, included for their sound. In ll.25-6 there is liquid alliteration and assonantal effect of "Why sit we mute, when early Linnets sing", followed by "Why sit we sad..?", two lines later. One notes the patterned repetition associated with pastoral convention, and the way in which "phrases repeatedly echo each other in pleasing varied patterns, and images are satisfyingly mirrored."[37] 'Natural' spoken conversation is effectively excluded: an aim for *compact* elegance and musicality necessitates avoidance of the 'natural'.

Since Pope is *not concerned* with evoking rural life, but with sound, symmetry, balance and pastoral tradition, the result, at the literal level, is solecism: oxen do not plough the English plain (l.30); crocuses and roses do not come out together (l.31); fountains do not reflect anything (ll.33-4). In Daphnis' next speech (ll.35-40), the things he describes in his bowl represent the four seasons, and twelve signs of the zodiac. Pope presumably does not think that "zodiac" is a rustic word, and hence Daphnis resorts to rather cumbersome periphrasis. Pope *did* avoid blatantly 'unrealistic' details. "Your Praise the Birds shall chant in ev'ry Grove, / And Winds shall waft it to the Pow'rs above",[38] originally read "Your praise the tuneful birds to heav'n shall bear, / And list'ning wolves grow milder as they hear". Pope's own notes give the original version, commenting, "So the verses were originally written. But the author, young as he was, soon found the absurdity which *Spenser* himself overlooked, of introducing Wolves into England".[39] His pastorals emerge as located in an increasingly English setting: because the pastoral desire

cannot usually be fulfilled in the 'real' world it is the natural territory of art and literature. But, one way or another, the real world always seems to intrude on the fantasy.[40]

Presumably in order to bring about a rhyme – "impart" with "Heart" ("Spring", ll.51-2) – Pope resorts to using an inappropriate word altogether, since one 'offers' a sacrifice, and does not "impart" it. In Daphnis' speech from ll.57-60, Sylvia should probably be described as tripping / running across the meadow, instead of the "Green" (l.57). In fact, it is unclear whether she is tripping or running (see ll.57-8). On the basis that Pope chooses his words because of their sound, it is irrelevant which of the two is happening, and "...run unseen" provides a quick repetition of the "un" sound.[41] Strephon's subsequent fourth speech sees sense sacrificed to sound again. There is no prospect of him deserting the banks of the Thames for those of the Po – although it is perhaps more significant that he is on the banks of the Thames at all.

In classical convention and belief, the countryside was where simple, unspoilt Man conversed / interacted with rural gods and goddesses. Such figures appear incongruous in an 'English' setting: between ll.49-66 of Pope's "Summer. The Second Pastoral, Or Alexis"[42] Satyrs, Pan, Elysium, Venus, Adonis, Diana and Ceres all feature. The issue of including such material in pastoral at all, regardless of setting, was called into question as part of the pastoral debates described below, not least by Addison.[43]

All in all, Pope's attempt to create a "reality in art" was plainly at odds with poetry that sought to reconcile art with the diurnal. As Doody argues:

> It is as if Pope were trying to turn the clock back, to reach some eternal idea of pastoral, anterior to the realities of Theocritus or Virgil. He disdains almost entirely sensuousness, particularity, variety of effect, homely language and objects – all for the sake of one pure effect, representing a static or uncontaminated state ... He concentrates on sweetness of numbers, the creation of pastoral music, at the expense of almost everything else.[44]

The qualities Doody lists in the second sentence quoted are those that Duck needs, and aims at. Furthermore, a poet seeking to mingle rural labouring experiences with the Popean stylistic medium would find that the latter lacked *any* alternative vocabulary for describing the rural world. The pastoral, like the georgic, was both a genre and a mode, in that one might set out to write a pastoral *poem*, or a passage in a pastoral *style*, within the context of a different 'kind' of poem. *Windsor Forest* is not,

generically speaking, a pastoral. Given Pope's stated view that pastoral should not be set in England, it could not be. Yet in *Windsor Forest* Pope repeatedly utilises the *same* pastoral vocabulary to describe England that he uses to write of the supposedly placeless Arcadia. *Windsor Forest* is a landscape of "Groves" (e.g. ll.17), "Plains" (e.g. ll.11, 23, 152), "Shades" (e.g. ll.22, 161, 166), "Swains" (e.g. ll.93, 369), and "Nymphs" (e.g. ll.19, 171), where Pan, Flora and Ceres are in evidence (ll.37-9). Even England itself is "Albion" (e.g. ll.106, 315, 321). As befitting the celebratory tone of the georgic, the labour undertaken is performed by happy swains, like the "joyful Reaper" (l.40; see also ll.93-4, 369-70).[45]

The nature of pastoral became hotly contested with the outbreak of hostilities between Pope and Philips. The latter's Fontenelle-influenced 'rationalist' pastorals naturally provoked critical comparison of the rival philosophies, but when Tickell's (anonymously published) essays appeared praising Fontenelle in *The Guardian* in 1713,[46] illustrating the argument with examples from Philips' verses, the slighted Pope was stung into a retort. This manifested itself in a now notorious mock-essay by Pope (in *The Guardian* 40, after Steele, the editor, was tricked into publication) praising Philips yet evidencing these mock claims with some of the latter's most inelegant writing. For good measure, these examples were then contrasted with examples of Pope's work unquestionably casting him in the superior light.[47]

Although the rationalist pastoral avoided the awkward inconsistency of setting seen in Pope, there were still some incongruities, not least that the climate in England is rarely suited to the pastoral ideal.[48] Nonetheless, the rationalist pastoral was *not* radically different from its neo-classical counterpart. A recurring theme in pastoral is that of the shepherd in competition with the nightingale to produce the sweetest sounds, as in Philips' "The Fifth Pastoral" (1708).[49] Yet the familiar 'artificiality' of this passage is partly advertised by the fact that none of these shepherd swains are doing any work. Beyond this, the language, rhymes and technique employed by Philips are all conventionally 'artificial'. These rhymes are familiar to any reader of Pope: "reign" and "swain", "sing" and "spring", "again" and "strain", "strong" and "song", "strove" and "grove". The vocabulary of swains, strains and groves is equally familiar. Beyond this, we also have familiar poetic techniques intended to enhance the sound of the poem: alliteration, as in "pause by pause, with pride" (l.37), "sweetest songster" (l.49), and "fingers fly"; and assonance and consonance, as in "lagging spring"(l.22), with the repetition of the "g" sound. Appropriately enough, for a tale of

a swain competing with a nightingale to produce sweeter sounds, this is highly musical; it is precisely *because* musicality is of the utmost importance in pastoral that such 'battles' are recurrently popular.

Elsewhere the disparity between the rationalist pastoral and its neo-classical counterpart can be more apparent, as in Thenot's speech to Colinet in Philips' "The Second Pastoral" (1708, ll.129-38).[50] Despite some unusually specific references, such as to "New milk, and clouted cream, mild cheese and curd" (l.131), as Lawson notes, in 'rationalist' pastoral

> The essence of the countryside might creep in ... without becoming the subject of the poem; the conventions and spirit of the pastoral could likewise appear in the rural without being the thing that the poet celebrates.[51]

As stated earlier, the result is a kind of illusion, giving the appearance of concern with the 'real' countryside whilst really just as focused on the familiar pastoral tropes as its neo-classical alternative: "The Second Pastoral" is dominated by Colinet's grief for the lost Sabrina. As Barrell and Bull note, 'rationalist' pastoral begins "to liberate the Pastoral from the confines of classicism",[52] but little more.

Despite the impressive array of those who appeared to (at least partially) disagree with Pope's position, critics have often accepted that he had the better of the 'pastoral wars' with Philips.[53] Crucially, however, "the neo-classicist and the rationalist did agree on several points – that pastoral must be simple and dignified, avoiding courtly wit on one side and rustic clownishness on the other; *and that hard work of any kind was banned*"[54] (my italics). One need only consult the original writings of Fontenelle that inspired the 'rationalist' school to appreciate how far 'naturalist' pastoral was from any inclination to depict the labour later poeticised by Duck.[55] As Lawson, who identifies poets including Duck and Bloomfield with Hesiod,[56] summarises, "The rural poet differs from the pastoralist ... because his first concern is the things, folk, and events of the countryside which are important *in themselves*" (my italics).[57]

If Pope's (and, for that matter, Philips') pastorals are at one end of a continuum in their presentation of rustics, Swift's "Pastoral Dialogue",[58] a clear anti-pastoral, locates him at the other. Although the (Irish) characters are the 'realistically' named Dermot and Sheelagh, and the diction – including "Nymph", "Swain", "sweetly flowing Strain" – purports to be 'pastoral', the subject matter includes bums

(ll.20, 52), sweat (l.24), lice (ll.34, 46) and unfaithfulness (ll.37-49). The implication is that it is absurd to think of making poetry out of 'real' rustic life. It is between the extremes provided by Pope and Philips, and Swift, that a particularly problematic, though relevant, contribution to the ongoing pastoral debate, Gay's *The Shepherd's Week*, can be best located and defined.

Controversy surrounding Gay's poem has not been confined to his own age: for many years there has been an influential view that it is a satire on the naturalist / rationalist school, written at Pope's instigation; yet Doody, Nokes and Fairer have all argued this view does not acknowledge the poem's double-edged nature, and that Gay satirises Pope as much as anyone. These critics argue that in some ways Gay's pastorals are actually the truest to Theocritus of any English writer, containing much of the latter's bucolic roughness.[59] Loughrey sums up a widely held view in arguing that *The Shepherd's Week* is "the earliest and probably the best mock-pastoral, which parodies Philips's style by selectively presenting the grosser aspect of rural life, yet describes country scenes with a vivacity that many have enjoyed for its own sake."[60] It is a crucial point that, just as *Trivia* conveys a certain sympathy with ordinary people on the streets,[61] *The Shepherd's Week* displays sympathy with rural people. One of the issues Gay raises is that of how difficult it is to write seriously of ordinary rustic life in verse, because of pastoral convention.

He prefaces *The Shepherd's Week* with "The Proeme to the Courteous Reader", in which he claims:

> *Other Poet travailing in this plain High-way know I none. Yet, certes, such it behoveth a Pastoral to be, as Nature in the Country affordeth; and the Manners also meetly copied from the rustical Folk therein. In this also my Love to my native Country* Britain *much pricketh me forward, to describe aright the Manners of our own honest and laborious Plough-men, in no wise sure more unworthy a* British *Poet's imitation, than those of* Sicily *or* Arcadie; *albeit, not ignorant I am, what a Rout and Rabblement of Critical Gallimawfry hath been made of late Days by certain Young Men of insipid Delicacy, concerning, I wist not what,* Golden Age, *and other outrageous Conceits, to which they would confine Pastoral.*[62]

Right from the outset the satire directed at Philips, clear enough in the above to require no further comment, is tempered by an equal satire directed at Pope,[63] and indeed at *pastoral itself*. As Doody argues:

> … Pope, chief upholder of the Golden Age, is a chief perpetrator of the "*I wist not what.*" He must be the foremost "*young Man of insipid Delicacy*" contributing to the "*Critical Gallimawfry*" … no other contemporary writer of pastorals could consider himself kindly treated by this "Proeme"… It is a kind of manifesto, a declaration that the pastoral genre (and hence serious critical introductions to new sets of pastorals, in Pope's manner) must be considered absurd.[64]

As Doody continues, "The mock-mock-mock levels of the "Proeme" guide us inescapably to the view that pastorals are all imitations … of an unreality. The genre is an absurdity, and the only way to manage it is to get out of it, to mix up its manners and question its conventions … Reality and pastoral are shown to be mutually exclusive."[65]

Gay neither returns to the language of classical poetry, nor makes his shepherds speak a 'realistic' dialect, but instead effectively invents one:

> *That principally, courteous reader, whereof I would have thee to be advised, (seeing I depart from the vulgar usage) is touching the language of my shepherds; which is, soothly to say, such as is neither spoken by the country maiden nor the courtly dame; nay, not only such as in the present times is not uttered, but was never uttered in times past: and if I judge aright, will never be uttered in times future. It having too much of the country to be fit for the court, too much of the court to be fit for the country; too much of the language of old times to be fit for the present, too much of the present to have been fit for the old, and too much of both to be fit for any time to come.*[66]

Even in "The Proeme", "a Man may speak Truth with a smiling Countenance" (as Fielding would have expressed it).[67] This is not *just* mockery of Philips and the 'naturalistic' school, but pastiche Spenser (hence the mock Elizabethan diction throughout), suggesting (ironically) that Gay too needs to include a statement of self-justification.[68] Gay's 'invention' of a new language places him, with deliberate irony, squarely in the English pastoral tradition. He deviates from this tradition both in his honesty in admitting what he is doing openly, and in that his 'invented' language differs markedly from that of other English pastoral poets. The – quite serious – difficulty for Gay is that if the dialogue of his shepherds is too sophisticated, he will put a language into their mouths that they would never speak; if his dialogue is too close to the vernacular he will, by definition, alienate readers. Hence he opts for the kind of 'invented' language described at some length in "The Proeme", containing aspects of both extremes.

As Loughrey was quoted noting above, many critics have found delight not just in Gay's satire, but in the vividness of his portrayals of country life. Fairer, for instance, contrasts Gay's "version of the traditional pastoral singing contest" in "Monday; or, The Squabble" (ll.83-8) with Pope's equivalent in "Spring" (ll.77-80), concluding that "Pope's neatly arranged ingredients (Spring, Autumn, Morn, Noon, Plains, Groves) seem lifeless and predictable. It is Buxoma, pranked out like a goldfinch, whom we remember."[69] Critics have not failed to notice, either, Gay's genuine interest in country superstitions. Nokes records the influence of

> ... D'Urfey, the despised collector of vulgar ballads and folk-songs ... [who] ... conspicuously pervades *The Shepherd's Week* ... Unlike Pope, Gay was never entirely happy ambitiously pursuing the Virgilian high road ... Gay may have found it diplomatic to present himself as a pretender to the Virgilian tradition, but his instinctive allegiance was to the voice of common experience which D'Urfey was not ashamed to present.[70]

An explicit example of such superstitions occurs in "Thursday; or, The Spell", in which Hobnelia recites her attempts to entrance the object of her affections, Lubberkin. They include getting up early on Valentine's Day to seek him out because of the superstition that "... the first swain we see, / In spite of fortune shall our true-love be" (ll.43-4); and finding a snail during the May-day fair in the belief that its "milk-white embers" will spell the name of her love:

> Slow crawl'd the snail, and if I right can spell,
> In the soft ashes mark'd a curious *L*:
> Oh, may this wondrous omen lucky prove!
> For *L* is found in *Lubberkin* and *Love*.[71]

Each verse is separated by the refrain "With my sharp heel I three times mark the ground, / And turn me thrice around, around, around." Subsequent superstitions involve giving two hazel nuts names, and throwing them in the fire to see if the name of one's sweetheart burns brightest; and plucking peascods, to take home and use for casting a love spell. As in "Friday", discussed presently, Gay provides a glimpse of real feeling. The paradox is that he names both the character and the object of her affections in burlesque terms – "Hobnelia" and "Lubberkin" – emphasising their *coarseness*; yet this is far from an unsympathetic portrayal. Had Gay wanted to invite us to feel superior to Hobnelia, he would surely have portrayed her doing something far more demeaning. Throughout the poem, the misfortunes that befall the

protagonists are universal, human ones, emphasising our commonality with them; it is their names that remind us of their pastoral 'otherness', and that writing of rustics with seriousness and respect is effectively precluded whether one writes pastoral, anti-pastoral or mock-pastoral. The linguistic differences between a passage such as ll.37-60 of "Thursday", and 'artificial' pastoral, are considerable. As Fairer notes, Gay revels in the specific and everyday so much that he includes in original editions of the poem "An Alphabetical Catalogue of ... material Things mentioned by this Author."[72]

In "Friday; Or, The Dirge", burlesque meets both empathy and the particular, as Bumkinet learns from Grubbinol of Blouzelinda's death (ll.27-68). With pejorative names like "Bumkinet" and "Grubbinol" it is obviously hard to take this entirely seriously; then again, whilst characters' names are intended to provoke mirth, Bumkinet's speech is worthy of serious attention. A 'high burlesque' style is much in evidence in lines like "There I remember how her faggots large, / Were frequently these happy shoulders charge" (ll.47-8), and "Lament, ye swine, in grunting spend your grief, / For you, like me, have lost your sole relief." (ll.67-8). There is also the deliberate mockery of the pathetic fallacy, "And winds shall moan aloud – when loud they blow / Henceforth, as oft as autumn shall return, / The dropping trees, when'er it rains, shall mourn" (ll.36-8). Yet the mockery is directed towards form and style. Lines such as "As the wood pigeon cooes without his mate, / So shall my doleful dirge bewail her fate" (ll.29-30), and the final lines of Bumkinet's elegy, "*Here* Blouzelinda *lyes – Alas, alas! / Weep shepherds – and remember flesh is grass*" (l.92), approach real poignancy. As Fairer notes,

> Gay turns much to laughter, but ... The lament of Bumkinet and Grubbinol for the dead Blouzelinda ... remains moving because it bridges the gap between the conventions of pastoral elegy and the unpromising ingredients of Blouzelinda's life. Gay does not attempt to 'raise' her by suppressing indecorous material.[73]

L.92 reminds us again of the universality of the emotions depicted, in appropriating a well-known line – "flesh is grass" – of such currency that it occurs in both the Bible (1 Peter 1.24) and even an old rustic May carol ("The life of man is but a span, / Remember flesh is grass").[74] This is an apt passage with which to demonstrate how torn Gay is over the issue of rusticity – the two extremes to which he feels drawn are both represented. There is a diverse vocabulary in this extract, one of the densest in *The Shepherd's Week* in its descriptions of authentic country objects and processes,

that would not appear in neo-classical pastoral, and would appear in naturalist pastoral only to provide the illusion of a 'real' background.[75] Yet as Nokes argues, the inclusion of such vocabulary in the poem is *not* satiric in intention. Discussing a passage similarly rich in everyday vocabulary, in "Tuesday; or The Ditty", he argues,

> ...the general effect of these lines is not bathetic or ironic, but rather lyrical in their richly sensuous evocation of the tastes and smells, the sounds of rustic life. The suggestion of dialect ... is not a self-conscious piece of parody or a deliberate piece of literary slumming to draw attention to the affected archaisms and regionalisms of Philips' verse ... They are part of a genuinely affectionate portrait, as Gay strives ... to recreate the authentic character of rural life. [76]

The exact nature of the relationship of *The Shepherd's Week* to pastoral remains problematic. For Fairer, " 'mock-' or 'anti-pastoral' is ... the opening out for display of its ironic potential as a mode defined by what it excludes", and Gay, therefore, merely opens up a gap that Pope had tried to close.[77] On this basis, Gay "works with the pastoral grain, not against it", and the poem was "as Goldsmith recognized, in 'the true spirit of pastoral poetry. In fact he more resembles Theocritus than any other English pastoral writer.' "[78] Even for Doody, for whom the poem is absurd because the *pastoral itself* is an absurdity, "Gay is the great practitioner in the pastoral mode", who "succeeds by the Augustan process of subversion",[79] and "Gay's pastoral poems ... are real poems, with real pastoral strengths, though these are used to unmake the convention itself."[80] For Nokes, *The Shepherd's Week* "remind[s] us of the real underlying facts and rhythms of rural life which give a sustaining animation to what would otherwise be a meretricious display of parodies. The rhythms of birth, copulation, death; the rising and setting of the sun; the alternation of happiness and despair, summer and winter."[81]

In "The Proeme" Gay claims, however tongue in cheek, to be the first worthy and linguistically faithful (English) heir to Theocritus. Likewise he expresses admiration for Spenser's decision to divide his pastorals into twelve monthly instalments yet not write about the seasonal differences themselves, and does the same. This itself is an excellent example of the double-edged nature of Gay's enterprise. He satirises the claims of those like Pope who purport to follow in the tradition of *all* previous major pastoralists without appreciating that this cannot be done without contradiction, and yet tries, however playfully, to at least match the best

attempts in this line himself. He does this at the same time as satirising the whole genre, including even his *own* attempts. In doing so he differentiates his enterprise markedly, of course, from those later attempted by the poets of labour such as Duck. Although Gay's pastorals are infused with everyday vocabulary, he does not describe physical labour in evocative / mimetic detail and writes instead, for instance, of the shepherds' amorous attachments. In both of these senses, Gay's *are* Theocritean pastorals.

Doody in particular has argued that *The Shepherd's Week* was an enabling precursor of *The Thresher's Labour*:

> It was ... only a period which had produced something like Gay's pastorals that would take kindly to the work of Stephen Duck ... who gives us the unglamorous, fatiguing and even heartbreaking aspects of true rural labour ... [what results] ... sounds not unlike Gay in rhythm and arrangement of sentence elements along the verse lines, as well as in the introduction of commonplace rural things of concern to country workers ... such a change from the pastoral notion of things is presumably assisted or even in a sense caused by the intervention of Gay, and the "killing off" of the pastoral high style along with the introduction of common English things, unromanticized.[82]

What a comparative reading of Pope, Philips, Swift and Gay shows, and what Doody suggests, is a certain unease and sense of disequilibrium in the pastoral medium. If set in the remote past, pastoral inevitably seemed remote; so situating it (if only by implication) in the familiar English countryside must have seemed an obvious antidote. To do so risked discordance, however. Hence both Swift (with contempt) and Gay (with affection) noted that English country labourers were nothing like the pastoral ideal. All four poets convey, in their different ways, a latent sense that there was a subject matter that the medium could not reach. This is the nature of the space that opens up, waiting to be filled. That it does so is also partly because the second classical 'kind' that was an influence on Duck's project, the georgic, likewise left this space vacant.

II: The Georgic

> The Subject, Sir, cannot be made poetical. How can a man write poetically of serges and druggets?[83]

The above remark, attributed to Johnson on John Dyer's georgic *The Fleece*, goes to the heart of the difficulty even educated poets in the Augustan period had in writing with respect about physical labour and the everyday. I will here consider two poets who attempted to do so using the georgic, Dyer and Robert Dodsley, before turning to a brief consideration of the georgic arguably most influential upon Duck, James Thomson's *The Seasons*.

Dodsley's *Agriculture*, Dyer's *The Fleece*, and *The Seasons* were written, or at least begun, within a period of fifteen to twenty years.[84] The first two have been selected because of their similarity of theme with poems by labouring writers considered subsequently, allowing for direct comparison. By contrast, *The Seasons* is not a formal georgic; whereas Dyer and Dodsley focus primarily on describing / recommending labouring processes, and nature is a secondary concern, in Thomson's poem these priorities are reversed. For this reason it will be considered separately. As with the pastoral, my focus is primarily on explicating both similarities and differences between the Duckian project and those of the writers of georgic.

<u>Dyer and Dodsley</u>

> Georgic:
>
> ...means literally "a poem about farming", and all examples of the genre derive from Virgil, whose *Georgics*, written basically as a treatise on Italian agriculture, showed an extraordinary vitality in the eighteenth century, and inspired a number of important poems which were often remote from any practical purpose, although others were seriously didactic in intention.[85]

Chalker classes *The Fleece*, for his purposes, in this latter category. He defines such poems as 'Formal Georgics', those

> ... which deal with some aspect of husbandry and are conscious attempts to reproduce the essential structural features of the Georgic ... These poems are all seriously didactic: the advice that they give derives from contemporary farming manuals and the authors are clearly interested in practical agricultural matters. But they also have a strong literary motive, and emphasize frequently the "imitative" aspect of their work.[86]

Chalker lists the four most "important" examples of the genre as John Philips' *Cyder* (1708); Christopher Smart's *The Hop-Garden* (1752); Dyer's *The Fleece* (1757); and

John Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* (1764).[87] Dodsley's *Agriculture* should also be placed in this category, even if his position on the fringes of the canon presumably meant that Chalker overlooked it. It is this particular "strong literary motive" – to imitate the genre of Virgil's *Georgics* – that in part sets its exponents apart from the labouring writers examined in following chapters. Both groups wish to dignify labour, but their methods of doing so vary.

Chalker asserts that "one way of reading Virgil's *Georgics* is to look upon it as a poem containing both epic and mundane elements with mock-heroic acting as a mediator between the two".[88] Virgil's aim was a serious didactic treatise, albeit in a laudatory, celebratory manner, that praised not just labour but also his country. The poem is ambitious, impressive in sheer scope, and spans a great amount of information on a range of topics. The version apparently known to Duck was Dryden's translation (presumably an important source for prospective poets with little knowledge of Latin themselves). Book I mixes instruction, advice, descriptions of labour and its processes, history and mythology (partly what Chalker means by the poem's "epic" elements). Following a dedication to the gods, it details work done by a ploughman, and then moves to the "mundane" in the shape of a passage on agricultural implements:

> Nor must we pass untold what arms they wield,
> Who labour tillage and the furrowed field –
> Without whose aid the ground her corn denies,
> And nothing can be sown, and nothing rise –
> The crooked plough, the share, the towering height
> Of wagons, and the cart's unwieldy weight,
> The sled, the tumbril, hurdles, and the flail,
> The fan of Bacchus, with the flying sail –
> These all must be prepared, if ploughmen hope
> The promised blessing of a bounteous crop.[89]

There is plainly specificity in the above, offering hope that the particularities of rural life *could* be translated into verse. This concern with elegance suggests, however, that in the version with which Duck was familiar it must have seemed that, at times, there was significant distance between the 'reality' of agricultural labour and its poetic representation: Dryden follows this passage with the couplet "I could be long in precepts, but I fear / So mean a subject might offend your ear." [90] This concern with

justifying the fitness of labour for literary dignity by 'dressing it up' in an elegant veneer would become a recurrent feature of the English formal georgic.

Both Dyer and Dodsley exhibit genuine enthusiasm, communicating detailed information to their readers. Either their original knowledge was extensive, or they expended great effort in conducting additional research; one suspects both. The sheer scale of their enterprise clearly parallels Virgil's. The following passage on the construction of a loom from *The Fleece* illuminates some of these points further:

> From some thick wood the carpenter selects
> A slender oak, or beech of glossy trunk,
> Or saplin ash: he shapes the sturdy beam,
> The posts, and treadles; and the frame combines.
> The smith with iron screws, and plated hoops, 115
> Confirms the strong machine, and gives the bolt
> That strains the roll. To these the turner's lathe
> And graver's knife, the hollow shuttle add.[91]

This description shows that the georgic *could* attain the specific, everyday vocabulary of the Duckian mode (albeit rarely). The gap between everyday diction and the vocabulary of the poem is narrowed much more than usual in the above because of the (industrial) subject matter. There are no classical or euphemistic equivalents for the "treadles", "frame", "iron screws", "plated hoops", "strong machine", "bolt", "roll", "turner's lathe" or "hollow shuttle" described. Even here, differences persist: written in the third rather than the first person,[92] it lacks a certain immediacy and informality in comparison with Duck's work. On the other hand, any such lack is partially compensated for by thoroughness: no detail is omitted that might add to our understanding. We are told the precise kinds of tree the carpenter selects from, and even the kinds of screws and hoops used.

Agriculture likewise includes many passages of great detail. According to Dodsley's prefatory "Argument", the third canto, for instance, deals with "... hay-making. A method of preserving hay from being mow-burnt, or taking fire ... harvest, and the harvest-home ... Apples. Hops. Hemp. Flax. Coals. Fuller's-earth. Stone. Lead. Tin. Iron. Dyer's Herbs. Esculents. Medicinals. Transitions from the cultivation of the earth to the care of sheep, cattle and horse ... feeding sheep ... their diseases. Sheep-shearing ... improving the breed ... the dairy and its products ... horses".[93] The following passage concerns "various manures, and other methods of improving lands":

From ashes strew'd around, let the damp soil
Their nitrous salts imbibe. Scour the deep ditch
From its black sediment; and from the street
Its trampled mixtures rake. Green standing pools,
Large lakes, or meadows rank, in rotted heaps 160
Of unripe weeds, afford a cool manure.
From Ocean's verge, if not too far remov'd,
Its shelly sands convey a warm compost,
From land and wave commixt, with richness fraught:
This the sour glebe shall sweeten, and for years, 165
Thro' chilly clay, its vigorous heat shall glow. (II: ll.156-66)

The depth of knowledge is again impressive. At that time few educated men[94] could have been familiar with such subjects; and few from a humbler station in life would have had Dodsley's literacy, or confidence to poeticise their knowledge. A few lines and phrases apart – "Their nitrous salts imbibe" – the poet achieves a dense everyday vocabulary, passing on valuable advice about a rural issue of vital importance. The annual harvest was an event of a magnitude difficult now to comprehend – if it failed whole communities would starve, either because of simple lack of food, or because the landowner could not or would not pay his labourers. Improving the soil to increase the chances of success was therefore crucial (and merits, as Goodridge is quoted arguing below, epic status). Whereas Duck's verse might emphasise this context, though, there is no such attempt in Dodsley's – just the advice / information itself, as befitting the prescriptive function of georgic.

There are, then, fundamental differences between Duck and the writers of formal georgic, in terms not just of style, but of subject matter and intent. Duck writes about work by describing his own experiences of manual labour; Dyer and Dodsley mix descriptions of labour with history, geography and even digressions on the nature of the soil the farmer tills. Their intentions seem (at least) two-fold. The first aim, as mentioned, is to convey technical information. The second aim is grander. Dyer and Dodsley seek to legitimise the study of topics as diverse as wool combing and hay making as worthy material for verse (to "make special" in Dissanayake's useful phrase). In many ways their work represents a further remove from Duck's. The latter wanted to present labouring rural experience as deserving of literary dignity; Dyer and Dodsley want to move beyond even this and intellectualise the science of agriculture in a manner comparable with Pope's summation of the current understanding of philosophy and theology in *Essay On Man*, worth turning to by way of analogy.

In writing the poem Pope was harking back to the classical models of scientific treatises in verse provided by Lucretius. Pope's theme is the providence of God, and how everyone and everything fits into the Divine Plan:

> Look round our World; behold the chain of Love
> Combining all below and all above.
> See plastic Nature working to this end,
> The single atoms each to other tend,
> Attract, attracted to, the next in place
> Form'd and impell'd its neighbour to embrace.
> See Matter next, with various life endu'd,
> Press to one centre still, the gen'ral Good.
> See dying vegetables life sustain,
> See life dissolving vegetate again:
> All forms that perish other forms supply,
> (By turns we catch the vital breath, and die)
> Like bubbles on the sea of Matter born,
> They rise, they break, and to that sea return.[95]

Even rotting vegetables have a place in the grand plan because fertilizer helps new life to flourish. Agriculture is a microcosm of the Divine Pattern. It is a science that can be studied separately in which everything has its own place, though interdependent with everything else. Dyer or Dodsley might describe how a farmer uses a hoe in the belief that if we can understand how this done, then we understand a little more of the grand plan; when Duck describes how he used an agricultural implement – such as a flail – it is a recollection of a particular instance of having done so, and of what the experience was like, how tired it made him etc.

Goodridge suggests that Dyer (and, by extension, other writers of formal georgic) were embroiled in an enterprise which licensed, and even necessitated an epic manner:

> If in the eighteenth century, as may fairly be argued, the ability of the nation to survive and flourish depended to a great extent on the ability of landowners and farmers to supply large amounts of inexpensive mutton to the capital, and large amounts of wool to the textile industry and thence to the world, then 'The care of sheep' might indeed become an epic theme.[96]

This claim complements the previous reading. As Goodridge notes, one of Dyer's "ideological tools" was the "rationalistic 'benevolent' Christianity he had learned with the help of John Hough, Bishop of Worcester".[97] This "rationalistic" Christianity sponsors the investigation of themes such as agriculture and the wool trade, as gifts

from God and part of His design, rightfully making an important contribution to the national economy. Dyer's enterprise consists of explicating and celebrating (and even idealising) this theme. It also accounts for his frequent, patriotic digressions[98] and highlights how Dyer's enterprise was profoundly different in some respects from Duck's.

The extent to which Dyer and Dodsley are embroiled in a *similar* enterprise to Duck and Collier centres on the common realisation that work merits literary dignity. All thoroughly appreciate the potential of labour as a subject. Beyond this, the aims and intentions of Dyer and Dodsley on the one hand, and Duck, Collier and other poets of labour examined in this study, diverge. If one broadens the survey of those who, up until this time, had sought to write of labour seriously, the aims and intentions only diverge all the more. This can be observed with reference to an early manifestation of labour as a topic in English poetry, Tusser's *Five Hundreth Good Pointes of Husbandrie.*[99] They include material as diverse as a monthly check list of things to be done around the farm, details of the farmer's daily diet, advice on growing herbs, fruit trees and flowers, accounts of mole-catching, sheep shearing, the arts of baking and brewing, and tips on the education of children. A glance at his verse, though, reveals an antithetical manner to that of Dyer and Dodsley.[100] Notwithstanding that Tusser writes doggerel whereas Dyer and Dodsley write in the loftiest manner they can manage, there is a similarity between all three on account of their near-obsessive enthusiasm for their subject, which often manifests itself in an urge to record what seems like trivial minutiae. Beyond this, their respective styles really are at opposite ends of the spectrum. On this scale, with Tusser as one extreme, and Dyer and Dodsley as the other, one would be compelled to place Duck and Collier somewhere between them. Dyer and Dodsley take the greatest risks; because what they attempt is on the largest scale, so there is more at stake in their work. If Duck or Collier fail, then they fail in an attempt to poeticise the experiences of themselves and their co-labourers; if Dyer and Dodsley fail, they fail to illuminate a small aspect of God's plan.

It is because of the difference in Dyer and Dodsley's intentions that their enterprise encounters different linguistic challenges. Potentially, there was nothing problematic about adopting a grand manner and language to write about, for instance, Agriculture (with a capital 'A') as a part of the great chain of being. The georgic, however, by definition, particularises. As soon as one begins to examine an area of

the great chain of being in detail, then specificity inevitably intrudes, and whilst Agriculture itself is not 'humble', particular aspects are. Inevitably difficulties are encountered and what is produced looks odd, because it is pioneering in trying to challenge accepted conventions.

During his commentary on the attempt to draw up a set of rules for the georgic form, Chalker quotes from Addison's "Essay on the Georgics", and the claim that the "lowness" of the georgic poet's subject matter may debase his style and "betray him into a meanness of expression".[101] By way of illustration, Chalker makes use again of Johnson's remarks concerning the literary 'faux pas'. Johnson criticised Shakespeare for the lines "That my keen knife see not the wound it makes, / Nor Heaven peep through the blanket of the dark, / To cry, "Hold, hold!"..."[102] by arguing that the speech's sentiment:

> ... is weakened by the name of an instrument used by butchers and cooks in the meanest of employments; we do not immediately conceive that any crime of importance is to be committed with a *knife* ... Who does not, at last, from the long habit of connecting a knife with sordid offices, feel an aversion rather than a terror? ... while I endeavour to impress on my reader the energy of the sentiment, I can scarce check my risibility, when the expression forces itself upon my mind; for who, without some relaxation of his gravity, can hear of avengers of guilt "peeping through a blanket"?[103]

Johnson's ideas about the incorporation of the everyday into art – far from unique (see below) – are here responsible for his failure to appreciate Shakespeare's shifts of perspective. They may perhaps be summed up as the view that "Associations derived from "sordid offices" debase the higher kinds of poetry and lead to a ludicrous and unavoidable descent from the elevated to the commonplace".[104] Addison states that

> ... nothing which is a Phrase or Saying in common talk, should be admitted into a serious Poem; because it takes off from the solemnity of the expression, and gives it too great a turn of familiarity: Much less ought the low phrases and terms of art, that are adapted to Husbandry, have any place in such a work as the Georgic, which is not to appear in the natural simplicity and nakedness of its subject, but in the pleasantest dress that Poetry can bestow on it. Thus Virgil, to deviate from the common form of words, would not make use of *Tempore* but *Sydere* in his first verse; and every where else abounds with Metaphors, Grecisms, and Circumlocutions, to give his verse the greater pomp, and preserve it from sinking into a Plebeian stile.[105]

According to the criteria above – and Addison's influence was considerable[106] – Duck's efforts would be condemned for "admitting into a serious Poem" too many "Phrases or sayings in common talk", whilst not presenting his material in the "pleasantest dress that Poetry can bestow on it". Indeed, Keegan has argued that *The Thresher's Labour* was a specific attempt to dispute Addison's prescriptions,[107] according to which Dyer would, of course, meet the same fate as Duck, for giving his subject matter "too great a turn of familiarity". Dyer did meet such objections,[108] and the poem was not popular in its day. Apart from Johnson's criticisms, as influential a figure as Horace Walpole wrote to Sir David Dalrymple on February 3, 1760 that he thought *The Fleece* "a very insipid poem ... His Fleece I could never get through ..."[109]

In short, one could write about farming / agriculture / labour in the georgic, but only by abstracting the subject matter to the extent that much of the necessary vocabulary is removed. Hence some have seen both *The Fleece* and *Agriculture* as "faintly absurd and sterile off-shoots of Augustan orthodoxy",[110] a point echoed by Tim Fulford when he notes that in *The Fleece*, Dyer risked "bathos as a gap opened between his mundane subject matter and his epic diction."[111] This is profoundly unfortunate: Dyer and Dodsley write from experience, are enthusiastic and believe their subject matter worthy of great respect. There is a sense of substance in what they write, and the contrast in this respect with the 'artificial' pastorals discussed earlier is notable. Whilst 'mixing modes' can be generally dangerous, they were unfortunate to be working against a backdrop of at least some ideas about the incorporation of everyday language into literature that later, rightly, came to appear unwarranted.

Certainly there are contradictions in style and vocabulary. Whereas Duck points predominantly to local places / landmarks, Dyer often refers to more impressive locations, both contemporary and classical: "Shobden", "Siluria" (twice),[112] "Falernum", "Vesuvius", "Herculanean" and "Pompeian" in I: ll.55-66 alone. In the preceding twenty lines one finds "Banstead", "Dorcestrian", "Dover", "Normanton", "Sarum", "Stonehenge", "Ross". A list of all those places, landmarks, nationalities and peoples mentioned in the first book of *The Fleece* alone would include another thirty or forty entries, many in Latin. The aim is to universalise by means of a panoramic view; agriculture is important the world over. The places and landmarks, however, are far from the only indications of a 'formal' style in this passage. There is also the generalised vocabulary associated with pastoral: the

"spacious plain", the "leas" and "purple groves". Throughout there are many references to "swains", and words like "verdure" and "herbage" recur instead of less formal alternatives. This paradox of traditionally pastoral language in a poem dealing with 'un-pastoral' themes persists both in *The Fleece* and *Agriculture*. At times pastoral language is used in the midst of a descriptive passage dealing with the least 'pastoral' themes possible, and alongside language never normally used in a pastoral context.

Like *The Fleece*, *Agriculture* wears its classicism proudly. Numerous extracts, including I: ll.56-65, attempt to reproduce the kind of musical effects referred to in the above section on pastoral. The lengthy pastoral interludes that both poets introduce betray a similar impression of their priorities to 'imitate'. A (pastoral) passage from *The Fleece* such as I: ll.627-38 includes muses, "carols sweet", shepherds, "venerable" swains, the 'artificially' named Damon and Colin (who subsequently replies to the former in ll.639-46), and a 'conversation' about how much better life must be in the country than in the town. Dyer presumably chooses to insert the passage at this point in the poem because Book One is devoted to the care of sheep, but even this is a contradiction. Since no variation of pastoral portrays the realities of rural labour, a section on the care of sheep is really the *least* appropriate place for a lengthy pastoral diversion. A (selective) list of topics covered prior to this, as described by Dyer in his 'Argument', reads: "Different kinds of English sheep: the two common sorts of rams described. Different kinds of foreign sheep; The several sorts of food; Care of sheep in tupping time; Of the castration of lambs; Of sheep-shearing".[113] Following this material, the decision to incorporate a – predominantly – 'artificial' pastoral interlude seems bizarre. This continual shifting of styles that will not comfortably co-exist goes to the heart of the reasons for the accusations of absurdity levelled at the authors of formal (English) georgic.

At the other extreme, there are often passages that contain traditional pastoral language, themes and imagery *alongside* the 'un-pastoral', and even passages like little else in verse at the time. Such latter extracts use specific, learned and scientific terminology in a manner found in neither Pope nor Duck. An extended passage on maladies that befall sheep, and on possible cures from *The Fleece* (I: ll.285-302) makes for an apt example. It includes vocabulary such as "Th'infectious scab" (l.285), "sodden stave-acre" (l.287), and "Norwegian tar" (l.288); and the periphrastic forms of the proposed remedies are equally conspicuous. Even in this passage, though,

conventionally 'artificial' pastoral language – "humble swain" (l.297) – intrudes. *Agriculture*, too, has more than its share of passages that mix formal and less traditional styles; for instance, the lengthy later passage returning to the subject of Patty and Thyrsis (III: ll.372-87, 401-11). A clear difference crystallises between the poetry of labour identified by this study, and formal georgic: because of their different aims, the former mingles the commonplaces of neo-classical versification with everyday, informal (though specific) diction; the formal georgic mingles such verse conventions (incorporating a predominantly formal diction) with an equally specific, but *scientific / technical* vocabulary.[114]

The following passage from *Agriculture* develops some of these points:

> For due reception of the fibrous roots:
> But from the streams of ordure, from the stench
> Of putrefaction, from stercoreous fumes 70
> Of rottenness and filth, can sweetness spring?
> Or grateful, or salubrious food to man?
> As well might virgin innocence preserve
> Her purity from taint, amid the stews.
> Defile not then the freshness of thy field 75
> With dung's polluting touch; but let the plough,
> The hoe, the harrow, and the roller, lend
> Their better powers, to fructifie the soil;
> Turn it to catch the sun's prolific ray,
> Th' enlivening breath of air, the genial dews, 80
> And every influence of indulgent heaven.
> These shall enrich and fertilize the glebe,
> And Toil's unceasing hand full well supply
> The dunghill's sordid and extraneous aid. (II: ll.68-84)

There are several extremely unusual things here. The obvious comparison with *The Fleece* I: ll.285-302 lies in the mixture of the language conventionally seen in 'artificial' pastoral with a small sample of everyday, rural vocabulary: "virgin innocence preserve / Her purity from taint", "the sun's prolific ray", "the genial dews", "indulgent heaven" and "the glebe" (if not the preceding verb) could all be 'at home' in a conventional pastoral setting. Alongside, we have everyday language that we would expect to find in the verse of the poets of labour: "plough", "harrow", "hoe" and "roller". There is the additional inclusion, however, of a vocabulary not found elsewhere in Augustan verse, the 'un-pastoral', or 'anti-pastoral' elements, expressed in formal, technical language: "ordure", "stench", "putrefaction", "stercoreous

fumes", "rottenness", "filth", "dung's polluting touch", "The dunghill's sordid and extraneous aid".

The mixing of modes can also have unfortunate consequences for the tone of the formal georgics, an issue bound up with the question of *audience*. *The Fleece* is effectively written for the simultaneous benefit of two different audiences, yet does not appeal to either in its entirety. Presumably farmers themselves would have learned from the abundance of agricultural literature available from the early seventeenth century onwards.[115] Much of Dyer's material, however, is so practical and detailed that it surely would have been of more interest to farmers themselves than to any more 'learned' audience. A relatively rare instance of the author ostensibly addressing somebody directly occurs in I: ll.185-7: "Ye shepherds, if your labours hope success, / Be first your purpose to procure a breed / To soil and clime adapted." Whilst Duck writes in an informal, amiable tone, Dyer is *not* generally able to achieve this when writing for his peers – gentleman sheep farmers.[116]

It is also difficult for Dyer to incorporate local, vernacular detail. From biographical sources we learn that Dyer was a farm manager for many years and that much of the material of the poem is likely based on his own experiences. His ability to articulate direct personal experience is effectively curtailed, however. A rare example of the introduction of vernacular detail comes in the line, "In cold stiff soils the bleaters oft complain / Of gouty ails, by shepherds term'd the halt" (I: ll.274-5) Here Dyer gives us rural slang, the shepherds' own word for a particular ailment sheep suffer. Were Duck giving us this information, he would be able, of course, to write the line "...term'd by *us* the halt".

The challenge of formal georgic is one of assimilating the new, and that they confronted it does the poets who attempted the form credit. The great range of 'new', very detailed, knowledge could not always be communicated easily in traditional forms that had evolved for the purposes of achieving 'older' aims. This is seen just as clearly in a less formal georgic, like *The Seasons*, considered below. It is 'less formal' not because of a lesser intention to imitate the classics, but simply because it does not appear to be a generic imitation of Virgil's *Georgics*, for all of the latter's evident influence upon Thomson. If the georgic was an especially protean genre, Thomson perhaps steps outside it altogether.

Thomson

In the Introduction to what has become the authoritative modern edition of *The Seasons*, James Sambrook characterises it as a poem "which has never seemed to be easily assignable to any one of the genres".[117] Unlike the two formal georgics discussed, *The Seasons* takes for its theme the cycle of the natural world, a cycle in which labour necessarily plays a part; but it is the wonder of nature itself that is Thomson's real theme. Despite all its other influences, the poem does show a clear Virgilian bent in at least a number of ways:

> Virgil's thoughts on nature's secrets and rural retirement ... in the *Georgics* are echoed in *The Seasons*, but Thomson also draws upon Virgil's practical advice on husbandry, his myths, his patriotism, his exotic excursions, his anthropomorphic, mock-heroic accounts of beasts, and much else ... Thomson's loose linking of episodes, descriptions, and reflections along the narrative thread of a farmer's year from Spring ploughing to winter sports is georgical, though *The Seasons* is not prescriptive quite in Virgil's way.[118]

Thomson's poem is 'Virgilian' not so much in any aspect of its depiction of labour, as in the celebratory, laudatory quality of the "Panegyric on Great Britain" in "Summer"; a tendency found elsewhere in the oeuvre of this most nationalistic of writers, and notably in *Britannia* (1729), a major influence upon the patriotism of *The Fleece*.

"The Argument" of each Season in turn spans, amidst the focus on describing nature itself, a range of labouring activities. "Spring" features "*Ploughing. Sowing and Harrowing*" and "*A Landskip of the Shepherd tending his Flock, with Lambs frisking around him*".[119] "Summer" contains passages on "*Hay-making*" and "*Sheep-shearing*".[120] "Autumn" promises "*Reaping*" and "*The Harvest being gathered in, the Country dissolv'd in Joy*".[121] Amongst the topics covered, labour intrudes only a few times per Season against a backdrop of descriptions of insects and animals, fields and meadows, of the sun rising and setting. Despite this the poem seems to have galvanised and enthused subsequent labouring bards. Poets including Duck,[122] in the aftermath of its immediate publication, and even Bloomfield and Clare at the turn of the next century and beyond, were all admirers. If a poem as successful as Thomson's could incorporate (at least some) labour, it must have encouraged them to think that they could foreground this labour much more in their own verse.

A closer look at the depiction of labour in *The Seasons* may suggest how much Duck and others still had to do to adapt its example to the vein they sought. The extract following is on ploughing, sowing and harrowing from "Spring":

> FORTH fly the tepid Airs; and unconfin'd,
> Unbinding Earth, the moving Softness strays.
> Joyous, th'impatient Husbandmen perceives
> Relenting Nature, and his lusty Steers
> Drives from their Stalls, to where the well-us'd Plow
> Lies in the Furrow, loosen'd from the Frost.
> There, unrefusing to the harness'd Yoke,
> They lend their Shoulder, and begin their Toil,
> Chear'd by the simple Song and soaring Lark.
> Meanwhile, incumbent o'er the shining Share,
> The Master leans, removes th'obstructing Clay,
> Winds the whole Work, and sidelong lays the Glebe.
>
> WHITE, thro' the neighbouring Fields the Sower stalks,
> With measur'd Step; and, liberal, throws the Grain
> Into the faithful Bosom of the Ground.
> The Harrow follows harsh, and shuts the Scene. (ll.32-47)

There is a reasonably specific vocabulary here, largely devoid of the periphrasis often present in *The Fleece* and *Agriculture* – a "Plow", a "Furrow", a "Sower", "Grain" and "The Harrow". The celebratory tone, however, means that Thomson comes nowhere near the evocation of the scene Duck would shortly achieve, which is not a criticism of the former since this is not what he attempts. From Duck's point of view, though, it must have seemed that lengthy and involved labouring processes were summed up very quickly – they receive just fifteen lines in a section of the poem extending to nearly twelve hundred. Since Thomson's focus lies elsewhere, there is no scope for 'individualising' his labourers; we simply have "th'impatient Husbandman" and "the Sower".

Befitting Thomson's main focus, he then turns back immediately back to addressing Nature directly, in grand style:

> BE gracious, HEAVEN! For now laborious Man
> Has done his Part. Ye fostering Breezes blow!
> Ye softening Dews, ye tender Showers, descend!
> And temper All, thou world-reviving Sun,
> Into the perfect Year! Nor, ye, who live
> In Luxury and Ease, in Pomp and Pride,
> Think these lost Themes unworthy of your Ear ... ("Spring", ll.48-54)

The poet then acknowledges classical precedents for dealing with such themes, beginning with "the *rural* MARO" singing "To wide-imperial *Rome*," when it was acknowledged as "the full Height / Of Elegance and Taste ..." (ll.56-8) Like Dyer and Dodsley, Thomson appears worried that including subjects like ploughing, sowing and harrowing in 'serious' verse will be thought inappropriate by his audience and so gets his defence in first. Like Dyer and Dodsley, Thomson believes in the dignity of work as a subject, but simply fears his audience might not. It highlights the gap between the respective approaches to labour of Duck and Thomson, that by l.67 (not quoted), the view of the latter "... expands, the plough turns from a thing into a symbol ... and the sharp particularity of the ploughman bending over and scraping his ploughshare yields to generalizations about Autumn's treasures and the better blessings of England's export trade."[123] It was observed previously that Augustan pastoral tends to see the rustic as metaphorical. Here, Thomson *does* see particularity – but shifts his gaze to the 'bigger', generalised picture that the ploughman can be made to represent, which is the patriotic theme of (inter)national mercantile success. Duck seeks to occupy a different kind of space, by looking at the labourer with the same "sharp particularity" as Thomson, but then making this particularity the predominant focus of his verse. Doing this would result in the creation of a new 'kind' of poem.

[1] *The Oxford Book of Work*, ed. by Keith Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.V.

[2] For a classic account of realism see Erich Auerbach's *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1953), which "sees western literature as a gradual development in which the obstacles to realistic representation are gradually removed, first by the egalitarian spirit of Judaeo-Christian culture, and then by the socio-economic development in the modern world" (Raman Selden, 'Realism and Country People' in *Peasants and Countrymen in Literature: A Symposium Organised by the English Department of the Roehampton Institute in February 1981*, ed. by Kathleen Parkinson and Martin Priestman (Roehampton: Roehampton Institute of Higher Education, 1982), 39-58, p.39). Auerbach reads the progressive, levelling tendencies of New Testament Christian theology in a manner similar to subsequent chapters of this study. Semiotics has challenged Auerbach's arguments on the grounds that " 'realistic' texts ... [are] ... fraudulent ... claiming an innocence and a truth which language or other sign-systems can never possess." (*Ibid.*) Selden's essay examines both views as they relate to the presentation of countrymen in pastoral verse. The aim of the present study is not to reject outright the 'reflection' theories of Lukacs or Williams, but to focus on shedding light on the intentions of the poets of labour, and on how successful they were in realising them. It will be argued, therefore, that these intentions included bringing everyday experiences into verse through mimetic evocation, arguably made possible for the reasons Auerbach suggests.

[3] These two kinds of constraint may, of course, be seen as closely related. Numerous accounts exist of the ideological bias and purpose of pastoral, underpinning its non-depiction of working rustics. See, for instance, John Barrell, *English Literature in History 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (London: Hutchinson, 1983); *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, ed. by John Barrell and John Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.4 (and elsewhere); Roger Sales, 'The Politics of Pastoral' in Parkinson and Priestman, 91-104, and *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1983); Terry Gifford, *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999).

[4] Theocritus, *Idylls*, trans. by Anthony Verity, intro. by Richard Hunter (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2003), pp.i-xx. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[5] Barrell and Bull, p.4.

[6] Hunter, p.xvii.

[7] See *The Pastoral Mode: A Selection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Bryan Loughrey (London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p.8, which speaks of *The Idylls*' "considerable elements of realism" and their tendency to "dwell on the harsher aspects of the lives led by an entire rural community, consisting not just of shepherds, but of farmers, serfs, goatherds, fishermen, neatherds and housewives."

[8] A passage of this type *would* have been likely in Gay's *The Shepherd's Week*, and its relationship to pastoral is discussed later in the chapter.

[9] Hunter, pp.xvii-xviii.

[10] *Ibid.*, p.xvii.

[11] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th edn. (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1971), p.141. For a widely available eighteenth-century translation of *The Eclogues* see *The Works of Virgil*, trans. by John Dryden, intro. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961). For a modern translation, see *The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. by C. Day Lewis, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[12] See Loughrey, pp.8-9, for an account of Virgil's "imaginary topography where 'the currents of myth and empirical reality flow into another', and gods mingled freely with men."

[13] Abrams, p.141. Loughrey also gives an account of how Virgil's influential conception of pastoral was "concerned far more with exploring the meaning of its conventions than in depicting any actual

countryside." (p.9). On the relationship between Theocritus and Virgil, see also David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Harlow and London: Longman, 2003), p.83.

[14] See Loughrey, p.9: "It comes as no surprise when Vergil, in Eclogue X, inserts his own friend, the contemporary poet Gallus, into this setting, *for shepherd and artist have become virtually indistinguishable*" (my italics).

[15] See Barrell and Bull, pp.1-2. See also Loughrey, p.9.

[16] Barrell and Bull, p.4. Loughrey (pp.9-10) notes that the "most familiar rendering" of the Golden Age myth originates in Golding's 1567 translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (I: 102-31).

[17] See *English Pastorals*, ed. by Edmund K. Chambers (London: The Gresham Publishing Company, 1906), p.xxv, where Chambers provides a summary of these 'missing links'.

[18] Barrell and Bull, p.13. See Loughrey, p.11, for a list of those with prior claims.

[19] Mantuan was a particular influence on *The Shepherd's Calendar*: "it is by way of Italy that the mainstream Pastoral reaches England." (Barrell and Bull, p.13).

[20] Like numerous critics, Barrell and Bull provide a thorough discussion of this point: see pp.13-15. They argue that "Spenser's problem in this poem, and his success, was a matter of finding a form in which the sophisticated and the bucolic could coexist" (pp.13-14), also arguing that England, unlike France or Italy, had yet to develop a "secure and protected literary language" (p.14). Spenser, they assert, "half-invented an archaic provincial dialect to put in the mouths of his shepherds" in imitation of Theocritean Doric (*ibid.*). In Italy or France, "where the theory of kinds was well established ... the 'low' words didn't so much point to the low things they described as make a general point about the humble status of Pastoral." However, in works by Spenser and his successors, "this language has a quite different effect from the one officially intended", because

> When Spenser refers to a 'galage', or when Drayton mentions 'start-ups', we recognize that this is a possible version of English Doric, but we visualize also with disarming clarity the rude action of the rustic pulling on his boots ... as the language points to an image of a contemporary and recognizable reality, it suggests the possibility that the Pastoral might be used to describe rural life not only in Arcadia, but in England of 1580. (*Ibid.*, p.15).

Whilst there might be room for disputing the extent to which one can really envisage anything in any "realistic" (the term Barrell and Bull favour) detail, this makes the point that Spenser – unintentionally – allowed everyday England to creep in to *The Shepherd's Calendar*. To illustrate Spenser's attempts to combine the bucolic and the sophisticated, they quote "February" from *The Shepherd's Calendar* (pp.28-36).

[21] Jonson, *Timber*, 1640; cited in "The Introduction" in *Edmund Spenser: Selected Writings*, ed. by Elizabeth Porges Watson (London: Routledge, 1992), p.17.

[22] See *The Rambler* 37, Tuesday 24 July 1750, in *Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Frank Brady and W. K. Wimsatt, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1977), 170-74 (p.172) for Johnson's accusation that poets, including Spenser, "degrade the language of pastoral, by obsolete terms and become authors of a mingled dialect." His objection to "joining elegance of thought with coarseness of diction" is consistent with the exception he takes to literary allusions to everyday objects, as discussed in relation to georgic. Johnson reinforces his point by censuring Pope's imitation of Virgil (*Eclogues*, viii. ll.43-5) in "Autumn", ll.89-92, because "Sentiments like these ... wants [sic] that exaltation above common life, which in tragic or heroic writings often reconciles us to bold flights and daring figures." (*The Rambler* 37, in Brady and Wimsatt, p.173).

[23] See Rene Rapin, *Dissertatio de Carmine Pastorali*, (1659), trans. by Thomas Creech in *Idylliums of Theocritus* (Oxford, 1684), in Loughrey, pp.39-45. Fairer (pp.80-1) provides an account of the critical heritage of both 'neo-classical' and 'rationalist' schools.

[24] Jonathan Lawson, 'Bloomfield and the Rural Tradition: Its Value and Values', *Robert Bloomfield* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), *Literature Resource Centre* (hereafter *LRC*), p.31 of 43.

[25] As Loughrey notes, Fontenelle was inspired by Cartesian rationalism, but "rejected realism in pastoral, finding low scenes displeasing to the imagination" (p.18). Tickell "significantly revised Fontenelle's doctrine by advocating the realistic description of a native countryside and contemporary peasantry", considering "this our island a proper scene for pastoral", but recommending that poets "lawfully deviate from the ancients" on the grounds that "what is proper in Arcadia, or even Italy, might be very absurd in a colder climate." (*Ibid.*) See *Guardian* 30 (Wednesday 15 April 1713), in *The Guardian*, ed. by John Calhoun Stephens (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 1982), pp.128-30.

[26] Lawson, *LRC*, p.32 of 43.

[27] See Johnson, *The Rambler* 36, Saturday 21 July 1750, Brady and Wimsatt, 167-70 (pp.168-9).

[28] Fairer, p.82.

[29] Alexander Pope, "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry", *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London: Routledge, 1963), p.120.

[30] *Ibid.* "Pope claimed to be following both Rapin and Fontenelle in his 'Discourse on Pastoral Poetry' ... but both his theory and the practice of his own *Pastorals* derive almost exclusively from the example of the former ... Realism is ... out of the question" (Loughrey, p.18).

[31] Alexander Pope, "Spring. The First Pastoral, or Damon", ll.1-6, Butt, pp.123-4. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[32] Fairer, p.25.

[33] This important point is underlined by Bridget Keegan, 'Lambs to the Slaughter: Leisure and Laboring-Class Poetry', *Romanticism on the Net*, 27 (August 2002), http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2002/v/n27/006562ar.html. See pp.2-3 of 15.

[34] See *Edmund Spenser's Poetry*, ed. by Hugh MacLean, 2nd edn. (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1982), pp.545-51.

[35] Loughrey, p.10.

[36] Rapin urged pastoralists to "let Pastoral be smooth and soft, not noisy and bombast" (Rapin, in Loughrey, p.41). Pope echoes this in "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry" (Butt, p.120).

[37] Fairer, p.82.

[38] Pope, "Summer. The Second Pastoral, or Alexis", ll.79-80, Butt, pp.131-2.

[39] It would appear Pope was mistaken. Butt's notes (p.131) include the correction: "But see Spenser's *September*, 151-3. Wolves are said to have disappeared from England in the reign of Henry VII."

[40] John Goodridge, *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.3.

[41] With such techniques, Pope was again following the prescriptions of Rapin, who had urged, "*Comparisons* are ... very suitable to the Genius of a Shepherd; as likewise often *repetitions*, and doublings of some words." (Rapin, in Loughrey, p.44). Pope echoes this passage in his "A Discourse on Pastoral Poetry" (see Butt, p.120).

[42] "Summer. The Second Pastoral, or Alexis", ll.49-66, Butt, pp.131-2.

[43] See Addison, *Spectator*, 1712, cited by Barrell and Bull, p.256.

[44] Margaret Anne Doody, *The Daring Muse: Augustan Poetry Reconsidered* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.99.

[45] See Pope, *Windsor Forest*, Butt, pp.195-210 (selected examples only).

[46] See *The Guardian* 22 (Monday 6 April 1713), 23 (Tuesday 7 April 1713), 28 (Monday 13 April 1713), 30 (Wednesday 15 April 1713) and 32 (Friday 17 April 1713), Calhoun Stephens, pp.105-7, 107-9, 122-4, 128-30, 135-7 respectively.

[47] See *The Guardian* 40, Monday, 27 April 1713, Calhoun Stephens, pp.160-5. Various overviews of these 'pastoral wars' can be found including in Lawson, *LRC* (pp.31-3 of 43); and Fairer, pp.80-6.

[48] Tickell "declares that the English countryside is a proper setting for the pastoral; the use of rural England *for all save climate* in the pastoral would free it from the servile following of convention." (Lawson, *LRC*, p.32 of 43, my italics). Lawson credits J. E. Congleton, *Theories of Pastoral Poetry in England: 1648-1798* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952), pp.87-8, *n*.

[49] Ambrose Philips, "The Fifth Pastoral", ll.19-77, Barrell and Bull, pp.262-3.

[50] Ambrose Philips, "The Second Pastoral", ll.129-38, *ibid.*, p.261.

[51] Lawson, *LRC*, p.32 of 43.

[52] Barrell and Bull, p.227.

[53] Fairer, for instance, claims "Pope is usually seen to have had the upper hand" (p.82). It was not only latterly that Pope was seen to have had the best of the skirmish: in the *Life of Ambrose Philips* Johnson, for all his intolerance of neo-classical pastoral, wrote that Pope's pretended praise of Philips in *The Guardian* 40 was executed "with an unexampled and unequalled artifice of irony" (cited by Doody, p.272, *fn*).

[54] Fairer, p.81. Nokes underlines this agreement (*Raillery and Rage: A Study of Eighteenth-Century Satire* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1987), p.125).

[55] For Fontenelle's desire to avoid pastoral being "as low and clownish as Shepherds naturally are", and his preference that it avoid naturalistic detail, see Bernard le Bouvier de Fontenelle, *Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes* (1688), trans. by 'Mr. Motteux' (1695), in Loughrey, pp.45-9 (pp.45-6). Fontenelle upbraids Theocritus for depicting the "miseries and Clownishness" of rural life, describing the "Employment of Shepherds" as "vile and low" (p.49).

[56] See Lawson, *LRC*, p.30 of 43; for Lawson's association of Bloomfield with Duck, see p.26 of 43.

[57] *Ibid.*, p.33 of 43.

[58] Swift, "A Pastoral Dialogue", *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, vol. III, ed. by Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 2nd edn, pp.879-882. References are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[59] See Barrell and Bull, p.227. For specific examples of the view that the poem is anti-Philips, see Hoyt Trowbridge, 'Pope, Gay and *The Shepherd's Week*' (1944), in Loughrey, pp.218-27, and Pat Rogers' *The Augustan Vision* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp.219-20. By contrast Doody (pp.100-8, 115-6) argues that the satire of *The Shepherd's Week* is also directed at Pope, and notes that the view that "*The Shepherd's Week* was written to punish Philips for his angry reaction to Pope's essay" is the result of "a tradition whose source is Pope" himself. (p.100). Fairer (pp.85-6) picks up the theme of *The Shepherd's Week* as a pastoral that disputes the Popean model, whatever the ostensible reasons behind its composition. Nokes has consistently argued for the double-edged nature of the poem's satire, both in 'John Gay: Shepherds and Chimeras' in *Raillery and Rage*, pp.122-35, and *John Gay, A Profession of Friendship: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.140-57.

[60] Loughrey, p.15.

[61] Whilst, as Fairer points out (p.31), the politeness and civility of *Trivia* may be pushed to a satiric extreme, Gay revels in the inclusion of specific everyday detail and empathy with the labouring poor. See, for instance, the words of the thirsty shoe-shining orphan, licking his lips at another drinking a double flagon of mead (*Trivia; Or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London*, "Book II. Of Walking the Streets by Day", ll.187-92, *John Gay, Poetry and Prose,* vol. I, ed. by Vinton A. Dearing, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, pp.148-9).

[62] John Gay, "The Proeme to the Courteous Reader", Dearing, p.90.

[63] Fairer agrees, arguing that Gay's pastorals "With characters like Cuddy and Lobbin Clout … *seem at first* to be taking Pope's line by ridiculing the Doric rusticity of the Spenser-Philips 'naturalising' school" (p.85, my italics). Ll.41-4 of Gay's "Friday; Or, The Dirge" are "written with one (winking) eye on Pope" (p.86) by replacing a focus on the immaterial in Pope's "Summer" (ll.73-6) with an emphasis on its opposite.

[64] Doody, p.101.

[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Gay, "The Proeme To the Courteous Reader", Dearing, p.92.

[67] Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1992), p.397. The line derives from Horace's *Satires* I. i. 24-5, which Fielding translated in *The Covent-Garden Journal* (4 Feb., 1752), as "for why should not any one promulgate Truth with a Smile on his Countenance?"

[68] For Spenser's prefatory statement of justification, see "The Generall Argument of the Whole Booke", like the "Dedicatory Epistle to The Shephearde's Calendar", with which it was published, attributed to "E. K.", described by MacLean (p.468) as "rambling", in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. by J. Payne Collier, 5 vols., repr. (London, 1966), p.11.

[69] Fairer, p.85.

[70] Nokes (1995), pp.149-53. The difference in outlook between Gay and Pope is well illustrated by contrasting their respective attitudes to Tom D'Urfey, the leading folk balladeer of his day. For Pope's contempt for D'Urfey, see pp.149-50.

[71] John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week*: "Thursday; Or, The Spell", ll.55-8, Dearing, p.110. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[72] Fairer, p.86. See also John Gay, *The Shepherd's Week. In Six Pastorals*, 1st edn. (London, 1714), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (The Gale Group). The index includes "Names, Plants, Flowers, Fruits, Birds, Beasts, Insects" and "other material Things". Each poem is the subject of a whole-page illustration, several of which feature labouring implements (e.g. the illustration of "The Squabble", Gay, p.15, and of "The Dirge", p.49).

[73] Fairer, p.86. Rather than siding with Pope in the pastoral debate, Gay does something different: "The most famous lines in Pope's *Pastorals* work precisely in the opposite direction, with poetic art creating an amenable subject, not seeking to represent a recalcitrant one", a reading that seems to bear out Lawson's view that Pope seeks to *create*, rather than *represent* a reality in art.

[74] This old English May carol was sung in "merrie England in Shakespeare's time" (A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (St. Albans, Hertfordshire: Paladin, 1975), pp.101-2).

[75] This list includes "wood pigeon", "dairy", "barn", "rotten sticks", "fuel", "faggots", "apron", "nuts", "feeding hogs", "acorns", "dairy's hatch", "kerchief starch'd", "pinners clean", "wax", "butter", "wooden lilly", "clouted cream", "spongy curds", "milky stream", "whining swine", "dairy door",

"hollow tray", "guzzling hogs" and "floods of whey". In the following twenty-four lines that conclude Bumkinet's speech we also find "sounding flail", "sieve", "sheaves", "weeds", "meads" and "hemlock".

[76] Nokes (1987), p.129.

[77] Fairer, p.84.

[78] *Ibid*, p.86.

[79] Doody, p.100.

[80] *Ibid.*, p.105.

[81] Nokes (1987), p.134. Nokes prefigures Fairer's (2003) reading that Gay inverts Pope's pastoral vision: "Gay ... reverses the conventional movement of the pastoral. Instead of the metropolitan world (as represented in the tones of *The Guardian*) standing for reality, with the pastoral world a kind of pretty masquerade, he presents the rural world as the real world, and the Court as a fancy-dress assembly ..." (p.128). For Nokes, Gay's position cannot be reduced to one of simply taking one side or another in the 'pastoral wars' and he maintains "a permanent ambiguity, or duality of outlook." (*Ibid.*)

[82] Doody, p.106.

[83] Cited by John Chalker, *The English Georgic, A Study in the Development of a Form* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1969), p.59. The original source is Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, chapter XIX.

[84] Dodsley's *Agriculture*, written in the 1730s, was published in 1753 and Dyer's *The Fleece*, though not published until 1757, was begun as early as 1741. Thomson's *Winter* was first published in 1726, *Summer* in 1727, *Spring* in 1728, and *The Seasons* (including the new "Autumn") in 1730. The poem was constantly revised and republished until the 'duodecimo' edition, the last of Thomson's lifetime, appeared in 1746.

[85] Chalker, p.1.

[86] *Ibid.*, p.36.

[87] *Ibid.*

[88] *Ibid.*, p.36.

[89] *Georgics* I, *The Works of Virgil*, trans. by John Dryden, intro. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.51. For a modern verse translation, see *Virgil, The Georgics*, trans. by L. P. Wilkinson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982). For a modern prose translation see *The Eclogues, Georgics and Aeneid of Virgil*, trans. by C. Day Lewis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[90] As Kinsley notes, "The Restoration poets who turned Virgil, Ovid, Horace, and Lucretius most successfully into English verse were literati rather than scholars, concerned with the general character and quality of their originals and valuing elegance above accuracy" (p.vii). See p.51 for the couplet quoted.

[91] John Dyer, *The Fleece*, III: ll.111-18, *The Poetical Works of Mark Akenside and John Dyer*, ed. by the Rev. Robert Aris Willmott, illustrated by Birket Foster (London / New York: George Routledge and Co., 1855), pp.80-1, reproduced on the *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992-5, hereafter *EPFTD*). Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[92] See Goodridge, p.170, on the rarity of the first person in eighteenth-century georgic.

[93] Robert Dodsley, *Agriculture, Trifles...with Several Others, not more Considerable*, 2nd edn. (London: 1777), p.134, *EPFTD*. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[94] Although the son of an educated (but poor) country schoolmaster, Dodsley (1703-64) endured years of menial work. Initially apprenticed to a stockinger, he ran away and became a domestic (Jean Joseph Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge and Kogan Paul, 1956), p.191). After working for an epicure, Charles Dartiquenave, and then Sir Richard Howe, in 1728 he became footman to Jane Lowther, daughter of the first Viscount Lonsdale. Here he flourished, making many literary acquaintances – including Pope – and his poetry was published, notably in *A Muse in Livery. A Collection of Poems* (London, 1732). He left service in 1735, helped by Pope's donation of a hundred pounds, becoming a successful bookseller, publisher and playwright. According to legend, Johnson's dictionary was compiled at Dodsley's suggestion.

[95] Alexander Pope, *Essay On Man*, III: ll.7-20, Butt, p.526.

[96] Goodridge, p.96. As Doody argues, and Goodridge acknowledges (p.4), epic was widely distrusted in the period, and therefore little written, which possibly goes some way to explaining the indifferent reception with which Dyer's poem met (see Doody, pp.66-7). This distrust led to the popularity of mock epic, such as *The Rape of the Lock*. Pope's intended epic on England was famously never completed, and epics such as Thomson's *Liberty* (1735-6) were, in their own time, unsuccessful.

[97] Goodridge, p.179.

[98] On georgic as a patriotic mode, see Fairer, (2003), p.95.

[99] See Thomas Tusser, *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, ed. by Geoffrey Grigson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[100] See, for instance, *ibid.*, p.83.

[101] Chalker, p.19.

[102] *Macbeth*, I.v.50-2.

[103] *The Rambler* 168, Saturday 26 October 1751, Brady and Wimsatt, p.215.

[104] Chalker, p.19.

[105] *The Miscellaneous Works of Joseph Addison*, ed. by A. C. Guthkelch, vol. 2 (London: G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1914), pp.7-8.

[106] See Chalker, p.17:

> ...both early and mid-century critics take Addison as their starting point, and often do little more than vary his phraseology. Joseph Trapp and Joseph Warton are the two most authoritative writers on didactic poetry; and ... they see the *Georgics* through Addisonian spectacles ... [Addison's] ... critical attitude became the established one for some generations.

See also John Sitter, 'Questions in Poetics: Why and how Poetry Matters' in Sitter, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 133-56, (p.142). Goodridge also acknowledges Addison's great influence upon English georgic, noting that "If the eighteenth-century sensibility required its rural poetry to be purposeful as well as poetic, this was not to be achieved at the expense of decorum ... the need for georgic-writers to maintain the 'high' style would have an important influence ..." (p.5). On later eighteenth-century criticism of the georgic, see Joseph Trapp, *Praelectiones Poeticae*, 2 vols. (1711-15), trans. by W. Clarke and W. Bowyer as *The Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1742); and Joseph Warton, "A Discourse on Didactic Poetry" in *The Works of Virgil* (London: R. Dodsley, 1753).

[107] Bridget Keegan, 'Georgic Transformations and Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour" ', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 41 (2001), 545-62, *LRC*.

[108] For a summary of the poem's critical reception, see Goodridge, p.92. As Goodridge notes, *The Fleece*'s " 'high' Miltonic manner ... has been criticised more than any other feature of the poem, usually being dismissed as absurdly inappropriate to the 'low' themes of the poem." (p.96). Such views were true of no one more than Johnson: see the "Life of Dyer" in *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. by Arthur Waugh (London / New York: H. Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1906), for a damning assessment of *The Fleece*, despite an acknowledgement of Akenside's admiration for it. (The text is also available at http://www.18thcenturyarchive.org/poets/dyer/default.html#Life). See also Fairer and Gerrard, who record that "even in its own day" *The Fleece* "failed to win a wide audience" (*Eighteenth-Century Poetry, an Annotated Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.232). Whilst Goldstein, Feingold, Barrell, Goodridge and Fairer have begun to redress the lack of critical regard for the poem, by no means all recent critics have wished to revise earlier views (see Doody, p.114). Dodsley's poem fared little better, and Juan Christian Pellicer has devoted a recent essay to the lack of contemporary interest in *Agriculture*: see Pellicer, 'The Georgic at Mid-Eighteenth Century and the Case of Dodsley's 'Agriculture' ', in *Review of English Studies*, 54 (2003), 67-93.

[109] See *The Project Gutenberg E-Book of The Letters of Horace Walpole*, 4 vols., ed. by Marjorie Fulton (Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation, 2002), vol. III: 1759-1769, Letter 12, p.40. The text is available at manybooks.net/support/w/walpolehora/walpolehoraetext03lthw310.exp.html.

[110] Chalker, p.1.

[111] Tim Fulford, ' "Nature" Poetry', *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 109-31 (p.115).

[112] Goodridge includes an appendix about 'Siluria' (pp.181-2), glossed, as he states, by Dyer as "the part of England which lies west of the Severn, viz. Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and Glamorganshire."

[113] See Dyer, pp.42-3, *EPFTD*.

[114] An aspect of this additional layer or 'kind' of vocabulary is the proliferation of polysyllabic words ending in "ious" or "eous". In *The Fleece* II: ll.68-84, quoted in the main text, one finds "salubrious", and "extraneous". A full list of such words in the first three Books alone would include forty-five in all. Many are employed multiply, and this excludes other polysyllabic words not ending in "ious" or "eous". An expanded list including such words present in *Agriculture* but not *The Fleece* would feature another twenty-one, some utilised on numerous occasions. Many are, or are derived from, scientific terms. Pope would not use such a vocabulary because he would not write of the planting of herbs or the dyeing of wool; Duck would not write of such matters in the grandiose manner of formal georgic.

[115] Influential titles available included Timothy Nourse's *Campania Foelix; or Discourse of the Benefits and Improvements of Husbandry* (1700), the Reverend John Laurence's *A New System of Agriculture* (1726), Edward Laurence's *The Duty of a Steward to his Lord* (1727), Professor (Richard) Bradley's *A General Treatise on Husbandry* (1726) and *Gentleman and Farmer's Guide for the Increase and Improvement of Cattle* (1729), John Cowper's *Essay Proving that Inclosing Commons and Common-Field-Lands is Contrary to the Interest of the Nation* (1732) – though this could hardly have been any influence upon Dyer, given his enthusiasm for enclosure – and Jethro Tull's *Horse-hoeing Husbandry* (1733). See R. E. Protheroe, Lord Ernle, *English Farming, Past and Present*, ed. by A. D. Hall, 5th edn. (London: Longmans, Green And Co. Ltd, 1912), pp.150-68, and W. H. R. Curtler, *A Short History of English Agriculture* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), pp.167-75.

[116] Goodridge argues that in I: ll.80-96, on drainage, "The implied reader, here as elsewhere, appears to be the shepherd or farmer, but in this context is in fact more probably the large landowner, the only person … financially capable of landscaping fields" (pp.114-15).

[117] James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. by James Sambrook (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p.xvii. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text. Sambrook

subdivides his first section on the poem's "Content and Form" under the headings: "Devotional", "Scientific", "Georgic", "Geographical, historical and narrative", "Descriptive" and "Subjective" (*ibid.*, pp.xvii –xxxiv). The subsection on georgic influences is one of the briefest (pp.xxiv-xxvi); indeed it has more often been classified as a 'prospect', 'nature' or a(n early) 'topographical' poem.

[118] *Ibid.*, pp.xxiv-xxv.

[119] *Ibid.*, p.3.

[120] *Ibid.*, p.58.

[121] *Ibid.*, p.144.

[122] Sambrook (p.380) speculates that Thomson's "...Thus they rejoice; nor think / That, with tomorrow's Sun, their annual Toil / Begins again the never-ceasing Round" ("Autumn", ll.1232-4), is the source of Duck's closing lines in the 1730 version of *The Thresher's Labour*, "Now growing Labours still succeed the past, / And growing always new, must always last" (ll.282-3, Fairer and Gerrard, p.256). For an examination of the mutual influence upon one another of *The Seasons* and *The Thresher's Labour*, see Goodridge, pp.12-15, 79-80 (and elsewhere).

[123] Sambrook, p.xxvi.

Stephen Duck: The New Voice of Labour

Stephen Duck's *The Thresher's Labour* (1730) attempts to assert a poetic identity for himself as a labourer within existing poetic forms, simultaneously creating possibilities for other labouring-class poets to follow suit. These possibilities, as well as the wider mode Duck institutes in which to describe labour, form the principal focus of this chapter. Plebeian verse was a phenomenon of the age, and Duck its most celebrated practitioner. *The Thresher's Labour* is believed to have been composed third[1] of Duck's extant[2] poems, behind "To a Gentleman, who requested a Copy of Verses from the Author" and "On Poverty", and immediately before the Biblical-historical "The Shunamite".[3] Even now these, as well as other noteworthy poems such as "On Richmond Park, and Royal Gardens", and "A Description of a Journey to Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth, &c:" (both 1736),[4] *Every Man in his own Way: An Epistle to a Friend* (1741), and the historical-descriptive *Caesar's Camp* (1755), are read (if at all) for the light they shed on *The Thresher's Labour*, and its author.

Duck was born *c*.1705 in Charlton St Peter, Wiltshire, the son of parents of "upper labouring status".[5] He went to a charity school until he was fourteen, when his mother withdrew him "lest he become too fine a gentleman for the family that produced him".[6] He married at nineteen and fathered three children, continuing his education by studying late at night and in work breaks. He was writing his own poetry by 1729, when he came to the attention of local gentry and clergy. He was patronised by the Reverend Stanley, recorder of Pewsey,[7] and Duck's noteworthy early works *The Thresher's Labour* and "The Shunamite" were written for Stanley's wife. Spence tells us that it was after the composition of the latter that we may date Duck's

> rising in his Character and Circumstances. Upon this it was that Persons of Distinction began to send for him different ways. In short, it got him Fame enough to be pretty troublesome to him at first ...[8]

With this fame came more exalted patrons, including Dr. Alured Clarke, Prebendary of Westminster, the Queen's lady-in-waiting Charlotte Clayton (Lady Sundon), Bathurst, Lady Hartford, Palmerston, the Earls of Tankerville and Macclesfield, and finally Queen Caroline herself. Christmas has also shown that Joseph Spence, Professor of Poetry at Oxford, and an enthusiastic patron of plebeian 'natural genius' played an important role in Duck's early success.[9] A pirated volume of Duck's verse

– *Poems on Several Subjects* (1730) – went through nine editions between 1730 and 1733 alone,[10] and achieved such vogue that other poets actively attempted to appear more like him than they were.[11] Davis observes that the period of Duck's great "... vogue seems to have been initiated by the pirating of his poems, which took place before he left his native village to take up his residence at Richmond." Although the printer of the pirated volume was a man named Roberts, responsibility for the scheme lay with Erasmus Jones, journalist for the *London Evening News*, and author of *A Trip through London, Containing Observations on Men and Things* (1728). Nine editions in three years obviously suggests the pirated volume's great success, and the Bishop of Sarum suggested it must have been worth at least £100 to the printer. It appears that this was not the last time Duck's work was printed spuriously.[12]

As in the cases of other labouring poets of the century, Duck's labouring authenticity was pivotal in his presentation to readers.[13] Introductions and prefaces to his works stressed his labouring background, and that he would work harder than his fellows in order to have both the time and money necessary for study. Later editions of *Poems on Several Subjects* even included a frontispiece[14] depicting Duck standing in front of a barn with a copy of Milton in his right hand and a threshall (that appears suspiciously under-used) in his left. Duck is shown in 'polite' dress. To his left is a writing table with paper, an ink-pot and quill, and a pile of books. Chickens wander around the yard. Out in the field, a labourer gazes in wonder at Duck, whose back is to him: the two men are separated by a gate / fence, a physical manifestation of the separation of the extraordinary Duck from his workmates. Ironically, of course, the scene depicted is lacking in any 'authenticity' at all, and 'sells' not a 'real' thresher, but a polite fantasy of a literary labourer, 'civilised' and sanitised for public consumption.

Duck's wife Anne died in 1730, and he was installed in a house in Richmond with a royal pension, ascending through various symbolic occupations including Yeoman of the Guard in 1733, master of Duck Island in St. James' Park, and keeper of Queen Caroline's Merlin's Cave in 1735. During this time he remarried, to the Queen's housekeeper Sarah Big, in 1733, and they had two daughters.[15] Caroline's patronage meant that the authorised *Poems on Several Occasions* (1736) sold in large numbers (though according to Harold Williams it "failed to rival the popularity of his earlier collection.")[16] Subscribers included many members of the government, presumably motivated by Caroline's involvement.[17] The suggestion for such a volume

seems to have been the Bishop of Sarum's, and the six-year gap between pirated and unauthorised editions on account of Alured Clarke's hope that "Stephen will not suffer if he defers publishing until he has had time to alter his pieces and add new ones."[18] Duck's social ascent meant that in this six-year interval he was required to master social and literary protocol, and accordingly the 1736 publication included rewritten, 'classicised' versions of early poems such as *The Thresher's Labour*.

Irreconcilably estranged from the life and people he had grown up with, he was a frequent target for satirical attacks by those wishing to ridicule Caroline's pretensions to culture, attacks which her death in 1737 finally alleviated. Davis records what many modern commentators do not, that Duck actually married for a third time in 1744.[19] He entered the church two years later, and in his final years worked as a preacher, first at Kew Chapel, Winchester, and from 1752 at Byfleet, Surrey where he was Rector (at a substantial salary of £130 per year). By all accounts he was successful in this capacity, and admired by his parishoners.[20] He drowned himself, however, in a pond or stream behind a Reading tavern in 1756. Whether the suicide was a consequence of his deracination cannot be known, although his success in the church makes this theory seem at least dubious.

I will undertake to display and describe the characteristics in *The Thresher's Labour* that fuse into what is describable as the emergence of a 'Duckian mode', although I will intermittently compare and contrast with "A Description of a Journey". *The Thresher's Labour* was composed when a patron suggested that Duck write about the life he knew,[21] and shows the hallmarks of several of his influences.[22] Despite its title, this narrative / descriptive poem[23] of two hundred and eighty three lines, predominantly in heroic couplets (it includes one unrhymed line,[24] and two triplets), tells the story of Duck's working life over the period of a year. Threshing is only one task that he performs. Others include winnowing (separating grain from chaff by tossing the threshed corn), haymaking and reaping / harvesting. Recurring themes include the repetitive, cyclical nature of the tasks undertaken, as well as the conditions and hardships of labour, the consolations that provide brief respite, and the tyranny of time, as it governs their lives and labour. All are distinctively Duckian characteristics passed on to his successors who likewise poeticise their occupational experiences. A key point to stress is the wide *range* of lived experience present: not just the labour undertaken, but its physical and psychological consequences – how they dominate labourers' home lives (and even their dreams) – coping strategies, and

the comradeship between co-workers. To convey this wide reach of lived experience, the poem necessarily creates multiple changes of both mood *and* pace.

The tone of the poem is also significant. Duck enlightens but never lectures, addressing his reader with amiable friendliness, partly because he is addressing a predominantly 'polite' readership, and partly, it would seem, out of genuine civility and humility. Despite the suggestion of the topic by Stanley, what became *The Thresher's Labour* is written on behalf of the labouring community on the farm where Duck works; yet he is also an individual, asserting the importance and relevance of his own (personal) experience, not least of trying to combine his role of poet with that of worker. It will be intrinsic to my argument, below, that the subject matter of the poem continually generates a vocabulary, a narrative energy and a pressure towards onomatopoeia and other kinds of mimicry that impact directly on the versification; accordingly my analyses will recurrently move between the former (subject matter) and the latter (versification).

Having fulfilled his dedicatory duties to patrons and established his poem's purpose (ll.1-12), Duck begins his account of the annual cycle of work by relating how the farmer gathers his labourers around him, allocating threshing duties:

> He calls his Threshers forth: Around we stand,
> With deep Attention waiting his Command. 20
> To each our Tasks he readily divides,
> And pointing, to our different Stations guides.
> As he directs, to different Barns we go;
> Here two for Wheat, and there for Barley two.
> But first, to shew what he expects to find, 25
> These Words, or Words like these, disclose his Mind:
> So dry the Corn was carried from the Field,
> So easily 'twill Thresh, so well 'twill Yield;
> Sure large Day's Work I well may hope for now;
> Come, strip, and try, let's see what you can do. (ll.19-30) 30

Duck presents the men standing around together, contemplating the hard physical slog ahead. Both his and Collier's poems draw the reader into a circle of workers to hear the employer's instructions; *we become one of them*, hearing what, and as, they do. In ll.27-30 Duck reproduces everyday dialogue almost verbatim despite writing in heroic couplets. One is reminded of Hunter's view that the 'public' couplets of argument and conversation written by the period's 'canonical' poets "don't try to emulate talk *exactly*".[25] Duck *does* aim to reproduce speech as nearly as he can. They are "These

words, or words like these": the closest he can get using couplets. Duck manages similarly well when the Master later admonishes them for – allegedly – not being productive enough: "Why look ye, Rogues! D'ye think that this will do? / Your Neighbours thresh as much again as you" (ll.76-7). For 'serious', 'formal', non-satirical, narrative / descriptive verse – as opposed to the informality of the dialogue or epistle form – this is unusually specific.

Duck continues by introducing the labour so central to his enterprise:

> Divested of our Cloaths, with Flail in Hand,
> At a just Distance, Front to Front we stand;
> And first the Threshall's gently swung, to prove,
> Whether with just Exactness it will move:
> That once secure, more quick we whirl them round, 35
> From the strong Planks our Crab-Tree Staves rebound,
> And echoing Barns return the rattling Sound.
> Now in the Air our knotty Weapons fly;
> And now with equal Force descend from high:
> Down one, one up, so well they keep the Time, 40
> The *Cyclops* Hammers could not truer chime;
> Nor with more heavy Strokes could *AEtna* groan,
> When *Vulcan* forg'd the Arms for *Thetis'* Son.
> In briny Streams our Sweat descends apace,
> Drops from the Locks, or trickles down our Face. (ll.31-45) 45

Physical details – the Flail, Threshall, Planks, Staves and Barns – mingle or combine with word play and classical allusion. There is an experiential account of what is actually done, providing in abundance the authentic detail that pastoral, of course, omits. Firstly, we have the account of the testing of the threshall before it is swung: the threshers would seem to stand face to face ("Front to Front"), presumably in two lines. They have to establish that the distance between them is "just" in order to prevent possible accident. Then there is the alternate striking – "Down one, one up" – presumably as between the two lines of men. The inference is that they can neither break time nor pause, and hence the sweat. The alliterative, onomatopoeic "we whirl" conveys the impending giddy, light-headed sensation of being drunk with exhaustion, lactic acid surging through the body. In l.36 the six strongly (and equally) stressed syllables (strong / Planks / Crab / Tree / Staves / (re)bound) convey the sense (and sound) of powerful, strenuous, equal whacks. The description would seem certain to close with a full stop after "rebound" at the end of a couplet, but the effect of the echo, mimicking the "echoing Barns", is achieved by l.37, completing an unexpected

triplet. The onomatopoeic "rattling" continues the preoccupation with sights and sounds. The reversal of stress in the first foot of "Down one, one up" in l.40 conduces neatly to an imitation of the alternating blows of the flails. The classical allusions (ll.41-5) provide a deliberate contrast to the physical / experiential nature of the preceding lines, another instance of Duck's tendency to mingle or juxtapose seemingly contrary elements within his descriptions of labour. The reference to the chiming of Cyclops' hammers functions doubly, indicating how deafening the noise is, but also that whereas labourers might be little regarded by their 'betters', arduous labour was *once* the stuff of heroic legend (also seen in the reference to Vulcan). Lines 41-3 are heavily influenced by Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Georgics*.[26] Not only was such labour mythical, but deemed worthy of praise within 'elevated' verse, and translated by as recent, and celebrated a figure as Dryden. The concluding lines – "In briny Streams our Sweat descends apace, / Drops from our Locks, or trickles down our Face", could arguably exist nowhere else in (non-satirical) verse at this time.[27] Duck's return after the Vulcan interlude to the sweat, the material consequence of hard physical exertion, seems deliberately – and successfully – bathetic in this context: we are suddenly back in everyday working life after the brief classical sojurn. Above all there is a great – and for the time, unusual – narrative energy in Duck's verse; in this passage Duck devotes ten lines to the single process of threshing, and because they amount to an extended description of a single, continuous experience, his couplets do not strike us as self-contained in the Popean manner explored in my Introduction.

The verbal texture of the vocabulary, seen in, for example, ll.35-6, is another important aspect of the passage. These lines are awkward to pronounce, rugged, or, to use a word favoured by Duck himself, "knotty". The conventional usage of many words within neo-classical verse, in relation both to rural and other affairs, was generic: a "swain" stood for an all-purpose country-labourer; a "flood" for an all-purpose water-feature, etc. Once, however, a "swain" becomes a "thresher", the reader is invited into a different, and less 'artificial' or 'literary' landscape; the focal length has *changed*. We are in neither Pope's world, nor (for the most part) that of formal georgic with its technical, scientific vocabulary. Many such generic words – "breeze", "trees", "groves", "nymphs" (for instance), all repeatedly used in Pope's *Pastorals* – were readily subsumed into familiar patterns of mellifluousness. Even the word "thresher" has a vigour that makes it more jagged than "swain", and promotes

new sound patterns. The same is unquestionably true of vocabulary such as "strong planks", "Crab-Tree staves", and much else throughout *The Thresher's Labour.* Unsurprisingly, a Pope Concordance[28] reveals that he never used such words as "thresher" / "threshall", "planks", "Crab-Tree", "staves", "flail", "suffocating", "Bushel", "Whetstone", "Scrip", "Dumpling", "Prong", "Workmen", "Waggons" and "Huzzas". "Reaper", like "scythes", appears once in Pope's works. By contrast, he uses "plain" fifty-four times; "swain" nineteen times; "groves" on thirty-five occasions; "shade(s)" seventy-three times; and "nymph" on thirty-seven different occasions.

As we might expect, Duck's dialectical relationship with the bucolic begins early in the poem. He stresses both the beauty of nature and the affinity men who work on the land feel with the natural world, whilst also wishing to disabuse his readers of any pastoral notions that the lives of rural labourers are easy or comfortable. Threshing was a mostly indoor occupation, and Duck stresses that working conditions were poorer than readers may believe:

> Can we, like Shepherds, tell a merry Tale?
> The Voice is lost, drown'd by the noisy Flail.
> But we may think – Alas! what pleasing thing
> Here to the Mind can the dull Fancy bring? 55
> The Eye beholds no pleasant Object here:
> No chearful Sound diverts the list'ning Ear.
> The Shepherd may well tune his Voice to sing,
> Inspir'd by all the Beauties of the Spring:
> No Fountains murmur here, no Lambkins play, 60
> No Linets warble, and no Fields look gay;
> 'Tis all a dull and melancholy Scene,
> Fit only to provoke the Muses Spleen. (ll.52-63)

These lines function as an effective, ironic, comment on the gap between the pastoral myth and Duck's working life. He and his comrades do not always work outdoors, and the weather outside in winter is less palatable than in the pastoral ideal – even if they were outside, conditions must have been frequently unpleasant. Hence, the chasm is emphasised with the use of conventional pastoral language: "No Fountains murmur here, no Lambkins play, / No Linets warble, and no Fields look gay". He is no idle piping shepherd: "No chearful Sound diverts the list'ning Ear". The passage is noteworthy because it provides an overt instance of a recurring tactic: *The Thresher's Labour* is influential within the annals of labouring verse not just because it provides

for laying claim to desired labouring-class identities, but because it provides a *rejection* of unwanted definitions imposed by others. The poem can plausibly be read as a series of such rejections.[29]

Nor is this passage the only one in Duck's oeuvre to enter into dialogue with the pastoral. In "A Description of a Journey to Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth &c." he writes that, like the plains of Arcadia, those he passes through:

> .... might gain immortal Fame, 175
> Resound with CORYDON and THYRSIS' Flame;
> If, to his Mouth, the Shepherd would apply
> His mellow Pipe, or vocal Music try:
> But, to his Mouth, the Shepherd ne'er applies
> His mellow Pipe, nor vocal Music tries[30] 180

Commenting on the gap between pastoral lambkins and their 'real life' equivalents, he writes of the latter that their "artless Bleatings rural Music made; / Too harsh perhaps to please politer Ears, / Yet much the sweetest Tune the Farmer hears." (ll.188-90). Duck does not exhibit any great resentment towards the pastoral; being able to define himself against it is a useful way in to his project. A chimney sweep, for instance, would have lacked even this means of poeticising his labours. Duck defines himself against the model it provides, and then proceeds to his grander aim – the attempt to assert a *labouring-class poetic identity.*

When the labourers do get outside in the better weather, the poet stresses that there are at least some of the compensations he has previously envied the (pastoral) shepherd, often demonstrating his powers of observation and comparison, and adding further conviction to his claim to be the bard of the rural, labouring community. For instance, expressing his joy when he and his fellow labourers have been ordered outside to begin the hay-making, at the end of grim months of threshing, he comments: "The Birds salute us as to Work we go, / And a new Life seems in our Breasts to glow." (ll.105-6) (Though this also makes a telling psychological point – the workers imagine birds singing to them at the beginning of a long passage that culminates with the fading of the initial spring optimism in the face of utter exhaustion). When he wishes to describe the fatigue that they feel in the afternoon after a hard morning's toil, a comparison with the natural world around him comes easiest to Duck:

Thus in the Morn a Courser I have seen,
With headlong Fury scour the level Green,
Or mount the Hills, if Hills are in his way,
As if no Labour could his Fire allay, 130
Till the meridian Sun with sultry Heat,
And piercing Beams hath bath'd his Sides in Sweat;
The lengthen'd Chace scarce able to sustain,
He measures back the Hills and Dales with pain. (ll.127-34)

There is, despite frequent and understandable fatigue, and despite Duck's wish to extricate himself as a rural worker from pastoral misconceptions, a sense of joy and wonder at the sights of the natural world. The sympathy with which he writes is an example of an empathy with the animal world often encountered in the eighteenth-century poetry of labour.[31] An ability to sympathise with the most put-upon in human society likewise makes itself felt in writing of the animal world (also an aspect of the ideals of 'New Testament Christianity', discussed later in the chapter).

This tendency to empathise with the animal kingdom is further evident elsewhere. Having said that the "prattling" females in the fields run for the cover of the hedges when it begins to rain, Duck searches for an analogy:

Thus have I seen on a bright Summer's Day,
On some green Brake a Flock of Sparrows play;
From Twig to Twig, from Bush to Bush they fly,
And with continu'd Chirping fill the sky;
But on a sudden, if a Storm appears, 195
Their chirping Noise no longer dins your Ears;
They fly for Shelter to the thickest Bush,
There silent sit, and all at once is hush. (ll.191-8)

Given the disparaging way in which he generally speaks of women labourers throughout the poem (though he speaks with affection of his wife and those of his mates) perhaps the surprise is that he likens women to birds at all, since he is often reverential of the natural world. He describes their "noise" as a "din", but it seems unlikely that this is genuinely pejorative in view of how he speaks of nature in the poem as a whole, including the pleasure he takes in the bird's "salute". These decorative epic similes should obviously not be interpreted *too* literally.[32] Passages such as these recall Thomson[33] or the Pope of *Windsor Forest*. His reverence for nature resurfaces later when, describing their scything, Duck writes, "But here or there, where-e'er Our Course we bend / Sure Desolation does our Steps attend"

(ll.229-30); "Desolation" because the virgin field before the harvest has an unblemished beauty that it is their job to destroy.

Duck's treatment of labour itself is clearly crucial to (a consideration of) the poem. His relationship with work is complex. Camus says of Sisyphus (with whom Duck later draws a comparison), that

> The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.[34]

If we might not say the same of the poem's speaker (although one recalls the influence upon Duck of the stoic Seneca), work is at least "transformed" and "justified by a wider context" for him.[35] Whilst he deplores the conditions in which he and his mates sometimes work, and loathes and dreads the constant round of toil to which they are subject, there is healthy respect, if not for work itself, for the Herculean *challenge* of unremitting toil. There is pride not only in doing a good job, but in the exertions undertaken to provide honestly for his family. He also relishes the comradeship between himself and his mates, the bonds forged between men dependent on one another. Duck is in full flow when describing the nobility of hard work. This work is often tedious; but not always. It is a real joy, for instance, when the threshing is over, and it is time to begin the haymaking:

> Before the Door our welcome Master stands, 90
> And tells us the ripe Grass requires our Hands ...
> This Change of Labour seems to give much Ease; 96
> With Thoughts of Happiness our Joy's complete,
> There's always Bitter mingled with the Sweet.
> When Morn does thro' the Eastern Windows peep,
> Strait from our beds we start, and shake off Sleep; 100
> This new Employ with eager haste to prove,
> This new Employ becomes so much our Love:
> Alas! That human Joys shou'd change so soon,
> Even this may bear another Face at Noon! (ll.90-1, 96-104)

Admittedly much of the joy here is at the end of the threshing, and the end of the winter and start of spring that it represents. Haymaking is not in itself unappealing, though, and it is almost a privilege to work outside after the indoor threshing. The more enjoyable aspects are enough to elevate these jobs to the status of being "bitter sweet"; as opposed, by implication, to the threshing that produces much of the former sensation and little of the latter. This passage is the beginning of a long portrayal of

how renewed optimism and vigour at the start of spring eventually give way to exhaustion and fatigue.

A further passage on labour reads:

> A-cross one's Shoulder hangs a Scythe well steel'd, 107
> The Weapon destin'd to unclothe the Field:
> T'other supports the Whetstone, Scrip, and Beer;
> That for our Scythes, and These ourselves to chear. (ll.107-10) 110

This is a particularly good illustration of the 'mingling' of the Duckian mode of aestheticising labour. The first two lines exhibit the balance and contrast associated with the neo-classical couplet: in the first line we are told the actual name of the implement, a "Scythe well steel'd", slung across a shoulder; in the second we have a neo-classical synonym for such an implement, "The Weapon destin'd to unclothe the Field". The specific and everyday come together with the general and neo-classical in a perfect microcosm of the Duckian mode and technique. Balance is further reinforced by the fact that this is a description of the – equally essential – objects resting on either shoulder. On one rests food and drink; on the other the implement necessary to perform one's labour. There follows a passage about the men using the idea of a contest as a motivational tool, before the couplet "Our weary Scythes entangle in the Grass, / And Streams of Sweat run trickling down a-pace" (ll.123-4). These lines recall 44 and 45, quoted earlier, and the circular, Sisyphean nature of their experiences become explicit in the poem's final lines.[36] Far from needless or dull repetition, this is deliberate self-reflexivity, in a poem constructed throughout in a more meticulous manner than acknowledged until very recently.

Another passage central to Duck's treatment of labour in the poem depicts the invigoration resulting from the whirlwind of activity at the culmination of the harvest (ll.258-67, quoted in my Introduction). Nor is this the only such passage in Duck's work to deal with his absorption in the sights and sounds of physical labour in such a concentrated way. A comparison is provided by Duck's descriptions of industry, as in "A Description of a Journey to Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth, &c."(ll.367-96, discussed in chapter four). Duck always takes pride in work and is disturbed by the thought that an employer (or reader) may think he has done less than his best. When the farmer in *The Thresher's Labour* admonishes his gang of labourers for (allegedly) making a bad job of the threshing, Duck tells us:

> Now in our Hands we wish our noisy Tools,
> To drown the hated Names of Rogues and Fools,
> But wanting those, we just like School-boys look, 80
> When th'angry Master views the blotted Book:
> They cry their ink was faulty, and their Pen;
> We, The Corn threshes bad, 'twas cut too green. (ll.78-83)

Duck presents himself and his mates as ashamed and embarrassed at being told they have done a bad job, leading them to make what they are worried seem excuses. Yet the pride they take in their industry suggests that they are not the rogues or fools the Master calls them, and that "The Corn threshes bad, 'twas cut too green" is not mere idle excuse.

Summing up Duck's complex approach to labour itself, Goodridge writes of the threshing scenes,

> It would be quite wrong to overemphasise the pride and pleasure in Duck's work: it is an undercurrent, not the main text, which shows a debilitating and backbreaking routine. Nevertheless an awareness of Duck's feelings of pride and pleasure, here and in the mowing scene, allows us a fuller picture of his ideas about work ...[37]

That *The Thresher's Labour* is the product of a man who wants to educate his so-called 'betters' about the hardship labourers bear is again important. To go further than Goodridge: Duck does not deny the satisfaction he derives from the struggle for the survival of himself and his family, or the solace found in the redemptive nobility of labour. He would never want his words to be mistaken for laziness or sloth, or for a denial of the virtues of hard, honest labour.

He is frank, however, about the physical, mental and emotional stress resulting from a life of toil. This stress emanates from a number of factors: working hours, conditions, and their consequences, such as fatigue and illness:

> When sooty Pease we thresh, you scarce can know
> Our native Colour, as from Work we go; 65
> The Sweat, and Dust, and Suffocating Smoke,
> Make us so much like *Ethiopians* look:
> We scare our Wives, when Evening brings us home;
> And frighted Infants think the Bug-bear come.
> Week after Week we this dull Task pursue, 70
> Unless when winnowing Days produce a new; (ll.64-71)

The allusion is to the threshing of pea-plants, in order to release the dried peas.[38] The repeated "s" and "t" sounds in "The Sweat, and Dust, and suffocating Smoke," suggest the labourers' need to spit. The commas are positioned to convey the impression of one imposition and hardship piled on another. Incidentally, the mode of address is informal: "When sooty Pease we thresh, *you* scarce can know" (my italics).

Sweat, dust and "Smoke" are not the only factors that make life unpleasant for the labourers. They have only the shelter of the barns to protect them from the winter weather, and Duck more than once describes how difficult labouring under a fierce summer sun can be:

> But when the scorching Sun is mounted high,
> And no kind Barns with friendly Shades are nigh,
> Our weary Scythes entangle in the Grass;
> And Streams of Sweat run trickling down-a-pace; (ll.121-5) 125

Finally there is the recurrent weariness and near-exhaustion they feel:

> Our time slides on, we move from off the Grass,
> And each again betakes him to his Place.
> Not eager now, as late, our Strength to prove, 145
> But all contented regular to move …
>
> Homewards we move, but so much spent with Toil,
> We walk but slow, and rest at every Stile.
> Our good expecting Wives, who think we stay,
> Got to the Door, soon eye us in the way;
> Then from the Pot the Dumpling's catch'd in haste, 155
> And homely by its side the Bacon's plac'd.
> Supper and Sleep by Morn new Strength supply,
> And out we set again our Works to try:
> But not so early quite, nor quite so fast,
> As to our Cost we did the Morning past. (ll.143-6, 151-60) 160

Here their diminishing strength is (however temporarily) restored. This is also a good example of the poem veering into areas of labouring experience uncharted by either pastoral or georgic, providing a precedent for other labouring poets wishing to transgress generic boundaries. Domestic labouring life is illuminated for us. Strong medial pauses here are clearly intended to mimic the real-life slowing down described. The subject of food is highlighted. Duck's specific references to "homely" everyday foods such as "Dumplings" and "Bacon" prefigure Collier, Leapor, Blamire and Wilson. Elsewhere, in (yet) another passage bemoaning how far pastoral

convention has strayed from the 'reality' of rural labour, things are differently described. They sit down underneath a "shady Tree", tired "with Heat and Labour", and:

> From Scrip and Bottle hope new Strength to gain;
> But Scrip and Bottle too are try'd in vain.
> Down our parch'd Throats we scarce the Bread can get,
> And quite o'er-spent with Toil, but faintly eat; 140
> Nor can the Bottle only answer all,
> Alas! the Bottle and the Beer's too small. (ll.137-42)

A passage such as this, ending with the pun lamenting the (too) weak beer, is a precursor of Tatersal's desperate musings on the inadequacy of his provisions (see next chapter). Just as food sometimes fails to give hoped-for respite, even sleep can fail – hence ll.250-3 complaining that labour even dominates their dreams.

A final dimension of Duck's treatment of labour that merits attention is his description of the various methods that the labourers use to motivate themselves, faced with lengthy spells of repetitive exhausting work. They see the work as a kind of trial of strength:

> The Grass and Ground each chearfully surveys,
> Willing to see which way th'Advantage lays.
> As the best man, each claims the foremost Place, 115
> And our first Work seems but a sportive Race:
> With rapid Force our well-whet Blades we drive,
> Strain every nerve, and Blow for Blow we give:
> Tho' but this Eminence the Foremost gains,
> Only t'excel the rest in Toil and Pains. 120
> But when the scorching Sun is mounted high …
>
> Our sportive Labour we too late lament, 125
> And wish that Strength again, we vainly spent. (ll.113-21, 125-6)

Writing about Collier's *The Woman's Labour*, Landry picks out a line to contrast with this passage from Duck. She writes: "The Virgilian topos of "Now we drive on, resolv'd our Strength to try", addresses the washing as if it were an epic contest, the women's strength against the task at hand, and not, we notice, the women against each other, as in Duck's description of male competition in scything."[39] It is important to stress that what Duck describes is not competition in any hostile sense, as Landry's argument that they are "against each other" might imply, but an attempt to try to out-

do each other in a friendly spirit of rivalry. It is designed, if anything, to bring them closer – there is actually comradeship in this passage. They survey the "Grass and Ground ... cheerfully". Trying to seek out advantage for themselves is a precious diversion from the monotony of their work, which turns into a "*sportive* Race" (my italics). In a similar passage in "A Description of a Journey" Duck, back in his native Wiltshire in 1735 to attend the inaugural Duck Feast, cannot wait to wield again the trusty flail, scythe and threshall, and again enters into a playful competition with his former fellows.[40] The equivalent vignette in *The Thresher's Labour* is a microcosm, however, of the way in which the harvest culminates in the cheat of the harvest-home supper before the cycle begins again. The "sportive Race" likewise turns out to be a deception and ends in lament. In other words, the very coping strategy used to deal with the monotony itself compounds the labourers' disillusionment when it inevitably ends in something quite different.

The controversial gleaning passage (ll.163-204, discussed in the next chapter) has been of great interest to feminist critics concerned with a gender-based dialectic between Duck and Collier. It is also relevant to a discussion of the poem's overall structure, even if this issue has often been overlooked on account of the passage's political implications. Also of central relevance to the poem's structure is the closing comparison with the labours of Sisyphus. Whilst it is the only time in the poem that Duck explicitly alludes to Sisyphus, these lines function as an apt conclusion because they reinforce the circular nature of the labourer's lives that has been to the fore throughout:

> Like *Sisyphus*, our Work is never done, 280
> Continually rolls back the restless Stone:
> Now growing Labours still succeed the past,
> And growing always new, must always last. (ll.280-3)

Respites deceive them into thinking that their labour will be lighter for a while, only to be followed by repeated disappointments. The interlude – for this is what it is – provided by the controversial gleaning passage also takes its place within this scheme of transitory diversions from the inevitable.

After eighty-three lines of introduction describing various occupations undertaken during the autumn and winter, a lengthy passage commences until l.162 showing how, from a position of renewed vigour and optimism at the onset of spring,

exhaustion sets in. The gleaning interlude then commences, in which the pressure of this relentless, frenetic activity is released; it is succeeded by a description of the gathering of the harvest, another frantic period of work culminating in l.267 before the "Cheat" passage and the (Sisyphean) conclusion (ll.268-83). In this way, the poem is divided into a clearly symmetrical pattern: introduction; frenzied activity; diversion / interlude; frenzied activity; conclusion. Duck creates tension, releases it with the gleaning passage, then builds it again with the description of the harvest, before concluding with exhaustion and disillusionment.

The poem's patterning is more intricate yet. As part of the Sisyphean cycle, even the periods of frenetic activity contain mini-digressions. The first occurs from ll.127-34 (beginning "Thus in the Morn a Courser I have seen,") in the middle of the extended passage of exhausting activity from ll.84-162. In the middle of the second passage of such activity, another mini-digression occurs, from ll.231-8 (beginning "Thus when Arabia's Sons, in hopes of Prey"). The informal voice of the worker-poet is not the only voice on show in the poem, as Keegan (and Goodridge before her)[41] have noted. Keegan makes a differentiation between the "we", which she argues is the voice of the labourer, and the voice of the (Addisonian) poet. The latter, she claims, is evident in two passages featuring the pronoun "I", and in one without a personal pronoun that nonetheless corresponds to the 'voice' of the passages elsewhere narrated by the "I". The two extracts I have identified, in the middle of passages of frenzied activity, are two of these three passages. The other, from ll.191-203 (beginning "Thus I have seen on a bright Summer's Day") occurs at the end of the digressionary gleaning passage, a diversion within a digression, as it were.

Keegan argues that ll.231-8

> ... obscure the distinction between the two voices ... It is no surprise then that while the arduous nature of the collective "we's" labor continues to the poem's conclusion, the "I" does not reappear. In describing the thresher's labor, Duck is describing the silencing of the poet who would sing of that labor.[42]

She contends, then, that Duck suggests that he cannot be a(n Addisonian) poet *and* simultaneously a poet of labour. This is not necessarily the case. As the "I" demonstrates, the poem simultaneously aestheticises the experiences both of a group of threshers, *and* of one particular thresher, who is also a poet. The "I" passages emphasise Duck's 'otherness', and that his status as a poet divides him from his

fellows. This is Duck's articulation of the paradox, later alluded to and examined by a variety of labourer-bards, of what it is to be a 'labouring poet'. As soon as a labourer attains 'poethood', s/he is by definition separated from her / his workmates. As Duck experiences the same labouring activities as his mates, he relates them to classical precedent, and experiments with the means of poeticising them. We find ourselves in the midst, then, of a self-reflexive work, as Duck poeticises the very processes through which he arrives at the poem we are reading. *Just as he describes testing the threshall early in the poem, he tests his ability to 'poeticise' his experiences.* These experiments include speaking through the 'worker' mode, the 'poet' mode, and devising a means of moving between the two. The poem deals not just with the experience of being a thresher, but with the experience of being a thresher simultaneously seeking to be a poet. The latter's – personal – labours involve pursuing this quest as he moves through the year.

The three 'poet' passages are all are epic similes and hence display a more 'formal', detached register (despite the use of the first person in two). The identities of 'poet' and 'thresher' do not co-exist easily (as Duck recorded in another poem, "To a Gentleman who requested a Copy of Verses from the Author").[43] In conventional epic, the transition is between the 'elevated' and the mundane / everyday. For instance, in Book I of *Paradise Lost*, Milton describes the fallen angels converging upon the newly constructed palace of Pandemonium, his major subject, by means of a contrast with a swarm of bees:

> .... As bees
> In springtime, when the sun with Taurus rides,
> Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
> In clusters; they among fresh dews and flowers
> Fly to and fro, or on the smoothed plank,
> The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
> New rubbed with balm, expatiate and confer
> Their state affairs ...[44]

The movement is *away* from the grandiose and *towards* the humble or everyday. In order to emphasise this, and despite the fact that "Bee similes were commonplace in the epic tradition from Homer through the Renaissance", as Elledge notes, "Milton characteristically enriched the significance of his version with meaningful detail. Instead of wild bees (as in Homer and others) Milton refers to a *domestic* swarm ..."[45] (my italics). The simile has a number of purposes. By recalling Homer, and as Elledge

implies, it helps Milton to locate his enterprise in the epic tradition; the homely comparison helps readers to imaginatively assimilate a scene beyond normal human imagination; and it widens the range of human experience spanned in the poem as a whole, thereby contributing to the traditional epic aim of being as far as possible comprehensive, universal and encyclopaedic. Additionally, such similes can manipulate the dramatic tension of the poem, and therefore heighten the reader's dramatic experience, by means of a variation of mood, pace and tone. The poet turns away at a key moment and allows this tension to dissipate before restoring it (as with the 'porter scene' in *Macbeth*, for instance).

Whereas, to broaden the scope of a supernatural narrative, Milton uses such similes to incorporate the everyday, Duck, by contrast, broadens the scope of an everyday narrative by using them to incorporate mythical or theological allusions. In doing so, he highlights his poetic 'otherness' even as he seeks to illustrate the epic potential of his labouring theme. As he proves, intentionally or otherwise, a thresher *can* write poetry about his working life, but however he seeks after influence by imitating those who inspire him, the end result will necessarily be *different*. Each epic simile in Duck's poem is brought abruptly to an end by the labour to which the poet-narrator is returned, as the register becomes less 'formal'. The first of the three simile-digressions (ll.127-34, the comparison of the swift courser with he and his fellows) is followed by "With Heat and Labour tir'd, our Scythes we quit, / Search out a shady Tree, and down we sit", as the effects of his own labour suddenly bring his private, 'poetic' musings to a halt. Similarly, the second such digression (ll.191-8, on a flock of sparrows playing, imbedded within the wider digression on gleaners) is succeeded by "But now the Field we must no longer range, / And yet, hard Fate! still Work for work we change". Finally, the third digression in the voice of the would-be Addisonian poet (ll.231-8) is succeeded by "The Morning past, we sweat beneath the Sun, / And but uneasily our Work goes on." What Duck seeks is the *intersection* between labouring experience and literary convention, a means of subduing raw experience to existing literary form, a meeting of the two (a quest likewise pursued by poets in succeeding chapters of this study). What he produces, within these terms, is far from unsuccessful: if it is impossible to tell, from human experience, whether a swarm of bees does resemble the gathering of the gods (since no-one has ever seen the latter), tired labourers at the end of the day can be appropriately contrasted with a wearied courser, a simile none the less epic in nature for the fact that human

experience confirms its veracity. Duck's experiments in providing 'epic' similes in the inverse of the direction seen in conventional epic ('lower' to 'higher' instead of the other way around) demonstrate his appreciation of the epic potential of his theme. Duck, Collier and others had a topic worthy of heroic verse – the struggle of honest individuals to survive despite working long hours that are mentally and physically exhausting – whereas canonical poets of the age did not. This issue is admittedly not developed to its logical conclusion until James Woodhouse's *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*. Writing in the 1790s Woodhouse, one of a number of figures who attempts to fill a space opened up by Duck, consciously constructs himself as a Duckian literary descendant and poeticises the epic scale both of the emergence of the proletariat and of his own struggles. In *The Thresher's Labour* there is a strong sense of the *potentially* epic status of the struggle of the labourer.

There is also a sustained sequential energy in Duck's poem because instead of using the couplet to produce the compact epigram (for the reasons explained by Hunter, and alluded to in my Introduction) he narrates continuous events (as discussed in my analysis of the threshing passage). This concentration on creating a series of near-epigrams made narrative energy usually an irrelevance in much contemporary verse, since invariably – exceptions stand out[46] – the freedom to write couplets of this kind was sought, and narrative energy willingly foregone. The primary experiences Duck represents cannot easily be sub-divided or miniaturised in self-contained couplets – as seen in a number of vignettes quoted – because of the poem's continuous 'narrative'. The high number of lines beginning with "And" seems relevant here – no less than forty-four in all. Pope also often begins lines with "And" – particularly in his minor verse – but at his most 'formal' does so more rarely. If he does so begin a line, it is invariably in the second line of a couplet; Duck is driven on numerous occasions to begin a couplet's *first* line with "And" (e.g. *TTL* ll.33, 111, 169, 173). It is noteworthy that of the ten lines describing the end of the harvest (ll.258-67), four begin with "And" – Duck's natural urge is to attempt to 'carry on' narrating ongoing experiences. A comparison with Clare's sonnet "Mouse's Nest"[47] is instructive; five of the fourteen lines begin with "And", because what Clare describes is *a single experience*. Duck writes in a similar spirit: a sustained experience, such as that of several hours' manual labour at the same task, is likely to be falsified beyond even poetic licence if sub-divided into a sequence of (near) autonomous couplets. A

related point concerns the various lines in the poem (e.g. ll. 3, 54, 64, 86, 92, 111 and 163) where the sense decrees that the lines run strongly on – a 'natural' overcoming of repetitive end-stopping.[48]

Like the run-on lines in the poem, Duck's variations of the pause can provide a refreshing departure from the predictability of the 'tight' end-stopped couplet, however much meaning / suggestion could be produced within it. Some analysis of these variations is demanded, since they impact upon issues of mood, pace and momentum; they show how Duck attempted to adapt, or contribute to the evolution of the Augustan medium, in order to further his purposes. His mimicking of 'natural' pauses both encompasses a 'slower' pace – as when the Master is explaining what he wants the labourers to do at the start of a new seasonal occupation (and hence when the pauses mimic those of actual speech); and when creeping fatigue has slowed down the activity levels of the workers. Conversely, when they are keen and energetic at the outset of a welcome new task, Duck reproduces the speed and enthusiasm with which the labour is performed.

Eighteenth-century punctuation was generally, within our terms, inconsistent (not just in Duck but equally within the work of his canonical counterparts), and hence it is the perceived pause, rather than the punctuation-mark, that must be noted, even if often the pause will be marked *by* punctuation. The first scene in which the Master gathers his workers around was quoted earlier (ll.19-26). The colon in l.19 marking the pause, is obviously significant as it mimics the 'real-life' equivalent as they wait for him to begin speaking. After he points, and then "directs", in ll. 22 and 23, in each case there is a comma to reflect the 'real life' pause as they respond to his command, and as the Master hesitates to allow them to do so. "Here two for Wheat, and there for Barley two" (l.24) again uses the comma to mark the pause in his speech as he waits for them to respond, and turns to indicate where to go to thresh wheat and barley respectively. Lines 26-30 then further reflect the 'real life' pauses in his speech. These techniques are replicated later when the Master this time introduces them to the harvesting:

> For Harvest now, says he, yourselves prepare,
> The ripen'd Harvest now demands your Care.
> Early next Morn I shall disturb your Rest, 215
> Get all things ready, and be quickly drest.
> Strict to his Word, scarce the next Dawn appears,
> Before his hasty Summons fills our Ears.

> Obedient to his Call, strait up we get,
> And finding soon our Company complete; 220
> With him, our Guide, we to the Wheat-Field go;
> He, to appoint, and we, the Work to do. (ll.213-22)

Again in ll.213-16, the commas reflect the pauses of 'actual' speech, those on either side of "says he" in l.213 denoting that the poet is himself 'speaking' to his reader in order to relate what was said to the workers. Line 220 is a good example of the waywardness of eighteenth-century punctuation (always remembering that this version of the poem was, in any case, pirated, and therefore not under Duck's ultimate control). The sense demands a comma after "And", and another – instead of a semi-colon – at the end of the line. We read the line, nonetheless, as it should be read, with pauses, gleaned from the sense; pauses that again reflect 'real life' equivalents. When we – and the labourers – get to the field in ll.221-2, multiple commas (that are, *here*, included to mark pauses) again *slow the couplet down* to reflect the delay as the Master necessarily instructs them; at this time they are not actually doing anything other than listening.

Alternatively, when engaged in periods of frenzied or concentrated labour, the sense surges on without a pause. Lines 99-104 (quoted earlier) occur just before the onset of haymaking, to which the labourers look forward because it will enable them to work outside after months of indoor threshing. Hence the absence of pauses in ll.101-2 ensures that this 'real life' enthusiasm is mimicked with (what read as) brisk lines. Similarly, in the lines on comradely rivalry in ll.116-20, already quoted, the lines are energetic and the commas, standing for pauses, just reflect those between each individual blow of the blade. When, however, the workers are excessively tired, the tactic shifts again as the lines are slowed down to reflect the slower 'pace' of the now-tired labourers: "With Heat and Labour tir'd, our Scythes we quit, / Search out a shady Tree, and down we sit;" (ll.134-5). At a period of extreme exhaustion, l.145 – "Not eager now, as late, our Strength to prove," – as many as three pauses are included. A similar technique can be seen in ll.151-2 and ll.159-60.

Then there are the changes of mood that reflect the fluctuating morale of the workers as the year's tasks leave them first deflated, then relieved. For instance, a strong caesura in l.96 (quoted earlier) provides a pause to mimic the collective gasp of relief of the workers after the months of indoor threshing. Another strong caesura in

l.209 suggests a similar change of mood, as the labourers are glad to temporarily get out of the sun:

> Back to the Barns again in haste we're sent,
> Where lately so much Time we pensive spent:
> Not pensive now; we bless the friendly Shade,
> And to avoid the parching Sun are glad. (ll.207-10)

The break allows for a clear division between the former pensiveness and the ensuing relief.

For all the variations of momentum, mood and pace in the poem, Duck's verse is clearly not as nimble or agile as, for instance, Leapor's in "Crumble-Hall". Given that the central metaphor of the poem, though, to which it builds, is one of eternally rolling a stone up a hill, this is hardly inappropriate. Duck's strengths lie in his stamina, weight of subject matter, and accumulation of effect. By the end, we have a sustained sense of the sights and sounds of Duck's everyday working life – and of the gamut of emotions that the workers run. Yet this 'accumulation of effect' is such that, by definition, lengthy passages have to be read in order to appreciate it – Duck's poem repays brief, isolated quotation less than, for instance (and to generalise), Pope's work – or at least isolated quotation makes it hard to praise Duck in the same way, because Duck does not aim at producing as much meaning / suggestion within a short space.

This would appear an appropriate point at which to identify the characteristics that Duck passed on to those who attempted to create their own versions of the poem, and to decide how they might best be described. I am interested here in attempting a definition of a particular 'kind' of poem inaugurated by *The Thresher's Labour*, distinct from, though inter-related with, my earlier definition of the general mode of poeticising labour also seen in the poem. According to Richard Greene:

> ... "The Thresher's Labour" demonstrated that the experiences of labour itself could be the basis of poetry ... As a model for labouring poets, this composition is especially important. James Sambrook observes that "The Thresher's Labour" is "one of the earliest eighteenth-century poems to belong to no recognized literary 'kind'." That Duck had opened a new avenue of literary expression is evident from the number of poems published in the 1730s, often addressed to him, in which poets assert the literary possibilities of their own labour.[49]

Far from being the 'kind' of poem that labouring-class and female poets regularly produce, poems such as *The Thresher's Labour* and other attempts in the same vein such as Collier's *The Woman's Labour*, Tatersal's "The Bricklayer's Labours" and Leapor's "Crumble Hall" occupy a position of prominence within the oeuvres of their writers. Elsewhere these poets attempt more traditional 'kinds' of verse, such as pastoral, epistle, elegy etc. (as well as, in some cases, writing other poems featuring a Duckian medium of writing about labour – or at least about the *everyday*). There is normally only room for one of these central poems in the oeuvre of each poet. They are predominantly experiential and employ everyday language, sometimes even incorporating dialect and / or vernacular, and an informal tone of friend addressing friend (replicated in other poems by these figures), 'mingled' with the more 'formal' commonplaces of neo-classical versification. It might be misleading to describe them as a 'genre', since, as the next chapter will show, there are differences between them, but they all feature the Duckian mode and appear to fulfil the same, or a very similar, *function*. They represent an attempt to describe their authors' specific occupational labour and to assert that their experiences are of sufficient significance to merit individual recognition. They also appear to hark forward politically and sociologically in that they are written on behalf of a community not able to express its own views in literary form. These communities can be either occupational or geographical, but tend before *c*.1750, to be the former. Duck, whilst notionally writing on behalf of threshers, in fact represents a wider occupational group of labourers on the farm on which he works; Collier's poem's title is inaccurate in that she attempts to represent the views and experiences of *labouring* women; Leapor writes on behalf of domestic servants; and Tatersal of bricklayers. The poems all seek to educate readers about the 'realities' of working life and experience, at the same time as establishing that their authors merit the title of 'poet'.

To arrive at a descriptor for this 'kind' of poem, some reference to the idea of 'self-assertion' would seem desirable. The poets are all individuals theoretically excluded from writing poetry by virtue of their occupations, and hence find it necessary to write at least one major autobiographical poem to assert their right to compose verse, whilst also affirming the existence of a wider labouring community. This also accounts for the fact that women poets (including those of other social classes) in this period, equally excluded from a literary form produced by and for men of the middle and upper social orders, write poems asserting something similar.[50]

Ideally, any descriptive term would also involve reference to the experiential nature of these verses, and to the fact that their writers reject what they see as the definitions imposed on them by others in favour of a right to self-definition. Poems that are "assertive of the value of individual experience and identity, and of the right to self-definition, on behalf of the writers themselves and of the members of their fellow labouring community", may not, as such a description, win commendations for brevity, but does make reference to these various elements. That this description extends beyond merely two or three words is not necessarily a bad thing; too restrictive a description would only risk imprisoning Duck's poem within another tight definition of the type one imagines he would have been keen to escape.

Beyond the next couple of decades, once the need to define oneself and affirm the existence of a labouring community in verse has been satisfied, the influence of a Duckian medium persists in other forms, and Duck's continuing visibility in the latter half of the century was illustrated in my Introduction. As argued, poeticising his experiences did not just endow his subject matter with dignity by "making special", but implied a claim for the status of *poet*, rather than mere (anonymous) folk songster, or diarist. Duck's affinity with the working people of his home county of Wiltshire, and his fame, were sealed in 1735 with the inauguration of 'The Thresher's Feast', an event of a nature seldom accorded to songster or diarist.[51] As Davis wrote in 1926, this annual occasion gives Duck "the unique position among the English poets, of one whose memory has been celebrated continuously by an annual banquet for nearly two hundred years."[52] 'The Duck Feast' (as it is now known) endures, and 2005 saw not only the tri-centennial anniversary of Duck's birth, but the two hundred and seventieth of the first Feast, instigated by Lord Viscount Palmerston so that the threshers of Duck's native Charlton St. Peter might celebrate his achievements. Duck attended the inaugural feast, and wrote about the experience in "A Description of a Journey" The following passage is unusual within the works of the self-effacing Duck, and aptly concludes the present discussion:

> Oft as this Day returns, shall Threshers claim 91
> Some Hours of Rest sacred to TEMPLE's Name;
> Oft as this Day returns, shall TEMPLE chear
> The Threshers Hearts with Mutton, Beef and Beer:
> Hence, when their Childrens Children shall admire 95
> This Holiday, and, whence deriv'd, inquire;
> Some grateful Father, partial to my Fame,

Shall thus describe from whence, and how it came.

'Here, Child, a Thresher liv'd in ancient Days;
Quaint Songs he sung, and pleasing Roundelays; 100
A gracious QUEEN his Sonnets did commend;
And some great Lord, one TEMPLE, was his Friend:
That Lord was pleas'd this Holiday to make,
And feast the Threshers, for that Thresher's sake.'

Thus shall Tradition keep my Fame alive; 105
The Bard may die, the Thresher still survive. (ll.91-106)[53]

II: Agency and Religion

As suggested in my Introduction, I am concerned to challenge certain existing conceptual approaches – influenced by Marx, Althusser and Gramsci – to Duck and the poetry of labour. Such approaches have tended to stress these labourers' (proto-socialist) attempts at 'resistance' to social, cultural and ideological norms, and the ways in which the dominant institutions and ideologies of their time acted to frustrate them. Yet the first half of the eighteenth century was (fundamentally) a socially stable period. I will argue that the English labouring classes (and particularly the poets with whom I am concerned) were reluctant to rebel overtly for reasons better accounted for by Žižek and Nietzsche. Whilst cautious of a 'left-wing' need to see poets as offering 'resistance' – of being seduced by what Keegan calls "critical fantasies for proto-proletarian pronouncements"[54] – I will argue, with Christmas, that "Complicity and critique" could "coexist in many plebeian texts"[55] of the century, and that to understand why (and how), we need to attend to poetic discourses surrounding both custom and religion. My intention is to focus on the simultaneous *co-existence* of complicity and (subtle) protest, and on the reasons for this. In order to differentiate my approach from those of existing studies, I will pay close attention to the methodology adopted by William J. Christmas in *The Labr'ing Muses*, the most wide-ranging monograph-length study yet devoted to the labouring-class poets as a group.[56]

Christmas discards certain aspects of classical Marxist methodology, adopting a post-Marxist, cultural materialist framework. His approach generates a number of valuable insights – I will use his work on custom as a springboard for my own on religion – but seems vulnerable to a number of criticisms, mostly that go to the root of the cultural materialist project itself. Christmas indicates the importance of the work

of Althusser in his thinking,[57] arguing that "Althusserian theory has served as a benchmark for studies which require a more sophisticated notion of ideology than is provided by classical Marxism". He continues:

> The traditional Marxist conceptions of ideology as false consciousness, defined as the distorted representations of material conditions, or as conscious struggle, as the way in which people become conscious of their real interests and respond by fighting it out, do not provide much for literary critics to do: texts either become examples of false consciousness themselves or they show us what we already knew before reading them. [58]

Althusser, Christmas states, "offers a more significant role for literature within the cultural matrix, and hence, a more interesting job for critics to undertake in explicating its nature and effects."[59]

Quoting from Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)",[60] Christmas argues that "Althusser extends standard Marxist conceptions of ideology and effectively enables ideological analysis in materialist literary / cultural studies".[61] Christmas summarises Althusser's concepts of the RSA (Repressive State Apparatus) "which controls citizens directly through such social institutions as armies, police, courts, and prisons" and the ISA (Ideological State Apparatus) "which control indirectly by means of culture, communication, and specialized institutions such as churches, schools and the family."[62] He then asserts:

> Literature is a key feature of what Althusser terms "the cultural ISA" and it is here that literary critics, even those working in earlier historical periods, can seek out both the ways in which the state subtly disseminates and sanctions as valid certain ways of representing reality, and the ways in which certain people resist those dominant or hegemonic representations.[63]

The duty of the cultural critic for Christmas, then, is to work out where and how ideas serve the cause of the ruling class, as well as identify the contradictions that reveal the gaps and flaws in ideology. Althusser held that ideology 'interpellates' us and we respond in a reflexive fashion, acting as if 'brainwashed' into remaining in thrall to ideology. Like Gramsci, the Italian philosopher renowned for his concept of 'hegemony'[64] whose work Althusser developed, the latter believed that Marxism can make these things clear so that we can escape the conditioning process keeping us subject to the ideology of the ruling class.

It is Christmas' aim, he states, to consider the following questions:

> ... what ideological representations were produced and reproduced in textual forms in the eighteenth century that were intended to keep men and women of the labouring classes in their appointed places in the social order? Given the historical scope of this inquiry, how did these ideological representations change (or not change) over time to meet the demands of different social conditions? ... in what ways did plebeian poets contest or counter these representations in their own published texts?[65]

Whilst an examination of such issues clearly suggests a very different approach to that of the present study, the questions posed are clearly of great interest in themselves. There are objections to Althusser's ideas, however, that also afflict cultural materialist methodology.[66] Not least is Althusser's failure, recurrent in Marxist thought, to adequately conceptualise the role of religion in the emancipation of the working classes. He counts the church as an integral part of the Ideological State Apparatus, and is surely right, in that throughout the history of the Western world, ruling social and political orders have consistently sought to appropriate Christianity. One must turn to Nietzsche, however, for an appreciation of Christianity as the will to power of the servant class.[67]

Christmas notes that Althusser "does not allow much room for individual agency resistive to ideology", adding, "In light of this aspect of Althusserian thought, Gramsci has become the key figure for theorizing the potential for individual and / or collective resistance to dominant, repressive forces".[68] Herein lies an important debate. Marxist methodologies of all hues struggle to conceptualise the individual – usually presented as a mere bourgeois construct – which tends to disappear into history amidst the swirl of all-powerful social and historical forces. On the face of things, Gramsci's ideas do seem to deny agency to individuals, just as much as those of Marx or Althusser. Can Gramsci rescue Marxism from its inability to conceptualise the individual?

Hegemony,[69] "the Gramscian concept *par excellence* and the very fulcrum of his thought",[70] is conceived of as an equilibrium between civil society[71] and political society, between "leadership" or "direction" (based on "spontaneous" consent), and "domination", based on coercion in the broadest sense. A "historical bloc" – another key concept – is formed only when this equilibrium exists, i.e. when a given class succeeds in maintaining hegemony over society through both direction and domination, persuasion and force. The way in which the masses are effectively

seduced into giving this "spontaneous consent" is usually referred to as "interpellation". The intellectuals – "deputies" of the dominant class – play a key role in exercising this power over the masses (part of Gramsci's controversial attempt to reintroduce the individual into Marxist thought). Whenever direction lags and the ideological grasp on the masses lessens, the State enters into crisis, allowing other classes to penetrate the spaces it has failed to occupy, and to advance towards a hegemonic position.[72] It is interesting to note Gramsci's reference to the church in the letter of September 7 1931,[73] and like Benedetto Croce, by whom Gramsci was greatly influenced, he also may be accused of an inability to conceptualise Christianity as the will to power of the servant class.

Whilst, as Lawner argues, Gramsci's "new concept of hegemony and the crucial role it gives to intellectuals on all levels of society is something quite unique in the history of Marxist thought",[74] and although Gramsci is clearly capable of conceptualising the individual at some level,[75] there are strong arguments against adopting his ideas to provide a framework for theorising issues facing the labouring-class poets. One of the first objections to hegemony as a means of theorising social relations within early eighteenth-century England must be that the notion of a planned, orchestrated domination and direction by the ruling social order over the masses on a national 'state' level seems unlikely, since social relations were governed by the local, not the national.[76] Naturally there was a ruling – or at least dominant – social order that employed strategies to keep the masses in subjection, but in an age before mass transportation and modern communications, 'national' identity was largely notional.[77] In the absence of a conception of 'class' on either the part of, for instance, an agricultural labourer or his employer,[78] there seems little reason for doubting that a bond existed that would preclude hegemony in a way not possible a century later.

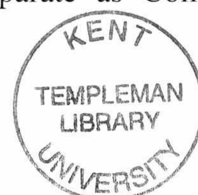
The most persuasive reason for doubting the concept of hegemony in this context is that if Gramsci and his followers can spot this ideological 'conspiracy', then there is no reason why everybody else cannot either. Profound doubts have also emerged, however, within contemporary theory about whether there would be a *need* for a ruling social order to establish dominance over the masses in the way hegemony suggests, or whether it is possible – the backlash began with the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantel Mouffe in the mid-nineteen eighties, before gathering pace with Slavoj Žižek's ongoing work on individual collusion with ideology. This focus on

criticisms of Gramscian hegemony from the left is quite deliberate. Since liberal objections both to Marxism and major offshoots of Marxist thought are well known and might be anticipated,[79] it seems pertinent to focus instead on the criticisms from the left. Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe all stray into areas extending well beyond the concerns of the present study, but are united in their critique of Gramscian hegemony.

Laclau and Mouffe[80] trace the genealogy of hegemony, discredit the Gramscian version, and attempt to radically reinvent it in a manner more applicable to the culturally pluralist world of today. Arguing that new social movements around the world, such as the feminist, ecological, ethnic and sexual, suggest that Marxism has been superceded, Laclau and Mouffe claim that the message of traditional Marxism is no longer relevant to rapidly altering socio-political circumstances. They ask for a recasting of the 'political imaginary' of the Left as traditionally understood, a process that necessitates discarding sacred principles of Marxist and socialist thought (such as the belief that the working class is the 'privileged agent' of social change). Socialism, they contend, is only one aspect of the contemporary struggle against social and political oppression; and the task of the Left, far from being to *renounce* liberal-democratic ideology, is actually to deepen and expand it in the direction of radical and plural democracy. Hegemony was, they claim, never any more than an admission of defeat in the face of problematic gaps in Marxist theory, simply attempting to explain why Marx's predictions were taking so long to come about. They argue hegemony:

> ... did not emerge to define a new type of relation in its specific identity, but to fill a hiatus that had opened in the chain of historical necessity. 'Hegemony' will allude to an absent totality, and to the diverse attempts at recomposition and rearticulation which, in overcoming this original absence, made it possible for struggles to be given a meaning and for historical forces to be endowed with full positivity. The contexts in which the concept will appear will be those of a *fault* (in the geological sense), of a fissure that had to be filled up, of a contingency that had to be overcome. 'Hegemony' will be not the majestic unfolding of an identity but the response to a crisis.[81]

Laclau and Mouffe subsequently argue, as had earlier theorists such as Marcuse, that the working class no longer exists in its traditional form (if indeed it ever did). In this sense they contribute to a school of thought that reached its apogee a few years earlier with Andrè Gorz's most renowned – and controversial – work, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism.*[82] Further left-wing criticisms of Gramscian hegemony have come from sources as disparate as Collins, and



Abercrombie.[83] It is clear, though, that if hegemony is merely a case of special pleading, an attempt to rescue failed theory, then it is discredited purely at a theoretical level. What is true of Gramsci is clearly similarly true of Althusser: his work attempts to shore up the authority of failed theory.

The Lacanian-influenced post-Marxist Žižek develops the views of Laclau and Mouffe, proposes individual complicity with ideology as a viable alternative to hegemony, and so challenges the assumption that ideology is some kind of 'conspiracy'. According to Žižek, we are well aware of the gaps and contradictions in ideology, yet *choose* to ignore them because we want – need – to reassure ourselves that we live under a consistent system of belief.[84] In effect, we 'interpellate' ourselves, *actively* willing and colluding in ideology's success. *We* fill in and disguise gaps and contradictions, not some powerful (and sinister) political elite. Žižek first begins to work towards these ideas in his major work on human agency, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*.[85] Unsurprisingly, Žižek also applies his ideas to religion and is the first theorist discussed to see beyond the limiting view of religion offered by most versions of Marxism. In *The Fragile Absolute, or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for?*[86] Žižek first treats the theme in detail, before pursuing it again in *On Belief*,[87] in which he (again) argues that despite our supposedly secular twenty-first century beliefs, we all *want* and *need* to be secret believers.

Žižek demonstrates his thesis through a series of lucid, though eclectic illustrations, with reference to examples involving the experimental psychology of Jean-Leon Beauvois,[88] the collapse of communism in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin wall[89] and the France 3 television programme "C'est mon choix".[90] He shows that those 'given' the freedom to choose other than what is required by authority will freely prevent themselves from doing so, and then lie to themselves that this is not what they have done: "they will tend to "rationalize" their "free" decision … unable to endure the so-called cognitive dissonance (their awareness that they FREELY acted against their interests, propensities, tastes or norms), they will tend to *change their opinion* about the act they were asked to accomplish."[91] He claims:

> …the truly free choice is a choice in which I do not merely choose between two or more options WITHIN a pre-given set of coordinates, but I choose to change this set of coordinates itself … the "actual freedom" as the act of consciously changing this set occurs only when, in the situation of a forced choice, one ACTS AS IF THE CHOICE IS NOT FORCED and "chooses the impossible".[92]

Žižek therefore advocates "choosing the impossible", acting entirely outside of the parameters or coordinates of others, and calls for a return to the "Leninism" he believes makes such freedom possible.[93] By making only "small choices" that do not "disturb the social and ideological balance", people collude with that balance, and the concept of hegemony itself is just another such collusion, providing a convenient excuse why people cannot disrupt the system, and preserving the credibility of failed Marxist theory.

Unsurprisingly, Žižek's ideas have been controversial – mostly because of the implication that one can institute radical change by withdrawing one's support and waiting for the system to collapse. Yet individual collusion with ideology has affinities with other developments in postmodern theory of agency, such as Baudrillard's theory of seduction, which holds that individuals can 'subdue' – or 'seduce' – ideology by withdrawing their complicity.[94] Perhaps most persuasively of all, though, Žižek's ideas are supported by extensive empirical psychological research into agency and obedience in the second half of the twentieth century, the most celebrated example of which is the work of Stanley Milgram (with whose work Beauvois', quoted at length by Žižek, has much in common).[95] As relevant as Milgram's work is, one must obviously not jump to the conclusion that eighteenth-century subjects would necessarily have reacted like Milgram's equivalents; yet Nietzsche (discussed further below) certainly came to the same conclusion about the *nineteenth*-century mind:

> Considering, then, that obedience has until now been bred and practised best and longest among humans, we can surely assume that everyone on average is born with a need to obey, as a kind of formal conscience that decrees: 'Thou shalt do certain things without question, refrain from certain things without question', in short 'thou shalt'.[96]

Žižek's ideas have advantages in the present context. There is a need for a theory that can reconcile the very large social forces of history with the (in comparison, microscopic) individual. Žižek may not, alone, have achieved this, but his work is a welcome step in that direction, going further than Gramsci in restoring the individual to history, and possessing the desirable side effect of no longer conceptualising the labouring classes of the past as victims. It also opens up other interesting possibilities for the poetry of physical labour in the eighteenth century when there were acts of rebellion as well, even though then, as now, the majority of

individuals were complicit with prevailing ideologies. Žižek's ideas, however, would seem to have at least the potential to shed light upon wider eighteenth-century behaviour, such as food riots, or industrial disputes.

Social historical research into labouring-class resistance to authority in the eighteenth century reveals a complicated picture: whilst there were no grand proto-Marxist aims, neither were the labouring classes mere victims. Rebellion was common, tended to be local in nature (at most county-wide) and to have specific aims. Its most common cause was a feeling that 'rights', according to custom had been infringed in some way, usually relating to food price, wage rates or working conditions. In years when food prices shot up, family budgets became strained. Such rises would normally be caused by a bad harvest, making grain scarcer and therefore more expensive. According to Malcolmson, "These conditions were especially prevalent during the following years: 1709, 1740, 1756/57, 1766/67, 1772/73, 1782/83, 1795 and 1800/1."[97] Six of these eight outbreaks occurred in the second half of the century, as the onset of capitalism created real economic hardship. Prices spiralled and if there was a bad harvest as well, the cycle was perpetuated and it could become almost impossible for labouring-class families to make ends meet. The disturbances that resulted in this situation were always the most widespread, since bad harvests did not respect county boundaries. By contrast, "Conflicts ... rooted in the processes of production were also common, though they were rarely found among agricultural labourers, and they were never as extensive as food riots – that is, during any given year they were always confined to particular localities, and to particular workers within these districts."[98] They focused on "basic issues concerning the conditions of labour and standards of production: wage rates, payment in truck, the recruitment of new workmen, the means of assessing the quality of workmanship, the control of the actual workplace."[99]

Malcolmson continues:

> Almost all popular protests and collective actions were informed by certain clearly defined moral concerns and social expectations ... as to the proper arrangement of economic affairs, the correct observance of priorities during times of hardship or the responsible exercise of magisterial authority. Direct actions, or 'riots', were not merely acts of unreflective impulse: they were disciplined and (at least partly) controlled by a complex of inherited values and sensibilities.[100]

These sensibilities and values concerned issues such as the selling of essential foodstuffs – farmers would supply the markets, and the populace could buy essential foodstuffs direct from the producers. The labouring-class sense of fair play decreed that transactions "should be publicly conducted, open to scrutiny, as transparent as possible."[101] It was the responsibility of local magistrates to ensure fair play. Sometimes, however, when the authorities failed to protect the interests of the poor, they would then take matters into their own hands. If a general feeling prevailed that farmers were asking for more than was fair, consumers would agree the maximum they could afford amongst themselves, and compel the farmer to sell at this price. There were brutal penalties for consumers who refused to club together in the common interest, and women and men both played prominent roles in these events. In such cases "the 'rioters' are seen to be enforcing their own price standards … that (in their own minds) were determined by tradition, consumer need and basic notions of equity."[102] What one sees is a tentative understanding on the part of the populace, albeit not in these terms, that if they withdrew complicity with the authorities, they could change things. However the labouring-classes were only ever willing to go so far. There seems to have been little desire to withdraw complicity on a wider scale. The history of working-class revolt in this country defies Marx's well-known prediction that the working classes would be more likely to rebel in times other than those of direst need. In times of only relative poverty, they have tended to comply with authority; only when their very existence has been threatened, has there been willingness to revolt.[103] A (perhaps) surprising aspect of the food uprisings seems to have been their discipline. In times of dire need, the labouring classes would take control of marketplaces and regulate sales, yet ensure steadfastly that all producers received what consumers considered to be a fair price; often only farmers who refused to deal with them at all would receive nothing.[104] There *were* instances when crowds resorted to looting; but only where special circumstances were deemed to exist.

This demand for fair play also extended to industrial relations, where:

> There was also a desire, largely on the part of industrial workers, for wages to be regulated in the interest of preserving certain minimum standards of subsistence. Just as there was thought to be a 'fair' maximum for food prices, so too there was a 'fair' minimum for wages: a level determined by customary expectations and 'normal' human needs. This commitment to maintaining standards was central to the industrial relations of the period.[105]

It was the responsibility of Justices of the Peace to regulate wage levels, and workers would take direct action if Justices failed to do so. Again, such action was generally taken as a last resort, if labourers felt driven to it in order just to earn a subsistence wage: "... almost all popular protests were, in fact, intended to achieve strictly limited objectives ... They were not ... motivated by any grand ambitions ... Most of them wanted simply to preserve customary standards of living, to defend traditional rights and liberties, to resist what they took to be arbitrary and oppressive power."[106]

In relation to Duck's work, whilst one notes his honesty about his disillusionment with the working cycle of the year, there seems a pronounced lack of inclination to 'choose the impossible', as Žižek might term it, by acting outside recognised norms. Duck's first 'confrontation' with "the Master" in *The Thresher's Labour* occurs in the following:

> Week after Week we this dull task pursue, 70
> Unless when winnowing Days produce a new;
> A new indeed, but frequently a worse,
> The Threshall yields but to the Master's Curse:
> He counts the Bushels, counts how much a Day,
> Then swears we've idled half our Time away. 75
> Why look ye, Rogues! D'ye think that this will do?
> Your Neighbours thresh as much again as you. (ll.70-7)

Lines 78-83, already quoted above, continue the scene. Goodridge describes Duck's Master as "a sort of cartoon tyrant" who "seems to have only one concern (greed) and one mood (wrath)".[107] He also notes that for both Duck and Collier it is being closely observed that rankles most; is this why the labourers feel so sheepish? To be watched closely at all is degrading, and that the Master is able to claim justification for keeping such a close eye on them makes matters worse; they blame themselves for playing into his hands in this way, and so perpetuating the degrading treatment. Christmas alleges that Duck's dialogue:

> ... suggests a sense of conflict between workers and masters over the issue of wages earned for labor already performed ... in likening the threshers to "School-boys" Duck stops short of casting rebellious stones at the "Masters", but he does incorporate a subtle – and publishable – critique into his poem. Our understanding of the ideological counter-production in Duck's text requires a recognition of the "We" which moves beyond Duck's own subject position to encompass the other threshers who worked in the fields with him as a group of laborers whose interests are decidedly in opposition to the masters who employ them.[108]

It is one thing to say that Duck could not be more critical than this, but speculative to allege that he *wanted* to be more critical. Others *were* more critical of their Masters / Mistresses – including Collier and Leapor – so the claim that Duck's criticisms were tempered because he dared not go farther seems hollow. Furthermore the final comments above seem reductive, and ahistorical. That Duck uses the plural proves no more than that he identified with his most immediate co-workers. Christmas' comments seem to veer towards the suggestion that Duck was some kind of proto-Marxist, yet there is limited venom in Duck's depiction.

The one occasion on which Duck really does seem to approach something like anger comes in the following, in which he reveals the so-called "Cheat":

> Our Master joyful at the welcome Sight,
> Invites us all to feast with him at Night.
> A Table plentifully spread we find, 270
> And Jugs of humming Beer to cheer the Mind:
> Which he, too generous, pushes on so fast,
> We think no Toils to come, nor mind the past.
> But the next Morning soon reveals the Cheat,
> When the same Toils we must again repeat: 275
> To the same Barns again must back return,
> To labour there for room for next Year's Corn. (ll.268-77)

This is unquestionably one of the most affecting passages of the poem, that Goodridge again interprets correctly.[109] The only respite in the year's Sisyphean cycle proves alcohol-induced, which only makes reality worse the next morning. It is a cruel irony that the harvest feast, a traditional benefit regarded as a 'right' or entitlement, ultimately becomes more punishment than blessing. The annual glimpse of the "Table plentifully spread" only serves to remind the workers of the luxury they go without for the rest of the year, and of how the more privileged live. Yet, for all the poem's disappointment and disillusionment, any claims for Duck's "status as spokesperson for the oppressed", are condemned to remain "largely unsubstantiated"; any attempt to "unnecessarily politicize" the poem destined to remain "a position … less easy to defend."[110] It is telling that although Peggy Thompson claims on no less than five occasions in an article that *The Thresher's Labour* sets out to attack capitalism, she is unable to bring forth any textual (or other) evidence to substantiate the claim.[111] Even Christmas, whose study emphasises radical elements, concedes "If we understand

full-blown resistance to mean the refusal to be dominated, then of the many poets I discuss ... only James Woodhouse, Ann Yearsley, and, to a certain extent, John Clare ultimately measure up to the definition at some point in their respective careers", admitting, "These poets were not (nor should we expect them to have been) pipe-wielding workers taking to the streets of London, Bristol or Coventry."[112]

Yet this is not the whole story. One is reminded that just as individual collusion with ideology is liberating and optimistic in its restoration to individuals of the agency removed by hegemony and 'interpellation', it also tempts us to uncomfortable judgement about those who choose not to withdraw complicity. Labouring poets of the eighteenth century were not prevented from recording their dissatisfactions, and as Christmas does persuasively argue, one way of doing so was by means of a discourse centred around custom. In addition, an important dimension of the cultural and ideological situation in which they found themselves has not yet been considered: religion. There is a direct connection between religion and Christmas' work on custom, which he argues can be defined as "an early-modern conceptualization of what we understand as ideology critique":

> By the late seventeenth century, Custom emerges in imaginative writing as a site of gender- and class-based contestation. Polite, predominantly male authors most often used the term in its established capacity to mean habitual social behaviour or established fashion. Yet many eighteenth-century plebeian and women writers (and even a few sympathetic male authors) recognized the socially repressive function of Custom when internalized by individuals.[113]

Christmas argues that "Custom" was generally invoked by the ruling social orders to maintain their dominance, yet that in this period the disenfranchised increasingly viewed the term negatively, as an instrument of oppression. These few in number, did not think in terms of 'ideology', but did increasingly perceive ways in which custom was used against them. Once this happens a debate ensues in which the labouring classes claim that the same 'Customs' used by the ruling orders to subjugate them, actually *guarantee* them certain rights. As Christmas puts it, "Both ideology and Custom constitute a "field of contest", where opposing factions with opposing socioeconomic interests, for example, can make conflicting claims in an effort to maintain or acquire social power".[114]

He continues:

> Custom was regularly invoked in this period ... by the disenfranchised in their attempts to maintain rights perceived to be theirs ... custom was a central feature of a plebeian culture that was increasingly "rebellious, but rebellious in defence of custom". Custom ... often marked the ideal ends of labouring-class agitation, and it also provided a sort of justification for such rebelliousness.[115]

A handful of women and labouring-class male writers perceive, however, that the "Custom" that seems to give them certain rights to rebel (within limits) is ultimately responsible for preventing them doing so beyond these limits. Christmas is on strong ground here, and invokes as evidence Astell's comprehensive use of "Custom" in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*, Mandeville's in *The Fable of the Bees*, Behn's in *Sir Patient Fancy*, Cockburn's in *The Revolution of Sweden*, Burney's in *Evelina*, and that of the anonymous author of *An Essay in Defence of the Female Sex*.[116] He might have invoked a number of eighteenth-century labouring-class and / or female poets in order to further make his point: *The Woman's Labour* contains the lines "Our first Extraction from a Mass refin'd, / Could never be for Slavery designed; / 'Till Time and Custom by degrees destroy'd / That happy State our Sex at first enjoy'd";[117] whilst Sarah Fyge Egerton begins "The Liberty" with "Shall I be one of those obsequious Fools, / That Square their lives by Customs scanty Rules;"[118] and "The Emulation" with "Say Tyrant Custom, why must we obey / The impositions of thy haughty sway?"[119] These are just isolated examples from many such instances. Christmas wisely errs on the side of caution, claiming that of the poets discussed in his study, "only Henry Jones, Ann Yearsley, and Robert Bloomfield mobilize the concept of Custom in their published poetry to fashion a critical discourse aimed at exposing upper-class interests and debunking class-based strategies of social containment."[120] Yet the labouring-class poets repeatedly challenge 'customary' interpretations of Christianity (both Collier and Leapor, unlike Duck, do so explicitly, using the actual word 'custom'). Also, alongside acknowledging interpretations that require them to meekly submit to their allotted place, they stress the rewards that they deserve to receive for such meekness and piety. One of the means by which they do this is (as in the cases of Duck and Collier) by poeticising scriptural tales of the poor and helpless receiving the Grace of God (in *this* life). In some cases (as in the work of Dodsley, discussed in the next chapter) they even invoke their common Christianity with their masters to urge better treatment from them.

Marx misdiagnosed religion's function as that of enabling the ruling class to maintain dominance over the majority by suggesting this dominance was divinely ordained (what he termed 'ideology' or 'false consciousness').[121] Raines, for one, makes an eloquent defence of Marx in this regard, arguing that it was not so much that Marx could not see the potential to agitate for political equality and justice in organised religion, as that he did not appreciate how this potential could translate itself into action.[122] As Nietzsche realised though, Christianity – as defined by Christ's own teachings, a specifically 'New Testament Christianity'[123] – is a major catalyst for the historical trend towards democracy that actually begins with Christ and Socrates[124] rather than, as Watt argues, Descartes.[125] As Nietzsche writes, "the *democratic* movement is Christianity's heir".[126] Christ is the 'servant king' who teaches "the meek shall inherit the earth"; Christianity is, in Nietzschean terms, the will to power of the servant class.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* Nietzsche attributes the rise of Christianity to a revolt two thousand years ago in morals by the "slave" class, against the "master" class,[127] which he terms a "re-evaluation of all ancient values".[128] In aphorism 32 he sets out his theory of the pre-moral, moral, and extra-moral periods, detailing the characteristics of each. Unlike Marx, Nietzsche conceives of history as cyclical; during the pre-moral period mankind sates itself upon the noble values. The moral period provides a period of abstention from them, in which what he calls the 'slave morality' (see below) is dominant. In Nietzsche's view, the hunger for noble values will be renewed during the moral period, until satisfied in the impending extra-moral period. The one aspect of the theory that is not cyclical concerns self-awareness, always something positive in Nietzsche's thought. In the pre-moral period, there is a virtual absence of self-awareness, whereas the moral period heralds its beginning, and Nietzsche anticipates that the extra-moral period will see it reach unprecedented heights. This, too, is interesting in view of the tendency of the labouring-class poets in the early eighteenth century to write poems claiming the right to self-definition. Marx can only conceptualise the self as something bourgeois; yet the poetry of physical labour suggests that the emergence of the self affected the labouring classes just as much as the other social orders, whether because of the growth of capitalism or otherwise. This may well be significant: 'New Testament' Christianity, as befits its democratising mission, teaches that all are equal in the sight of God, not just in heaven but on earth. Hence it is no coincidence that in an age when the labouring

classes became capable of reading and interpreting Christ's teachings for themselves, we observe the emergence of a set of experiential poems assertive of the right to self-definition of even the most 'lowly' in society. It is perhaps because Marx under-rates this important aspect of Christianity that critics who invoke his influence play down the individuality found in the work of the poets of labour.

Nietzsche's notorious views about religion are widely known, and are summarised in section three of *Beyond Good and Evil*, "The Religious Disposition".[129] Their broader context is less widely understood. To Nietzsche's way of thinking, the masses, in their weakness, realise that they cannot compete with the strength and power of the masters and so use intellect and cunning to revolutionise (or perhaps 'evolutionise') morality and encourage the strong to abstain from using their power by praising the virtues of restraint and meekness possessed by the weak and powerless. This 'reactive', 'slave' morality, which the labouring poets can be seen advocating, condemns the characteristics of the old (self-affirmative) master morality as 'evil'. With the physical strength and power of the master class subdued, the weaker can, through use of their wits, obtain power not possible otherwise.[130] Instead of the ruling class dominating the masses by inculcating them into the belief that their domination is divinely ordained, as Marx argues, this situation is reversed.

Nietzsche himself writes that

> within a slave mentality a good person must in any event be *harmless*: he is good-natured, easily deceived, perhaps a bit stupid, a *bonhomme*. Wherever slave morality gains the upper hand, language shows a tendency to make a closer association of the words 'good' and 'stupid'.[131]

A means emerges, combined with Nietzsche's material about the "moral hypocrisy of commanders",[132] of arriving at a reading of the early eighteenth-century labouring-class tendency towards reluctant rebellion in urgent circumstances. The masses exhibit a desire to be fundamentally harmless and, when combined with human reluctance to accept responsibility for one's actions unless legitimated by some form of self-created higher authority,[133] one sees the kind of behaviour characterised by the near-starving masses taking food forcibly from a farmer but then insisting on paying for it. Nietzsche's contempt, however, for reactive 'slave morality' should *not* blind us to the positive advantages for the labouring classes of adopting a 'cautionary' approach. Whilst Nietzsche denigrates this approach, this hardly precludes others

from arriving at more measured judgement. The predominantly evolutionary, rather than revolutionary pace of social change in this country meant that social change often tended to be of an enduring rather than temporary nature.

This evolutionary 'New Testament Christianity' is found in Duck's major religious work, "The Shunamite", his poetic re-telling of the story from *II Kings* iv.[134] Uncomfortable with condemnation or satire directed at those who would deny sympathy to the poor or weak,[135] Duck instead makes his point in a positive manner by *praising* virtue and faith, delighting in a portrayal of its receipt of earthly reward (the poem also includes references to the rewards due to "generous Labour", as in l.28). Not only this, but just as Duck tells the story in *The Thresher's Labour* of the threshers whose voice is "drown'd by the noisy Flail", he again gives voice to the downtrodden and powerless, letting the Shunamite woman tell her story in the first person. The point is underlined by the many references to her speech, and words: there are twenty-three references to her speech in some form or other. Indeed, "The Shunamite" begins with the woman urging God to "… make th'Inhabitants of *Judah*'s Land / Give Ear, and Israel to my Voice attend."[136] She, a humble, poor woman has something to say of import to whole nations because of her relationship with God, and how He has rewarded her, not just once but twice.

Just like the labourers in *The Thresher's Labour*, the Shunamite's people do not ask for much and are grateful for their blessings:

> Heaven's King hath plac'd us in a fertile Land,
> Where he showers down his Gifts with copious Hand;
> Already we enjoy an affluent Store,
> Why should we be solliticous for more? …
>
> Here we may feed the Indigent in Peace,
> And cloath the Bare with the superfluous Fleece,
> And give the weary fainting Pilgrim Ease. (ll.31-4, 41-3)

However, "All blessings, but a Child, had Heaven supply'd / And only that the Almighty had denied" (ll.50-1). The Shunamite woman goes to see the prophet Elisha, who "often deign'd to lodge within our Gate", and her faith is rewarded:

> Celestial Grace sat on his radiant Look,
> And Power diffusive shone before he spoke.
> Then Thus: Hail, generous Soul! thy pious Cares
> Are not forgot, nor fruitless are thy Prayers: 65

Propitious Heav'n, thy virtuous Deeds to crown,
Shall make thy barren Womb conceive a Son.
So spake the Seer, and to complete my Joy,
As he had said, I bore the promis'd Boy. (ll.62-9)

The child dies, though, at the age of only fourteen (ll.116-190). The Shunamite woman responds at first with a stoicism not dissimilar to that sometimes seen in *The Thresher's Labour*, but then resolves to seek Elisha again (ll.145-65), having to persuade her sceptical and doubting husband to accompany her (ll.219-31). Significantly, in terms of any metaphorical importance the poem has, the woman's husband attempts to dissuade her by employing the kind of fatalistic arguments it has been suggested in the past the labouring poets were 'interpellated' into:

Pensive and sad, my mourning Husband said,
Fain would I from this Journey thee dissuade: 200
No God to-day the Prophet does inspire,
Nor can he aught reveal thou dost require …

Calm and compose thy anxious Mind, said he,
Tears can't revoke th'Almighty's fix'd Decree. 220
We live and die, and both as he thinks fit;
He may command, but Mortals must submit. (ll.199-203, 219-22)

The Shunamite woman succeeds in persuading her husband to accompany her, however, and when she finds Elisha her faith is rewarded with the Grace of God for a miraculous second time:

By the dead Child a-while he pensive stood, 250
Then from the Chamber put the mourning Croud:
That done, to God he made his ardent Prayer,
And breath'd upon the Child with vital Air:
And now the Soul resumes her pristine Seat,
And now the Heart begins again to beat; 255
A second Life diffuses o'er the Dead,
And Death, repuls'd, inglorious doth recede …

And now the Prophet to my longing Arms
Resigns the Child, with more than wonted Charms;
The blushy Rose shone fresher in his Face,
And Beauty smil'd with a superiour Grace. 265

So when Heaven's Lamp that rules the genial Day,
Behind the sable Moon pursues his way,
Affrighted Mortals, when th'Eclipse is o'er,

Believe him more illustrious than before. (ll.250-7, 262-9)

Christmas' earlier quoted claims about the role played by "Both ideology and Custom" function almost as well as a definition of the role played by religion, a true "field of contest" for power throughout human history.[137] Nietzsche's work here is of real use. Naturally the ruling social orders throughout history have tried to appropriate Christianity for their own ends. Hence the centuries-old popularity of the Old Testament: "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" is a very useful maxim for a multi-millionaire with a vested interest in preserving the status quo. If, however, one is a member of the oppressed, Christ's teachings are much more useful, since many equate closely to what we would think of as "socialism". The New Testament is, politically speaking, a document containing the potential to ignite great social change; and since Christ's parables enabled him (indeed, such was the object of the exercise) to speak directly to the humble and little educated, it is hardly surprising that the subversion he preached was not easily to be contained. In virtually every major civil / human rights movement in the West during the past two millennia there has been a strong Christian element, for these reasons. As soon as a point was reached at which the labouring classes could read and interpret these writings for themselves, it was inevitable that social change would result, even if through evolutionary (i.e. peaceable), democratic means. At least *some* members of the 'middle classes' of the period recognised these impending social changes, and attempted strategies of containment.[138]

Taken with Žižek's work, Nietzsche's ideas about the labouring classes and the reasons for their rise provide us with a fuller picture of their conduct, and of the reasons for the co-existence of complicity and critique in their work. Lest we still doubt the extent of this co-existence, it is worth noting that nothing Duck writes in "The Shunamite" precludes him from writing elsewhere, "Contented Poverty's no dismal Thing, / Free from the Cares unwieldy Riches bring".[139] Neither does it prevent, later in the same poem:

His noble Thoughts are fix'd on Things above, 50
Where by true Faith, he sees the God of Love
Hold forth th'attractive Prize, which makes him run
His mortal Race, to gain th'immortal crown. (ll.50-3)

The "immortal crown" of heavenly riches is not incompatible with greater equality on earth, however, and Duck's work nowhere suggests that one must or should accept

earthly poverty; merely that there is no shame in being poor, that riches should not be taken forcefully (as explained below) and that even if one is poor, reward will wait in heaven for the righteous. It is significant that accounts of the riches awaiting in heaven pepper the verses of the radical James Woodhouse alongside, and not in place of, his polemical advocacy of earthly equality.

If 'interpellation' is understood to mean the process of preventing overt, immediate withdrawal of complicity (or preventing "full-blown" resistance), as Žižek's stated examples imply, then religion *is* the cause of what is, in effect, labouring-class 'self-interpellation'. A (literal) Žižekian reading presumably *would* have to conclude that the labouring-class poets avoid 'choosing the impossible' – and there *were* those in the eighteenth century who unquestionably chose in this way[140] – accompanied by the pejorative ethical judgement a term such as 'avoidance' implies. Such a reading would have to further conclude that the labouring classes avoid 'cognitive dissonance' by changing their perception of the situation faced, a Žižekian equivalent of an almost-existential 'bad faith' that results from acting as if a free choice is forced: instead of deciding whether or not to accept hardship and injustice, they persuade themselves that the most important consideration of all is not to compromise deep-seated metaphysical values.

Yet if this specific kind of labouring-class 'self-interpellation' precludes the overt, immediate ideological resistance identified with 'choosing the impossible', it does *not* necessarily passively accept the status quo. Instead of open defiance it seeks to re-educate, to bring about change peacefully by stealth. "The Shunamite" functions to join in the process of *redefining existing morality* by privileging and preaching a respect for the faith and endurance of the poor and meek, instead of the (Nietzschean) 'master' morality of strength and power. This advocacy of 'slave' morality would be utterly *undermined* by, and is antithetical to, any subsequent attempt to *forcibly take* greater equality. "The Shunamite" needs to be read alongside similar works by labouring poets (such as those considered in later chapters) to be viewed in full and proper context. The very purpose, however, of seeking to redefine morality in this way is that it will not be *necessary* to use force since, as Nietzsche explains, it is a moral strategy adopted by those who doubt that they *possess* such strength. Even Woodhouse, much later, adheres to this principle and avoids violating it by condemning violent revolution. Winning greater equality by peacefully redefining existing morality was a more low-risk long-term strategy for the labouring classes,

and made greater equality, once achieved, more sustainable. In its clear implications (and elsewhere and later in the century, in its explicitly *desired end*) it does point towards a 'choosing of the impossible', even if by means other than those prescribed by Žižek; if the speed with which it is accomplished is hardly radical, radicalism is present in what becomes, during the course of the century, its clear aims. It *does* "disturb the social and ideological balance." Nietzsche recognises this, though also condemns labouring-class bad faith on the grounds of the method of realising these aims. For him, the labouring classes echo the behaviour of their rulers in that they

> suffer inwardly from a bad conscience and feel the need to dupe themselves first in order to be able to give commands, by acting as if they too were only following orders ... The only way they know to protect themselves from their own bad conscience is to behave as if they were carrying out orders from before or from above (from ancestors, the constitution, the judicial system, the laws, or even from God) ... [141]

For Nietzsche, even in contesting authority, the masses lack the courage to do so openly and so authorise themselves to act in this way by 'inventing' an imaginary higher authority who legitimises their actions. For him, critique and complicity coexist because although withdrawal of complicity materially advantages the masses, the thought of full responsibility for their actions is terrifying. Therefore, not only do they persist simultaneously in various forms of complicity, they even create new forms of self-deceptive complicity with authority. Nietzsche may well have been right, but one cannot help feeling that his achievement in correctly diagnosing the nature of the social change around him is tempered somewhat by his rather grudging acknowledgement of the ingenuity of its accomplishment.

Duck's example is in some ways atypical: like Robert Dodsley he ascends the social hierarchy spectacularly, and has little reason, ultimately, to withdraw complicity with the ideology of a society that permits such elevation, even as he continued to hold values that equated to a redefinition of existing morality. He only gestures towards a phenomenon that becomes increasingly pronounced throughout the century. In the next chapter a wider survey related to the works of a range of labouring poets in the period 1730-51, demonstrating a more strident testing of moral and 'customary' values (yet without violating the evolutionary principles of 'New Testament Christianity') will follow an initial consideration of the Duckian mode in these works.

[1] See Joseph Spence, *Full and Authentick Account of Stephen Duck, the Wiltshire Poet* (London, 1731), pp.12-13, as quoted by Rose Mary Davis, *Stephen Duck, the Thresher-Poet* (Orono, Maine: University of Maine Press, 1926), pp.21-2.

[2] An (unauthorised) account of Duck's life prefixed to 1730's *Poems on Several Subjects* suggests Duck burned his earliest efforts. See *Poems on Several Subjects*, 3rd edn., p.iv, cited by Davis, p.8.

[3] All initially published in the pirated *Poems on Several Subjects* (London, 1730), and then in the authorised *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1736).

[4] Both were published in *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1736). They can be found, as can *Every Man in his own Way*, in *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. I: 1700-1740*, ed. by William J. Christmas, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp.127-80.

[5] *Eighteenth-Century Poetry, an Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.249.

[6] Cited by Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.39. The original source for this claim was the unauthorised "Some Account of the Author's Life" in *Poems on Several Subjects* (see, for instance, 7th edn., 1730, pp.iii-iv). Spence (1731), p.6, agrees, though, that Duck left the charity school aged fourteen.

[7] "Duck's particular debt of gratitude to Stanley seems to have been occasioned by much-needed financial assistance." (Davis, p.24).

[8] Spence (1731), p.13 (cited by Davis, p.26).

[9] See William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses; Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry 1730-1830* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2001), pp.74-6.

[10] Davis, p.92.

[11] John Bancks, author of *The Weaver's Miscellany* (1730), for instance, claimed to be a poor Spitalfields weaver, whereas he had actually only been briefly apprenticed before becoming a bookseller. See Eric Rothstein, *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Poetry 1660-1780* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p.202; or, for a more detailed treatment, Christmas (2001), pp.95-106.

[12] For a full account, see Davis, pp.40-1. For a reprint of the title page to *Poems on Several Subjects*, see *ibid.*, p.30. Duck's patrons did not deem it worthwhile to pursue Jones legally because contemporary copyright law was so ineffective. Jones was, however, forced to publicly apologise both to Duck and the public. He appears to have died in 1740, apparently having made little profit from the exercise himself, since most of the money was kept by the printer. Duck did not attack or divulge the identity of the pirate in print, alluding to him as "a Person who seems to have as little Regard for Truth, as he had for Honesty, when he stole my Poems" (*Poems on Several Occasions*, pp.xiv-xv). The pirating of his poems remains an under-investigated issue within Duck studies.

[13] See Christmas, (2003), p.xx. See, for instance, Spence's "An Account of the Author, in a Letter to a Friend", in *Poems on Several Occasions, Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (The Gale Group), pp.xi-xx (a shorter version of the 1731 *Full and Authentick Account*).

[14] For a recent reproduction of this frontispiece, see Christmas (2003), p.xii.

[15] Davis, pp.67-8. The exact date of Sarah Big's death is unknown.

[16] See *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. by Harold Williams, 2nd edn., vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p.520.

[17] See W. A. Speck, 'Politicians, Peers, and Publication by Subscription 1700-50', in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Isabel Rivers (Leicester: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 47-68 (p.60). See also David Fairer, *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Harlow and London: Longman, 2003), p.179. Although Christmas (2003, p.xix) suggests that the rising middle-class were often more prominent than the aristocracy in lists of eighteenth-century subscribers, this is certainly untrue in Duck's case. Subscribers to *Poems on Several Occasions* included 6 members of the royal family, 8 Dukes, 8 Duchesses, 1 Marquis, 26 Earls, 12 Countesses, 43 Lords, 27 Ladies, 15 Knights of the Realm and 60 (Right) Honourables (see Duck (1736), "The Names of the Subscribers", pp.xxi-xxxi).

[18] See Davis, p.41.

[19] *Ibid.*, p.68.

[20] For several accounts, see *ibid.*, pp.103-5.

[21] All sources for this claim can be traced to Spence's "An Account of the Author" (p.xv), and his *Full Account of Duck*, pp.21. The subject of the poem was suggested by Stanley. Many, if not all of the topics for early poems appear to have been initially suggested by patrons.

[22] On Duck's various influences – the Bible, Milton, *The Spectator*, Seneca, Addison, Ovid, Bysshe, Shakespeare, Epictetus, Waller, Dryden, Virgil, Prior and Ned Ward – see Davis, pp.16-22, 137-41. All information on this subject ultimately derives from Spence (London, 1731), pp.22-23, and Spence (1736), pp.xi-xx. On the influence of Denham, see Davis p.134. On Duck and Pope see *ibid.*, pp. 35, 45-53, 127, 132 (where Davis suggests that an 'anti' or 'counter-pastoral' passage from *TTL* is a direct response to Pope's pastorals), 149-50, 152, 154, 159. On the influence of Latin authors on Duck, see *ibid.*, pp.161-4, and, on the knowledge Duck's work shows of contemporary philosophers such as Locke, pp.167-8. Goodridge suggests that William Diaper's "Brent" (1726) may have been a (partial) model for *The Thresher's Labour*, and also argues for the mutual influence upon one another of Duck and Thomson: see *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.12-15, 79-80.

[23] This chapter quotes from the original 1730 text, reprinted in Fairer and Gerrard, pp.250-6. Subsequent line references are given in parentheses in the text.

[24] Incidentally, the line that appears at first glance to be unrhymed – l.96 – seems, upon closer inspection, to precede what is probably a lost line. A concessive – perhaps "but", or "although" – would seem to be needed in the following line if the apparently-intended meaning of ll.77-8 is to be retrieved. There might have been an accidental omission of a line by the printer, or perhaps an accidental conflation of two lines.

[25] J. Paul Hunter in 'Couplets and Conversation', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 11-35, (p.25).

[26] 4:245-6, 251-3. See the note in Fairer and Gerrard, p.251; and *The Works of Virgil*, trans. by John Dryden, intro. by James Kinsley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.112.

[27] Pope, for instance, never uses the word "briny"; the word "trickles" appears only once, and the word "sweat" only four times within his oeuvre. See Edwin Abbott, *A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope*, repr. (New York: Kraus, 1965).

[28] See Abbott, *A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope.*

[29] Just as they are not pastoral swains, they are *not* (or do not want to be) the "Rogues and Fools" (l.79) the Master claims; they are *not* the naughty schoolboys he makes them feel they are (ll.80-1); and, perhaps most obviously of all, they *are not* like the female gleaners (ll.163-204) Duck controversially represents as idle (irrespective of whether the gleaners 'really' were). Proceeding from rejections of unwanted identities, Duck lays claim to alternatives: unlike pastoral swains, *they* toil continually in

harsh conditions; despite the Master's accusations, and unlike the (apparently) idle gleaners, *they* are industrious, do *not* question the nobility of hard labour and *do* take great pride in their work.

[30] Stephen Duck, "A Description of a Journey from Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth &c.", ll.175-80, Christmas (2003), ll.56-69 (pp.160-1). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[31] Keith Thomas discerns a more sympathetic attitude to animals on a wider scale throughout the period of his *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), which is especially apparent in labouring poetry of the eighteenth century.

[32] Goodridge (1995), p.19, has demonstrated how the description of the rain shower is imitative of Virgil; and the poem's epic similes often originate from Homer.

[33] This is discussed at length by Goodridge, who compares *The Seasons* with Duck and Collier (1995, pp.11-88).

[34] Albert Camus, 'The Myth of Sisyphus', in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. by Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975), p.111.

[35] Fairer and Gerrard, p.257.

[36] The 'Sisyphus' passage: ll.278-83, *ibid.*, p.256. On the poem's conclusion, see Goodridge (1995), pp.79-81. The view that Duck shows the labourer's task to be describable in "Sisyphean" terms derives from Goodridge, p.79.

[37] Goodridge (1995), p.48, who deals with the 'twin' approach to labour in the poems he discusses by devoting one chapter to their descriptions of labour itself (pp.44-57), and one to the compensations of labour (pp.58-70).

[38] "It was a messy business ... With peas and beans, it is well to thresh in the open on account of the clouds of black dust which are knocked out of them" (Thomas Hennell, *Change on the Farm*, cited by Fairer and Gerrard, p.251).

[39] Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.69.

[40] "A Description of a Journey", ll.41-50, Christmas (2003), p.158.

[41] See Bridget Keegan, 'Georgic Transformations and Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour" ', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 41 (2001), 545-62, *Literature Resource Centre* (hereafter *LRC*), p.5 of 14 fol. Keegan acknowledges her debt to Goodridge in this regard on p.6 of 14.

[42] *Ibid.*, p.11 of 14.

[43] Stephen Duck, "To a Gentleman, who requested a Copy of Verses from the Author", ll.5-10, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1736), *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992).

[44] John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Scott Elledge (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Co., 1975), I: ll.768-75, pp.27-8.

[45] *Ibid.*

[46] E.g. Pope, *Epistle III. To Allen Lord Bathurst*, ll.339-402, Butt, pp.584-6.

[47] See *John Clare: Selected Poems*, ed. by J.W. Tibble and Anne Tibble, (London and New York: Everyman, 1965), p.234. The word 'and' is used nine times in all in the poem.

[48] See, for instance, Fairer (2003), who maintains that in certain circumstances end stopping needs to be "over-ridden", since otherwise the poet will be "constantly reminded of a containing metre." (p.116; he refers to Mary Chudleigh's Pindaric, 'On Solitude').

[49] Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.108.

[50] For a selection of such poems, see *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) (subsequent page references are to this text). Mary Barber, for instance, defended her right to write verse claiming it was for the purposes of educating her children; see "Written for my Son .... at his First Putting on Breeches" (p.120). For other defences of female poets' right to acquire learning and write poetry, see Mary, Lady Chudleigh, from "The Ladies Defence" (p.2); Sarah Egerton, "The Emulation" (p.31); Elizabeth Thomas, "Epistle to Clemena. Occasioned by an Argument" (p.34) and "On Sir J--- S--- saying in a Sarcastic Manner, my Books would make me Mad. An Ode" (p.40); and Anonymous ('The Amorous Lady'), "On being charged with Writing Incorrectly" (p.146). For poems serving as autobiographical introductions of poets' circumstances, why they write etc. – a sort of 'female assertion of the right to poetic self-definition' – see Martha Sansom, from "Clio's Picture. To Anthony Hammond Esq." (p.86) and Mary Jones, "An Epistle to Lady Bowyer" (pp.156-60). This is only a selective list of such poems.

[51] One is tempted to draw comparisons with one of the century's most lively rural diarists, Anne Hughes. Whereas Hughes lies undeservedly forgotten, Duck and his work live on because he was a *poet*: both he and his material have benefited from the higher status accorded them. Hughes' *The Diary of a Farmer's Wife 1796-1797*, ed. by Suzanne Beedell (London: Countrywise Books, 1964) includes descriptions of cooking, cleaning, baking, feeding pigs and calves, making wine, covering haystacks, corn cutting / harvesting ("fogging"), apple picking, cider making, scrubbing, butter-making, cleaning the dairy, lambing, grass and hay cutting, and collecting honey from the beehives. For a direct comparison with Duck's material see Hughes' account of the threshing (p.37).

[52] Davis, p.84.

[53] Temple was Palmerston's family name.

[54] Bridget Keegan, 'Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), 195-217 (p.196).

[55] Christmas (2001), p.50.

[56] Other critics to have approached labouring verse from the perspective of Gramscian hegemony and / or Althusserian interpellation include (in no particular order) Shiach, Landry, Ashraf and Klaus.

[57] *Ibid.*, p.46.

[58] *Ibid.*

[59] *Ibid.*

[60] The essay can be found in various publications, including *Mapping Ideology*, ed. by Slavoj Žižek (London and New York: Verso, 1994), pp.100-140.

[61] Christmas (2001), p.46.

[62] *Ibid.*, p.47.

[63] *Ibid.*

[64] The most important texts for an understanding of Gramscian hegemony are arguably Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*: see *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. by

Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971), and Gramsci's *Letters from Prison*, ed. and trans. by Lynne Lawner (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975).

[65] *Ibid.*, pp.48-9.

[66] For one of the most comprehensive expressions of the – overtly left-wing – theoretical objections to Althusser, see E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and other Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1978).

[67] Admittedly Althusser may not be thinking exclusively of Western societies, and there is no reason why he should; nonetheless, if one applies his theories to Western, Christian society, his inability to distinguish between what he sees as the conservative purpose of the Church, and 'New Testament' Christianity, *is* problematic.

[68] Christmas (2001), p.47.

[69] Gramsci's "reworking of ideology as a consensual formation", and "an attempt to explain why Italian workers failed to seize power in the years following the First World War, when it had appeared that all the 'objective' material conditions for a worker's revolution were in place." (Lawner, p.72). Gramsci's consideration of the role of intellectuals in Italian history, whom he saw as the 'deputies' of the dominant authorities, was key to the concept; see a letter from prison dated September 7 1931 (cited in *ibid.*, pp.41-2). He expands on these ideas in a crucial passage from the *Prison Notebooks*. (Hoare and Nowell Smith, p.12). Together these passages go to the heart of Gramsci's philosophy.

[70] Lawner, p.42.

[71] By 'civil society' Gramsci understands the whole complex of social, cultural, and political organizations and institutions in a particular society – everything not strictly part of the State.

[72] This final aspect of Gramsci's thought has curious (and unexpected) parallels with the theory of historical change Nietzsche advances in aphorism 262 of *Beyond Good and Evil*.

[73] See Lawner, pp.41-2.

[74] See *ibid.*, pp.42-4, for an explanation.

[75] Gramsci's ideas about the importance of the individual are again to the fore in his analysis of Croce's work (see *ibid.*, p.45). His conclusions distanced Gramsci from doctrinaire Marxism, and hence "Today Gramsci ... is accused ... of "Croceanism" ... attack[ed] ... on the grounds that he considers history from a "superstructural", cultural, and hence voluntarist perspective". (*Ibid.*) For a detailed treatment of Gramsci's political ideas see, variously, J. V. Fernia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1981); R Simon, *Gramsci's Political Thought: An Introduction* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1982); Anne Showstack Sassoon, *Gramsci's Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1987).

[76] See Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p.93.

[77] See *ibid.*, p.94.

[78] See Porter, (1991), pp.53, 96-7; and E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1965), p.11. For a detailed social historical account of the debates surrounding class, class consciousness and class warfare (or rather their absence) in the early eighteenth century, see also Peter Mathias, *The Transformation of England: Essays in the Economic and Social History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1979), pp.171-89; or for an account of the problems of discussing class even in relation to the *next* century, Richard Brown, *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp.350-5.

[79] Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism*, repr. (London: Routledge Classics, 2002) remains unsurpassed as the definitive articulation of many such criticisms.

[80] Their most influential work is *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. by Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985).

[81] Laclau and Mouffe, p.7.

[82] Andrè Gorz, *Farewell to the Working Class: An Essay on Post-Industrial Socialism*, trans. by Michael Sonenscher (London: Pluto Press, 1982, first pub. 1980).

[83] See J. Collins, *Uncommon Cultures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989) and N. Abercrombie, S. Hill and B. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1980). Chris Barker summarises both the arguments of Collins, and Abercrombie et al. in *Cultural Studies – Theory and Practice* (London: Sage, 2000, p.62).

[84] Such a position has obvious affinities with Nietzsche's work on the utility of human belief (as discussed in the remainder of the chapter). See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, ed. by Robert C. Holub, trans. by Marion Faber (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). All subsequent references are to this edition.

[85] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 1989).

[86] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute, or, Why is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting for?* (London and New York: Verso, 2000).

[87] Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[88] *Ibid.*, pp.117-18.

[89] *Ibid.*, p.121.

[90] *Ibid.*, p.122.

[91] *Ibid.*, pp.117.

[92] *Ibid.*, p.121.

[93] Žižek advocates a return to what he terms "actual" freedom, rather than the "formal" freedom he associates with western liberalism. He believes that what he terms "Leninism" offers the best hope of "actual freedom", and vehemently attacks liberalism. For a discussion of Zizek's attitude towards choice and responsibility, see Jacob Torfing's *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.285-6.

[94] Baudrillard's *De la Seduction* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1979) provides an introduction. An even briefer outline is provided (in English translation) by 'On Seduction', in Jean Baudrillard, *Selected Writings*, ed. by Mark Poster (Oxford: Polity Press, 1988), pp.149-65.

[95] Milgram's initial experiments, in which volunteers were instructed by doctors in white coats to administer what they were led to believe were electric shocks to those on the other side of a screen when the latter got a question wrong, are well known. The "chief finding of the study" was "The extreme willingness of adults to go to almost any lengths on the command of an authority". See Milgram, 'The Perils of Obedience', http://home.swbell.net/revscat/perilsOf Obedience.html, p.1 of 22 (a reproduction of Milgram's 1974 article 'The Perils of Obedience', published in *Harper's Magazine*, in turn adapted and abridged from Milgram's *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), the most exhaustive account). In the original 1961-2 experiments at Yale, "Of the forty subjects ... twenty-five obeyed the orders of the experimenter to the end, punishing the victim until they reached the most potent shock on the generator." ('The Perils of Obedience', p.5 of 22). This completely contradicted the predictions of outcome Milgram solicited (*ibid.*) It is generally less widely known that between 1961 and 1985, "when the experiments were repeated in Princeton,

Munich, Rome, South Africa, and Australia, the level of obedience was invariably somewhat higher … Thus one scientist in Munich found 85 percent of his subjects obedient." (*Ibid.*, p.6 of 22).

[96] See Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 199, p.85.

[97] Malcolmson, p.112.

[98] *Ibid.*, p.113.

[99] *Ibid.*

[100] *Ibid.*, pp.114-15.

[101] *Ibid.*, p.115.

[102] *Ibid.*, p.118.

[103] See Bridget Hill, *Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p.9, for a discussion of why the early suffrage movement contained so few labouring-class women. For a wider account of the political stability of the period 1688-1832, see J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832: Ideology, Social Structure and Political Practice during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Clark's influential revisionist work argues that the model of a 'resistant' labouring 'class' in this period propagated by Marxist historians is anachronistic, and that the labouring orders tended to relate to the upper orders not with resistance but deference, explaining why outright defiance was unlikely . The (seeming) conservatism of the English working classes has been widely discussed. Marx, of course, famously despaired of their lack of revolutionary fervour. In the twentieth century, both George Orwell (in part two of *The Road to Wigan Pier*) and Jessica Mitford (writing in the same period) concluded something similar.

[104] For instance, "a farmer who was stopped by a crowd on his way to Tetbury (Gloustershire) market in September 1766, and who had his produce forcibly taken 'and sold … to the Poor' (his own prices were considered too high), was paid right away for his goods." (Malcolmson, p.119).

[105] *Ibid.*, p.123.

[106] *Ibid.*, p.130.

[107] Goodridge (1995), p.49.

[108] Christmas (2001), p.125.

[109] Goodridge (1995), pp.78-9.

[110] Bridget Keegan, 'Georgic Transformations and Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour" ', *LRC*, p.2 of 14.

[111] Peggy Thompson, 'Duck, Collier, and the Ideology of Verse Forms', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 44 (2004), 505-23.

[112] Christmas (2001), pp.49-50.

[113] *Ibid.*, pp.51.

[114] *Ibid.*, p.53.

[115] *Ibid.*

[116] *Ibid.*, pp.53-61.

[117] Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*, ll.13-16, Fairer and Gerrard, p.257.

[118] Sarah Fyge Egerton, "The Liberty", ll.1-2, *ibid.*, p.11.

[119] Sarah Fyge Egerton, "The Emulation", ll.1-2, *ibid.*, p.15.

[120] Christmas (2001), p.61.

[121] Despite a welcome trend towards the view that Marx's engagement with religion was more multi-faceted than traditionally acknowledged – see, for instance, John Raines' introductory essay to his anthology *Marx on Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002) – this remains the case.

[122] See Raines, pp.8-9.

[123] On the Old and New Testaments, see Nietzsche, aphorism 52, pp.48-9.

[124] See, for instance, Nietzsche, aphorisms 190-1, pp.78-80.

[125] Ian Watt, *The Rise of the Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1957), p.13.

[126] Nietzsche, aphorism 202, p.89.

[127] Nietzsche terms this slave morality 'resentment', or 'ressentiment'. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson (London: The Athlone Press, 1983), pp.111-19.

[128] Nietzsche, aphorism 46, p.44.

[129] *Ibid.*, pp.43-57. Clearly there are elements in Nietzsche's thinking that one would not wish to preserve. Some of the most serious accusations levelled at him have, however, been shown to be unwarranted. Reg Hollingdale, for instance, has demonstrated that the charge that Nietzsche took joy in the suffering of the poor and weak is a nonsense (see chapter four, 'The Philosophy of Power', in Hollingdale, *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973)), as is Bertrand Russell's accusation that Nietzsche deliberately inverted the terms 'good' and 'evil'. Richard Schacht's *Nietzsche* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), is similarly skilful at debunking myths about the work of his subject.

[130] See *Beyond Good and Evil*, aphorism 260, pp. 153-6, for Nietzsche's own definitions of master and slave morality – too lengthy to quote in their entirety. Section Five, 'Towards a Natural History of Morals' (pp.74-92), also provides a detailed account of the rise of 'slave morality'. See also Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*. For a summary, see Richard Schacht, 'Slave morality' in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, ed. by Ted Honderich (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp.827-8.

[131] Nietzsche, aphorism 260, p.156.

[132] Nietzsche, aphorism 199, p.85.

[133] *Ibid.*

[134] For a discussion of this poem's genesis, including an account of how and why Duck chose to deviate from the Biblical version, see Spence, "An Account of the Author", in Duck (1736), pp.xvi-xviii. Davis also provides a detailed treatment (pp.136-141).

[135] *Every Man in his Own Way* (1741) is unique amongst Duck's works as (in parts) an attempt at the satirical mode of *The Dunciad*. For a recent reprint, see Christmas (2003), pp.172-80.

[136] Duck, "The Shunamite", ll.9-10, Christmas (2003), p.132. The text is from the first edition of *Poems on Several Subjects* (1730). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[137] Christmas does argue for the importance of 'piety' in labouring-class poetic production throughout the century, noting that, "Within the full spectrum of eighteenth-century plebeian literary production … there are three key values whose representations are ideologically charged most often in the service of the dominant culture: honesty, industry and piety." (2001, p.49). Whilst he notes that "many of these same poets show significant critical knowledge of the ideological implications of honesty, industry, and piety, and of the complex cultural processes that sanctioned their literary endeavors while restricting their access to literary careers" (*ibid.*), his claim that piety is "ideologically charged most often in the service of the dominant culture" precludes proper recognition of a levelling theology in the work of the labouring-class poets.

[138] See, for instance, Hannah More's disastrous attempts at patronising Ann Yearsley, and poems such as "The Riot", or Anna Laetitia Barbauld's "To the Poor".

[139] Duck, "On Poverty", ll.32-3 (Christmas (2003), p.147). Subsequent references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[140] The eighteenth century gave birth, for instance, to the first modern 'terrorist', James Aitken, the self-styled 'John the Painter': see Jessica Warner, *John the Painter* (London: Profile Books, 2005). Such an example has obvious parallels with the "dedicated racists" whose "difference DOES make a difference" (Žižek, p.122).

[141] Nietzsche, aphorism 199, p.85.

Answering Voices 1730-51: Mary Collier, Robert Tatersal, Mary Leapor

Three diverse examples of Duck's mode of poeticising labour are found in Collier's *The Woman's Labour* (published 1739), Tatersal's "The Bricklayer's Labours" (1734), and Leapor's "Crumble-Hall" (written before 1746, but published posthumously in 1751). Collier's poem is directly addressed to Duck, and Tatersal wrote several such poems. Leapor did not directly address Duck in verse, but was certainly aware of his work.[1] I have chosen to concentrate in this chapter on poems that capitalise, explicitly or otherwise, on *The Thresher's Labour* as a precedent for exploring the poetic possibilities of alternative occupations, a feature of labouring-class poetry in the first half of the century. Each fulfils the function of a poem "assertive of the value of individual experience and identity, and of the right to self-definition, on behalf of the poet herself and of the members of her fellow labouring community". The ways in which these poems adapt Duck's prototype, though, colonising the new form with their own content and extending the possibilities for its evolution in new directions, differ markedly. I will concentrate on how each poet makes use of the mode of writing with which I am interested, and on how they contribute to its development, making it more expressive.

I: Mary Collier

On the basis of her 'Remarks' at the beginning of *Poems* (1762), which account for virtually all that is known about her, Collier must have been born *c.*1690.[2] She states that she was born near Midhurst in Sussex, "of poor, but honest Parents" who taught her to read until her mother's early death, was not sent to school, being "set to such labour as the Country afforded", but continued her education herself. Having "continued a Washerwoman till I was Sixty-Three Years of Age, I left Petersfield to go and take care of a Farm House near Alton, and there I staid till turn'd of Seventy, And then the infirmities of Age rendered me incapable of the labour of that place." She has, she adds, "retired to a Garret (The Poor Poets Fate) in Alton ... endeavouring to pass the Relict of my days in Piety, Purity, Peace, and an Old Maid."[3] She was employed in Petersfield, Hampshire, doing washing, brewing and other manual tasks, when

> ...Duck's poems came abroad, which I soon got by heart, fancying he had been

> too Severe on the Female Sex in his Thresher's Labour brought me to a Strong propensity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex: Therefore I answer'd him to please my own humour, little thinking to make it Public it lay by me several Years and by now and then repeating a few lines to amuse myself and entertain my Company, it got Air.[4]

The result was *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck: In Answer to his late Poem, called The Thresher's Labour*, published at the end of the decade (although this account of its genesis obviously suggests original composition earlier). Another motive for its composition was certainly financial,[5] even if her hopes in this regard were dashed. It neither won the acclaim accorded to Duck's verse, nor lifted Collier out of poverty. She paid for the 1739 edition herself, and later claimed that others took the profits. Even a glance at the subscribers to her 1762 volume suggests the more modest and provincial scale of her success.[6] *The Woman's Labour* has enjoyed a longevity its author could scarcely have imagined, however: regularly anthologised, today Collier is one of the most widely read eighteenth-century plebeian poets.[7]

Collier's twin aims are to broaden the range of working experiences on offer in poetry by using *The Thresher's Labour* as a template to fill with her own material, and to give a counter-view of female rural labourers. She shows how women like her made a living not just by agricultural labour all year round, like Duck, but by doing miscellaneous domestic work such as washing and cooking. The poem mixes imitation of Duck, to the extent that lines and even whole passages answer him, and some quite subtle deviations from his project. As Goodridge argues, *The Woman's Labour*

> is ... both an imitation and a parody of *The Thresher's Labour*, extending some of that poem's themes and methods into new areas. Collier echoes and extends Duck's complaint of a hard working life by describing a working life some degrees harsher than his, and comparing it in detail with his ...[8]

She chides him for bias against women, through both demonstrating how hard women's lives were, arguing that they were even harder than men's, and by quoting Duck's words back at him ironically. Just as Duck enters into a dialectic with previous literary representations of rural workers in order to define himself against them, so Collier defines herself against his representation of female workers. My particular concerns will be with how Collier uses a Duckian methodology to bring 'new' experience into the medium of poetry, and with how she reinforces Duck's particular *kind* of writing. In representing the

experiences of labouring women at large (the emphasis on, for instance, motherhood means that she really is doing this and not poeticising only her own experiences or those of her most immediate co-workers) she goes distinctly further than Duck as a spokesperson for a 'class'. Apart from necessarily dealing with different areas of wage labour, in writing about women she engages with at least two large extra dimensions of work: domestic and child-rearing, and housework. Furthermore, by consistently addressing Duck himself throughout the poem, and in a variety of tones (laudatory, indignant, remonstrative and sarcastic) Collier significantly develops the conversational aspect of Duck's work – throughout, the "I" speaks to "you".

The poem consists of two hundred and forty-six lines of heroic couplets. After thirty lines introducing her theme, the next hundred record the agricultural work undertaken by women labourers in the summer; the last one hundred and ten lines move on to the domestic labour undertaken during the winter nights. Labouring experiences represented include the washing of clothes, haymaking, domestic cooking, swine feeding, gleaning, harvesting, charring and cleaning domestic instruments. Common Duckian emphases include the privations of weariness and uncomfortable conditions, the tyranny of the time that dictates yet another task awaiting the labourers, and a Mistress who, in an echo of Duck, "Tells us her Charge is great, nay furthermore, / Her Cloaths are fewer than the Time before." (ll.180-1).

During the eighteenth century, the laundry received what may seem a disproportionate amount of attention from poets and diarists alike.[9] It was not just labourer-poets like Collier who wrote about the washing of clothes, but others as diverse as Soame Jenyns[10] and Anna Laetitia Barbauld.[11] As representatives of a class who could afford to hire others (like Collier) to do the task, they dismiss it as something almost comic. The celebrated eighteenth-century 'faux pas' of visiting an acquaintance on an appointed 'washing day' also features in their verse. Even Barbauld's poem, which generally does not deride the event or those who take part, includes lines acknowledging the social horror of arriving unannounced on such a day.[12] Jenyns and Barbauld represent only the bourgeois employers' view of 'washing day'; Collier's poem, apart from its intrinsic poetic merit, preserves experiences little recorded elsewhere by literature of the period. Neither is it insignificant that a poem entitled *The Woman's Labour* should feature lengthy passages describing washing since, as Caroline Davidson records, it was considered a 'feminine' activity:

> As the chap-books popular in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries make plain, men only did laundry if there was something wrong with them ... So strong was the taboo against men washing, starching, or ironing that when they were in the unhappy position of having to do so ... they normally did it in secret, in the small hours of the morning, for they did not want the neighbours to know.[13]

The laundry was so bound up with the construction of femininity that when, in Jenyns' poem, the unfortunate male visitor intrudes, the (comic) horror of the women arises from his transgression into a space decreed exclusively female by custom.[14]

The 'Washerwoman' passage is one of the most vivid, vibrant and evocative in *The Woman's Labour*:

> When to the House we come where we should go,
> How to get in, alas! we do not know: 150
> The Maid quite tir'd with Work the Day before,
> O'ercome with Sleep; we standing at the Door
> Oppressed with Cold, and often call in vain,
> E're to our Work we can Admittance gain:
> But when from Wind and Weather we get in, 155
> Briskly with Courage we our work begin;
> Heaps of fine Linen we before us view,
> Whereon to lay our Strength and Patience too;
> Cambricks and Muslins, which our Ladies wear,
> Laces and Edgings, costly, fine, and rare, 160
> Which must be washed with utmost Skill and Care;
> With Holland Shirts, Ruffles and Fringes too,
> Fashions which our Fore-fathers never knew.
> For several Hours here we work and slave,
> Before we can one Glimpse of Day-Light have; `165
> We labour hard before the Morning's past,
> Because we fear the Time runs on too fast.
> At length bright Sol illuminates the Skies,
> And summons drowsy Mortals to arise;
> Then comes our mistress to us without fail, 170
> And in her Hand, *perhaps*, a Mug of Ale
> To cheer our Hearts, and also to inform
> Herself, what Work is done that very Morn;
> Lays her Commands upon us, that we mind
> Her Linen well, nor *leave the Dirt behind*: 175
> Not this alone, but also to take care
> We don't her Cambricks nor her Ruffles tear;
> And *these* most strictly does of us require,
> *To save her Soap, and sparing be of Fire*[15]

Written a few years before Leapor's poems, the description shows definite affinities with her style of writing about cooking and washing. Collier exploits not just new experiences, but a fresh domestic vocabulary: "linen", "Cambricks", "Muslins", "Laces", "Edgings", "Holland Shirts", "Ruffles", "Fringes". Once again, this is a vocabulary that promotes new and unusual sound patterns: Pope, seemingly a palpable stylistic influence, understandably enough used only two of the words on this list, and used even these only once each.[16] Collier replicates a number of specifically Duckian tactics: she achieves a tone of informality, even confidentiality: when she details the visit of their Mistress, the italicisation of the words the latter stresses makes us privy not just to *what* but *how* she speaks. As the Mistress gathers the women around her confidentially to give instructions, Collier makes us too, by extension, members of this circle. In the second verse paragraph quoted above, we see how, like Duck, Collier is driven to begin lines with "And", though not quite to the same extent: in total, twenty eight of her two hundred and forty six lines begin with the word. She also 'slows down' a line when describing fatigue: the caesura in l.152 replicates the 'real-life' pause whilst the weary maid comes to the door. The caesura itself, of course, is an almost inescapable by-product of the pentameter line. What the poet can do, however, is to *vary* the caesura (so that it does not recur monotonously in the same place, line after line), and emphasise it (where appropriate) making it expressive. In l.152 the caesura is strong because there is a shift of subject (from "Maid" to "we"), appropriately marked by the strong semi-colon (the only *medial* stop in the whole of the above passage). It is not difficult to understand why the maid would have been weary: washing day, customarily held on a Monday or Tuesday (though usually the former), could start as early as 1 a.m. for servant girls, and involve washing until tea time. Likewise, professional laundresses would commonly arrive at clients' houses before dawn.[17]

Collier moves rapidly between descriptions of various jobs, replicating the 'real time' in which they move between different jobs:

> Our Mistress of her Pewter doth complain,
> And 'tis our Part to make it clean again ... 205
>
> When Night comes on, and we quite weary are,
> We scarce can count what falls unto our Share;
> Pots, Kettles, Sauce-pans, Skillets, we may see, 210
> Skimmers and Ladles, and such Trumpery ...

On Brass and Iron we our Strength must spend;
Our tender Hands and Fingers scratch and tear ...

Then in much haste for Brewing we prepare, 225
The Vessels clean, and scald with greatest Care....

Water we pump, the Copper we must fill,
Or tend the Fire ... (ll.204-5, 208-11, 216-7, 225-6, 231-2)

Collier provides a compendium of tasks associated with eighteenth-century housework: the washing up, the cleaning[18] of a variety of objects such as pots and kettles (an eighteenth-century kettle was used for boiling either water or food, "suspended over the fire – a wood or peat fire on an open hearth or a coal fire in an iron grate"),[19] the polishing of iron and brass, brewing, pumping some water to re-fill the "Copper" (a large boiling vessel used for both the laundry and the cooking), and tending the fire. Few homes had the capability to heat water in the necessary amounts to wash clothes, although in wealthier houses (as here) there were large coppers under which fires could be lit.[20] Wives would need to use the same iron boiling pots in which they cooked family meals, meaning that women were able to do only the cooking *or* the washing – part of the reason washing day was unpopular with menfolk.

The Woman's Labour is particularly rich in words full of verbal texture, often implements of some kind. Those that stand out above are probably "Skillet" and "Skimmer", because, aside from the repetition of the 'sk' sound, we may be unsure what they are. A "Skillet" is "A boiling-pan with feet and a long handle, placed on the fire", whilst a "Skimmer" is "A shallow, often perforated, utensil for skimming liquids".[21] Although these are words that probably only Collier or another labourer-poet would use, their sound is evocative: the name 'Skimmer' also suggests its purpose. The pauses introduced by the multiple commas are also noteworthy. At this (late) point in the poem the workers are exhausted and the pauses – one after each item that they will have to clean – mimic their anguish as they take account of each thing in turn and approximate the labour required to complete each job. Like Duck's, Collier's poetic strength lies in the *accumulation* of effect, detailing experience in a continuous narrative (rather than writing self-contained couplets).

Collier's attitude to labour itself certainly differs from Duck's, however. Whereas the latter sees nobility in labouring life, there are no such sentiments in Collier's poem,

either in the sections on domestic labour or in the passages on rural work:

> Her poem is at times plodding and repetitive, but this is not inappropriate: work for her is never transformed or justified by a wider context as it is for Duck. It remains hard labour in which the material qualities of things demand attention.[22]

Indeed, the poem's final lines seem to offer something of a summation of the feelings expressed throughout:

> So the industrious Bees do hourly strive
> To bring their Loads of Honey to the Hive;
> Their sordid Owners always reap the Gains, 245
> And poorly recompense their Toil and Pains. (ll.243-6)

There are few, if any, compensations for Collier. The glorying in the natural world and the pleasure found in its beauties that provides fleeting consolation for Duck, are absent: Collier's full attention is devoted to surviving. She is, however, amiable in the most trying circumstances, displays great evident humanity, and, like Duck, depicts the genial comradeship she enjoys with her fellows: "Now we drive on, resolv'd our Strength to try, / And what we can, we do most willingly" (ll.182-3). Like Duck and his mates, the women develop the psychological coping strategy of testing themselves against the demands of the tasks.

Collier begins with a dedication to Duck which reads as a direct plea:

> Immortal bard! Thou Fav'rite of the Nine!
> Enrich'd by Peers, advanc'd by CAROLINE!
> Deign to look down on one that's poor and low,
> Remembring that you yourself was lately so;
> Accept these Lines: Alas! what can you have 5
> From her, who ever was, and's still a Slave?
> No Learning ever was bestow'd on me;
> My Life was always spent in Drudgery:
> And not alone; alas! with Grief I find,
> It is the Portion of poor Woman-kind. (ll.1-10) 10

At first it may appear that Collier's title is merely derivative – *The Woman's Labour* / *The Thresher's Labour* – but Duck identifies himself (as a member of a community) by reference to his occupation, though threshing was far from his only one. As stated, Collier goes rather further as a representative of those on whose behalf she writes. Her poem

places greater emphasis upon the impoverishment and hardship to which she feels subject. She also claims that "Drudgery" "...is the Portion of Woman-Kind" and uses the word "slave" (several times – e.g. ll.6, above, and 212). Two major issues that emerge concern her use of refutation of claims / passages within *The Thresher's Labour* as a 'prop' around which to structure *The Woman's Labour*, and the consequences of addressing Duck directly for the tone of the poem. Addressing the "you", in only the ten lines above Collier's tone moves from the laudatory (ll.1-2), to the rhetorical questioning (ll.5-6), to the comparative and remonstrative (ll.7-8), to one of pathos (ll.9-10).

Collier argues that women, if of Divine origin and creation, must once have enjoyed equality with men (ll.11-30, treated separately in my section below on conceptual issues), the only philosophical 'aside' that she permits herself. Her intentions signalled, Collier then launches into a refutation of the specific points made by Duck about female labourers (just as she later goes into such detail about domestic occupations specifically to show the ceaseless toil labouring women must perform to survive, *in contrast with* Duck's account of the female gleaners). Again, a crucial reason for Collier's success lies in her direct address to Duck. For all the informality and amiability of *The Thresher's Labour*, it is addressed to a patron. Collier, however, achieves a tone considerably 'chattier', frequently using both first and second person:

> 'Tis true, that when our Morning's work is done,
> And all our Grass expos'd unto the Sun,
> While that his scorching Beams do on it shine, 55
> As well as you, we have a Time to dine:
> I hope, that since we freely toil and sweat
> To earn our Bread, you'll give us Time to eat. (ll.53-8)

Since she writes of such common everyday topics as washing and cleaning, the desirability of achieving as informal a register as possible is apparent. This innovation is a key ingredient in Collier's 'improvement' on Duck's example. Robert Dodsley had mingled the obvious possibilities of the 'self-definition' poem with the verse epistle as early as 1732;[23] whereas he (inevitably) emerges as a purveyor of 'light verse', however, Collier develops the conversational possibilities of the new 'kind' of poem whilst preserving its dignity as 'serious' verse – complete with heroic couplets and classical references (see ll.239-42) that reconnect labour with the respect it once commanded. It is a vital point that tone of voice (equally with vocabulary) can *shape and colour*

versification: the strong running-on in ll.57-8 grows *directly* from the indignant sarcasm of the sentiment expressed. Neither is it only Duck that Collier is engaging in debate. She enters into dialogue with the anti-pastoral, as the reference to "toil and sweat" in l.56 above, and others such as that to "dirt and filth" in l.219 (unquoted) testify. Collier writes of the same (female) sweat that provokes contempt from Swift in his "A Pastoral Dialogue" where, in l.24, the suggestion is that Swift finds Sheelagh's sweat only mildly less disgusting than it would be if it *were* urine.[24]

The passage from *The Thresher's Labour* that seemed to irk Collier particularly is:

> Our Master comes, and at his Heels a Throng
> Of prattling Females, arm'd with Rake and Prong:
> Prepar'd, whilst he is here, to make his Hay: 165
> Or, if he turns his Back, prepar'd to play.
> But here, or gone, sure of this Comfort still,
> Here's Company, so they may chat their fill:
> And were their Hands as active as their Tongues,
> How nimbly then would move their Rakes and Prongs? ... 170
>
> ... they still sit on the Ground, 175
> And the brisk Chat renew'd, a-fresh goes round:
> All talk at once: but seeming all to fear,
> That they all speak so well, the rest won't hear;
> By quick degrees so high their Notes they strain,
> That Standers-by can naught distinguish plain: 180
> So loud their Speech, and so confus'd their Noise,
> Scarce puzzled Echo can return a Voice;
> Yet spite of this, they bravely all go on,
> Each scorns to be, or seem to be, outdone ...[25]

Always assuming Duck was serious (rather than playful), the passage does seem unfair, and even untypical of Duck on the basis of the passion for justice expressed elsewhere in his poem. The tone of *The Thresher's Labour* is not generally one of levity but earnestness, since labour is never a joking matter for Duck. The idea that Duck is playful therefore, just teasing his female co-workers, a valid possibility in itself, is not entirely convincing; although, as argued in the previous chapter, these passages *are* a diversion from the Sisyphean cycle. Taken with the 'poetic licence' seen in the account of the chattering gleaners, speculation has followed that this passage represents Duck's insecurities about women labourers infiltrating the fields, putting male jobs at risk. The

line "Each scorns to be, or seem to be, outdone" is reminiscent of his description of the men's spirit of friendly rivalry in labour; is it because the women are talking rather than working, as he perceives it, that he condemns the women for showing the same spirit? Considerable critical attention has been devoted to these questions[26] and ultimately Duck's comments remain "difficult to account for",[27] for the reasons given.

Alternatively, Goodridge argues that in their concentration solely on the content of the contentious passages in which Duck seemingly attacks female workers, critics have tended to miss the point. He argues that lines 191-8 of *The Thresher's Labour*, quoted in the previous chapter, are

> ... a very carefully planned and executed simile, clearly the product of Duck's nights with *Paradise Lost*, Bysshe's *Art of English Poetry* and Addison's *Spectator* ... His primary purpose, in other words, is a literary one; a piece of natural observation of birds falling silent has moved him to try his hand at an extended simile.[28]

Furthermore, he cites Collier's lines "But on our abject State you throw your Scorn, / And Women wrong, your Verses to adorn" (ll.41-2) as evidence that she "recognises the primarily literary intention of Duck's scene of women in the hayfield."[29] He alleges that "Duck is not actually thinking very much at all about what the women are doing in the hayfield" and that "Collier recognises this".[30] In short, Collier realises that Duck was writing a *poem*, and uses this account to define herself against, just as Duck used his fictional account of the female gleaners to contrast with himself and his comrades. Such a view is entirely consonant with Collier's "An Elegy upon Stephen Duck", published in the 1762 volume, which clearly suggests she bore him no malice.[31]

Collier answers the criticisms of *The Thresher's Labour* within the next forty-five lines, sometimes directly, occasionally quoting Duck's words back at him ironically. For instance, she points out that male labourers talk repeatedly whilst they work, and that Duck seems to have little objection to this (ll.69-72). (Duck describes how the voices of male labourers are drowned out by the flail: hence men, too, by his own admission, talk whilst working). From l.30 onwards there is a litany of such points, frequently accompanied by italicisation to emphasise a direct allusion to a specific line or passage in Duck's poem. Others include pointing out that whilst men sleep soundly, women have to tend crying children yet also be up "without fail" to start work again (ll.113-6), and that, whereas Duck complains of labour dominating male labourers' dreams, in contrast,

"...we have hardly ever *Time to dream.*" (l.134).[32]

Arguably the best point Collier makes in support of her argument that labouring-class women had an even harder life than their male counterparts occurs in lines describing the aftermath of the day's field work:

> When Ev'ning does approach, we homeward hie, 75
> And our domestic Toils incessant ply:
> Against your coming Home prepare to get
> Our Work all done, our House in order set;
> *Bacon* and *Dumpling* in the Pot we boil,
> Our Beds we make, our Swine we feed the while; 80
> Then wait at Door to see you coming Home,
> And set the Table out against you come:
> Early next Morning we on you attend;
> Our Children dress and feed, their Cloaths we mend;
> And in the Field our daily Task renew, 85
> Soon as the rising Sun has dry'd the Dew. (ll.75-86)

Labouring-class women, she argues, are doubly (if not trebly) disadvantaged; not only do they suffer the privations of labouring for a living, but receive lower wages than men, and are expected to care for husbands and children as well – what Landry terms the "triple burden of working women – wage labor, housekeeping, and childcare." ...[33] Nonetheless, this experience of working a 'triple' shift – fieldwork, housework, childcare – was not Collier's (suggesting again that she writes on behalf of others as much as herself). Indeed, as Landry points out, it was probably only her single status that enabled her to write at all:

> ... her working life is more circumscribed, her waking hours are less restricted than those of the married majority of her class, the women on whose behalf she writes *The Woman's Labour*. She works only a double (wage labor, housework), not a triple shift. That is presumably the difference ... that separates her from other working women ... If she had a husband and children to tend, her literariness would be effectively cancelled in advance.[34]

The inequalities of marriage, and of the expectations upon men and women[35] of the times, can hardly be overstressed. The major life choice faced by any woman concerned marriage. Often things turned out badly whatever the woman chose. Porter details what could go wrong in extreme circumstances, commenting "Once married, women might easily be reduced to the status of drudges and chattels", and recording that "ritualised wife sales" were routinely held, sometimes even with the agreement of the wife, at which

she could be traded either for money, or an ox, "the only practical – though not legally binding – form of divorce available to any but the very rich."[36] If, conversely, things actually went well, a wife would simply settle into a routine of wage labour, housework, childcare and looking after her husband. No wonder, one may think, Collier did not marry. Malcolmson, though, details the fate that often befell unmarried women, documenting how women were more susceptible to "serious impoverishment" than men because their wages were less.[37]

Collier follows up the passage concerning the "triple shift" with vignettes on the different kinds of physical labour women undertook, reminiscent of Duck's subdivisions into extracts describing the work of a particular season. She includes a passage in which she tries to establish the truth about the effort expended on gleaning, claiming, "To get a Living we so willing are, / Our tender Babes into the Field we bear, / And wrap them in our Cloaths to keep them warm ..." (ll.93-5); she then continues with the lengthy and detailed section on their travails as washerwomen, followed by accounts of cleaning and brewing.

Despite some awkward repetition in the poem (e.g. ll. 65/9, 75, 87, 101, 143, 188, 196, 208) and false rhymes (ll. 73-4, 95-6, 105-6, 115-6, 172-3), overall Collier's poetic achievement is not inconsiderable. She uses Duck's mode of poeticising labour to take his fledgling poetic 'kind' into the rather different arena of domestic work, also creating a poetic space for Leapor: Collier's dexterous conversational tone, a solid success of the poem, was later developed and exploited to even greater effect by Leapor. Collier's place in the emerging counter-canon of eighteenth-century verse is secure, because of her achievement not just in documenting, but in *poeticising* the lot of the labouring woman in all the ways described. Like Duck, she introduces to the province of verse democratising experience and language and a whole poetic discourse on work unavailable elsewhere at the time, that still appears vivid almost three hundred years later.

II: Robert Tatersal

Little is known about Tatersal beyond the facts surrounding publication of *The Bricklayer's Miscellany or, Poems on Several Subjects* in 1734, and its immediate reception; a bricklayer in Kingston-upon-Thames in Surrey, as Christmas notes, his poem "The Wish" suggests he was then a bachelor.[38] Publication appears to have been made

possible by the patronage of a Lord Richard Onslow. The collection's title page includes the couplet: "Since Rustick Threshers entertain the Muse; / Why may not Bricklayers too their Subjects choose?"[39] Tatersal's dedication to his patron, like Collier's preface, makes it further apparent that he is explicitly identifying himself with Duck:

> ... as the Poetical Performances of a Country Thresher hath been so universally applauded, so I hope these of a Country Bricklayer, may also meet in the World some favourable Reception; as they are the true and genuine Productions of a Mechanick Fancy and Genius.[40]

Tatersal's motives in publishing were understandably partially financial, and in the short term, it seems his verses did meet with "some favourable Reception". He published a second volume in 1735. Despite enjoying more initial success than she, like Collier, he sank back into anonymity, and has only been recuperated relatively recently.[41]

Having already alluded to Duck in the ways recorded above, Tatersal does not address him at the beginning of his poem (though he does in "To Stephen Duck", and "The Introduction, to Mr. Stephen Duck") but instead echoes, thematically and technically, passages from Duck's prototype. "The Bricklayer's Labours", consisting of a hundred and nine lines (fifty three heroic couplets, and a triplet) sets out to poeticise the bricklayer's tenuous existence, obtaining what seasonal work he can over a period of twelve months. Like Duck and Collier, Tatersal depicts himself as dominated by thoughts of labour both at work and away from it. The thematic echoes of Duck generally subdivide into four areas: description of the physical labour he and his mates undertake; description of the conditions in which they work (seen especially in the repeated references to the sweat of the workers under the heat of the sun); to food / drink / refreshment (i.e. the insufficiency of their humble provisions); and to time, and the annual cycle. Like Duck and Collier, Tatersal appeals repeatedly to the senses; his poem is full of the vivid sights, sounds and smells, often expressed in vernacular and colloquial language.

It might be wise to view Tatersal's pleading of poverty in the poem with caution. Whilst there should be no doubt that his work was physical demanding, and carried out in difficult and dangerous conditions, in relative terms Tatersal would have been better off than many of his labouring-class brethren. In the late 1720s Stephen Duck, a (semi) skilled agricultural worker of sufficient usefulness to his employer to be worth employing

all year round, earned four shillings and sixpence a week (or ninepence a day for a six-day week), amounting to some £11. 14s per annum.[42] It seems likely that Leapor, as a cook maid in Northamptonshire, would have earned as little as £3.10s. per year, in addition to room and board – barely subsistence wages. Even in an excellent situation, a kitchen-maid received no more than £10 per year.[43] Unskilled labourers by the mid-century would rarely earn more annually than £20, and more often in the region of £10-£12. The wages of a whole family working in agriculture averaged out at between nine and twelve shillings per week. London bricklayers and craftsmen, however, could earn £25-£35 per annum since they were skilled, even though by the mid-century few skilled journeymen earned fifteen shillings a week. (By contrast, merchants and traders in the same period could earn £200-£800 annually, and shopkeepers £100-£200).[44] Tatersal, of course, was not working in London and so would have earned a lower, provincial rate, but might still be expected to have earned an amount appropriate to a skilled tradesman.

Tatersal describes being caught up in the whirlwind of labouring activities with his colleagues, and what results at least resembles the passages in which Duck describes the harvest or Collier the frenzy of the washing:

So thus equipped, my trowel in my hand,
I haste to work, and join the ragged band.
And now each one his different post assigned,
And three to three in ranks completely joined,
When 'Bricks and mortar' echoes from on high, 25
'Mortar and bricks' the common, constant cry.
Each sturdy slave their different labours share,
Some brickmen called, and some for mortar are:
With sultry sweat and blow without allay,
Travel and standard up and down all day. 30
And now the sun, with more exalted ray,
With glowing beams distributes riper day,
When amidst dust and smoke, and sweat and noise,
'A line, a line', the foreman cries, 'my boys';
When tuck and pat with Flemish bond they run, 35
Till the whole course is struck complete and done:
Then on again, while two exalt the quoin,
And draw the midmost men another line.
The course laid out when, through the fleeting air,
A solemn sound salutes the willing ear; 40
When universal *Yo-hos* echo straight,
Our constant signal to the hour of eight.[45]

Again, despite the "dust and smoke, and sweat and noise" (l.33) there is a real sense of absorption in their work. As in the verse of Duck, Collier, Leapor and Blamire there is a concern with conveying the particularity of the everyday material world, even if his description of the bricklaying is nothing like as intricate or concentrated as, for instance, Duck's excellent evocation of threshing. Again, however, we are almost one of the labouring gang as we hear the cries of instruction from the foreman (who makes his appearance here, just like Duck's Master and Collier's Mistress.) He is a more marginal figure, however, than Duck's superiors, or indeed Leapor's, and his presentation is not as negative; Tatersal's priorities lie elsewhere. Further cries are described in ll.57-8. Another new working vocabulary is incorporated into verse, this time that of the "trowel", "Bricks", and "mortar". Additional authenticity is provided by the inclusion of vernacular; "Flemish bond", for instance, is a method of laying bricks, whilst a "quoin" is a key / corner-stone. Again this 'new' everyday vocabulary is 'rugged' and awkward, 'roughing up' the smooth Augustan medium. Connectives are particularly dominant at the beginning of lines: twenty-eight out of just one hundred and nine (i.e. one in four) begin with "And", as Tatersal's natural urge is to continue his narrative. In ll.70-3, three lines out of four begin with the word.

Again we are witness to methods used by the labourers to maintain morale and comradeship through the long working day, as they cheer the nearing of their work break. Later we are told, "We join our pence to satiate our thirst" (l.77). Whilst there is a direct first-person address not present in *The Thresher's Labour*, Duck's "we" and "our" is not abandoned as Tatersal, too, attempts to affirm and dignify the experiences of his particular labouring community. One again notes the companionship between workers: "each sturdy slave" shares "their different labours" in order to help one another through the ordeal, of which their working conditions are very much a part. The bricklayers spend their break time "...midst the clamour, noise and smoky din / Of dust, tobacco, chaws and drinking gin" (ll.45-6).[46] Their fists are "sunburnt" (l.48). "By line and rule our daily labour's crowned, / While to divert the sultry hours along, / One tells a tale, another sings a song", Tatersal tells us in ll.59-61, recording both the monotony of their working lives and their strategies for dealing with it. In the next two lines he laments: "And now the sun, with full meridian ray, / With scorching beams confirms the perfect day".

Solid (and liquid) refreshment, befitting its importance as one of the few respites of a labourer's life, makes an early appearance in the poem. Describing the first thing he

does upon rising in the morning, Tatersal writes:

> Then hanging on my threadbare coat and hose,
> My hat, my cap, my breeches and my shoes,
> With sheepskin apron girt abut my waist,
> Downstairs I go to visit my repast,
> Which rarely doth consist of more than these: 15
> A quartern loaf and half a pound of cheese.
> Then in a linen bag, on purpose made,
> My day's allowance o'er my shoulder's laid:
> And first, to keep the fog from coming in,
> I whet my whistle with a dram of gin. (ll.11-20) 20

Hence, like Duck (in ll.137-42 of *TTL*), Tatersal laments, in l.15, that his provisions are never enough. Unlike Duck, who never drinks anything more alcoholic than beer, widely regarded as a natural thirst quencher, Tatersal depicts himself and his comrades frequently drinking gin, which gradually became associated with drunkenness. In all, beyond the references to drinking gin already quoted in ll.20 and 46, in l.51 we are told that to round off their half-hour break the bricklayers "Wash down their throats a quartern full of gin"; in their lunch hour, "Some that have victuals eat; others who've none / Supply the place with drink and gin alone; / Mod'rate in food, but in good beer profuse, / Which for the heat we modestly excuse" (ll.66-9); and then at the day's end, "Some homewards bend, some to the alehouse steer" (l.86). The line that follows – "Others more sober feast on better cheer" – clearly suggests that all this drinking is far from a good thing. We are never explicitly *told* that the labourers drink alcohol to excess as a means of drowning out the desolation of their lives, but we are effectively *shown* as much. Like Collier, Tatersal goes further than Duck in articulating the desperation of a life of hard labour. Whilst they are driven to the alehouse partly by the thirst acquired through working in extremely dusty conditions, the "better cheer" is had by those remaining "more sober".

Like Duck and Collier, Tatersal powerfully conveys how the labourer's life is lived under the eye of the clock: time is both an enemy when it decrees that work must begin, and a temporary saviour when it brings another day's toils to an end, but ultimately it always condemns them to further prolonged labour. It is time that, appropriately, begins and ends the poem. The first lines depict Tatersal's waking:

> At length the soft nocturnal minutes fly,

And crimson blushes paint the orient sky ...
When up I start, and view the eastern sky,
And by my mark find six o'clock is nigh. (ll.1-2, 9-10) 10

Hence like Faustus, watching mere minutes eventually turn into the hour that marks his doom, Tatersal must rise. Meanwhile the "*Yo-hos*" that "echo straight" are "Our constant signal to the hour of eight." (l.42); ll.60-1 (quoted above) make the point that it is necessary to tell tales and sing songs "to divert the sultry hours". Like Frederick Douglass and his fellow slaves, the labourers sing not because they are happy but to alleviate monotony and misery.[47] One way of telling the time is the sun, and hence the two become intertwined in the labourers' minds: "And now the sun, with full meridian ray, / With scorching beams confirms the perfect day. / Full twelve o'clock, the labourers cry 'Yo-ho' " (ll.62-4). Again as their dinner hour dwindles away, time is the enemy, not just because they must go back to work but because the afternoon was the day's longest period of uninterrupted work:

And now the gliding minutes almost gone, 70
And a loud noise proclaims the hour of one;
Again we reassume the dusty stage,
And mortar chafed again we do engage.
This is the most tedious part of all the day,
Full five hours' space to toil without allay... (ll.70-5) 75

Then there is the passing of whole months leading to the precarious season of winter, with which Tatersal finishes the poem:

When frost and cold congeal the atmosphere, 90
And trees disrobed and hoary fields appear;
When all the earth in ice and snow is bound,
And naught but desolation all around,
Then hapless me! I wander up and down,
With half an apron wondrous greasy grown! 95
With anxious looks my countenance is clad,
And all my thoughts are like the winter, sad!
This scene of life corrodes my troubled mind:
I seek for work, but none, alas! can find;
Sometimes, by chance, I have a grate to set, 100
To hang a copper, or a hole replete;
A day or two to exercise my skill,
But seldom more, reluctant to my will.
And thus I pass the tedious winter on,

Sometimes repast I have, and sometimes none; 105
Till cheerful Phoebus, with a grateful ray,
Through vernal airs explores his willing way,
Dispels all cares, and gladdens every vein,
And all the joyous scene revolves again. (ll.90-109)

The intertextuality of the poem is reflected by Tatersal's repeated borrowings from Duck; here the winter "desolation" presumably echoes the "Desolation" that "does our Steps attend" for Duck's reapers (*TTL*, l.230). In both cases, this "desolation" reflects labour temporarily completed; the telling contrast lies in that whereas Duck has work all year round and so moves from one job to the next, Tatersal's immediate prospects of finding work are desolate also. Like Duck, Tatersal finishes on the annual treadmill on which he began; but for him part of the struggle lies every winter in the toil necessary merely to stay alive because of a very lack of the unceasing labour that Duck bemoans yet seemingly takes for granted. It is a bleak portrayal of labouring life, lacking in the brief consolations available to Duck, or the transcendence and nobility that the latter sees in his work. If anything, Tatersal's portrayal of labouring life is even bleaker than Collier's. For Tatersal his toils are nothing more than a frantic scramble for survival.

Poetically "The Bricklayer's Labours" is invariably 'laboured' as well. Tatersal's poetic achievement arguably is hardly in the same category as Duck or Collier's (and certainly not Leapor's – see below). His poem begins in a lively and engaged manner, and he succeeds in stamping an individual personality on the poem. Despite this initial sprightliness, though, his verse (perhaps appropriately) becomes plodding and repetitive. Tatersal struggles with word order, often forced to manipulate it awkwardly in order to engineer the rhyme (on too many occasions to make it worthwhile to single out specific examples); likewise these rhymes are bland and repetitive. His poem also noticeably lacks the shifts of tone and pace seen in Duck's work, neither establishing the convincingly conversational tone of Collier's. He cannot himself carry the burden of trying to successfully incorporate such material into existing verse form all at once, but much like Duck himself, is a pioneer who effectively helps make it possible for others later on to succeed where he struggles. It is in this light that he should be viewed. For all the clumsiness of the grammar, style and rhyme, Tatersal produces lively (reasonably) informative verse that carries a narrative that more than sustains the reader's interest, and also steers the 'self-definition' poem away from agricultural work and into an entirely

different – metropolitan – arena.

III: Mary Leapor

Mary Leapor was the predominantly self-educated daughter of a gardener. She began writing poetry at a young age, but saw only a handful of poems published in her short lifetime. Born in Marston St. Lawrence in Northamptonshire, like Duck she is believed to have received a rudimentary education at a Free School, in Leapor's case situated on the south side of the chapel belonging to Magdalen College in Brackley.[48] It is believed she subsequently worked as a maid for Susanna Jennens at Weston Hall.[49] Having lost her next job at a large, family home – Edgcote House, the inspiration for "Crumble-Hall" – she died of (probable) measles, aged twenty-four in 1746. Her poems were published after her death in two volumes thanks to a subscription organized by Bridget Freemantle, Leapor's young patroness. The volumes – and particularly the first – were highly successful. As noted in my Introduction, the list of the great and good who subscribed rivalled those who subscribed to Duck's 1736 volume. As well as one hundred and three published poems, and the many it is known she destroyed, she also wrote a play, *The Unhappy Father*, rejected for performance (in Leapor's lifetime) by Colley Cibber. After years of relative neglect, of all labouring poets resuscitated by scholarship in recent years, none has elicited more interest than Leapor. The most comprehensive account to date is Richard Greene's *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry*, and her complete works have recently been republished.[50]

She is arguably superior to any poet discussed hitherto. Although her published output is not greater than Tatersal's or Collier's in amount, Leapor achieves a consistency unmatched by other labouring-class poets in the first half of the century. Whereas the figures discussed so far (whether deservedly or otherwise) are predominantly remembered for one 'signature-piece' each, at least a dozen of Leapor's works display a real merit increasingly acknowledged in the growing body of criticism devoted to her.[51] Her impish, mischievous poetic persona 'Mira' is not just a domestic labouring identity, but a multi-faceted creation whose wide range of experience is represented in Leapor's works. Leapor's range and consistency results from her close study of Pope (to whom she referred in a letter as "my favourite Author")[52] and her ability to experiment with and vary the properties of the couplet. Her versatility is well demonstrated by "Crumble-

Hall", which displays the clear influence, at times, of both Pope and Gay – as well as her ability to reconcile matter and manner by forging a medium distinctively her own.

Based on her time working at Edgcote House, "Crumble-Hall" has received at least as much attention as her other works combined.[53] Leapor's attempt at a poetic assertion of labouring identity detailing specific working experiences is an imaginative adaptation of the traditional English 'country house' poem of Jonson, Carew, Herrick and Marvell.[54] It consists of one hundred and eighty six lines of heroic couplets, written from the point of view of the servants who, like the spiders and mice who live there, are extremely comfortable in their surroundings (unlike the family who notionally *own* the house). The poem elaborates on the daily activities and experiences of various servants, depicting a whole 'below stairs' community – Leapor's equivalent of Duck's threshers, Collier's washerwomen and Tatersal's bricklayers – and features the unusual device of genially taking the reader on a 'tour' of the property. This 'tour' encompasses the Gothic exterior of the building (including a few words about its history), the favourite hiding places of mice and spiders in dark corners, the parlour, stairs and library. The most detailed description, though, is reserved for the kitchen and the work the servants do there (ll.110-55) before the poem culminates in description of the gardens.

Domestic service was an extremely diverse occupation in the eighteenth century, and "embraced a whole series of different occupations, each with its own particular job description, standards of pay and conditions, and status."[55] Leapor was a 'kitchen' or 'cook' maid: the servant hierarchy designated "waiting women, ladies' maids, and companions" as the "elite of female domestic servants", on the basis that these were positions only attained by educated women "of genteel upbringing". Other 'upper servants' included housekeepers and cooks, whereas in large households those at the bottom of the scale would include chambermaids, housemaids, kitchen-maids and scullery maids.[56] The following represents a contemporary job description for a 'cook-maid' in Leapor's native Northamptonshire:

> To roast and boil butcher's meat & all manner of fowls.
> To clean all the rooms below stairs.
> To make the servants beds and to clean all the garrets.
> To clean the great & little stairs.
> To scour the pewter & brass.
> To help wash, soap & buck.
> Or to do anything she is ordered.

> If she has never had the smallpox to sign a paper to leave the service if she has them.[57]

This, then, is the wide range of jobs Leapor poeticises, and explains why she was so well placed to provide such a comprehensive account: the cook-maid, near the bottom of the servant hierarchy, turned her hand to virtually anything required.

This range / coverage of material can be seen early in the poem:

> 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: 20
> With humming Beer her Vats were wont to flow,
> And ruddy *Nectar* in her Vaults to glow....
>
> Strange Forms above, present themselves to View;
> Some Mouths that grin, some smile, and some that spew. 40
> Here a soft Maid or infant seems to cry:
> Here stares a Tyrant, with distorted Eye:
> The Roof – no *Cyclops* e'er could reach so high:
> Not *Polypheme*, tho' form'd for dreadful Harms,
> The Top could measure with extended Arms. 45
> Here the pleas'd Spider plants her peaceful Loom:
> Here weaves secure, nor dreads the hated Broom.
> But at the Head (and furbish'd once a Year)
> The Heralds mystic Compliments appear:
> Round the fierce Dragon *Honi Soit* entwines, 50
> And Royal *Edward* o'er the Chimney shines.
> Safely the Mice through yon dark Passage run,
> Where the dim Windows ne'er admit the Sun.
> Along each Wall the Stranger blindly feels;
> And (trembling) dreads a Spectre at his Heels. 55
> The sav'ry Kitchen much Attention calls:
> *Westphalia* Hams adorn the sable Walls:
> The Fires blaze; the greasy Pavements fry;
> And steaming Odours from the Kettles fly... [58]

The first six lines above bear comparison with Duck's descriptions of threshing, or Collier's of washing, in their rich, specific, detail about cooking: "powder'd" here means "salted"; "Warden-Pies" were those "made with warden pears, an old variety of baking fruit"; "tainted ven'son" was "well hung" meat; "humming Beer" was "really strong"; and "Nectar" was "sweet wine".[59] Leapor's adjectives often describe the *physical* properties of food. Pope might well have been content to call such viands "simple fare"

(as in "Satire II from Horace", ii. 73: "Remembers oft the School-boy's simple fare"). Yet at least a couple of the couplets in the above extract – e.g. ll.41-2, 50-1 like, elsewhere, ll.5-6, 155-64 – display an undeniably strong Popean influence. They co-exist, or mingle, however, with others, like ll.51-2, 58-9, that are distinctively Leaporesque in tone and character, agile and full of vivid movement, sights, sounds and smells. The poem is a miniature exhibit in itself of Keegan's argument, quoted in my Introduction, that labouring poets write both in homage to their canonical counterparts, and in reaction against them, forging their own distinctive styles and registers.

In ll.46-59, Leapor presents the domestic servants as curiously more at home than their affluent employers – along with the spiders and mice. These lines give a flavour of the coverage, and the range of juxtapositions, of the poem: Leapor moves from the spider, to the grandiose family coat of arms, and back to the mice. The 'tour' also takes in both the grand "upstairs rooms" ("See! yon brown Parlour on the Left appears, / For nothing famous, but its leathern Chairs", ll.60-1) and their contents, the 'below stairs' servants' quarters, the individual servants themselves and their jobs, the food in the kitchen and how it is cooked. Hence we have far more than the conventional 'country-house poem' might encompass. Even the stairs are described. About the only omission is the family who own the house – and the meagre five lines on them (ll.88-92) contain several satiric 'put downs'. The lines quoted suggest *an affinity* between the spiders and mice, and the servants – even though the former skulk in corners, out of the way, and the servants dwell in their lowly quarters, both share the feeling of being curiously comfortable and at home. The house may pass from one family to another; but there will always be servants in the kitchen, and spiders and mice in dark corners and holes. It is a poem full of animals – spiders, mice, a horse and dogs are all alluded to sympathetically.

In the following passage Leapor really begins to describe the servants and the work they do in detail:

Thus far the Palace – Yet there still remain
Unsung the Gardens, and the menial Train. 110
Its Groves anon – its People first we sing:
Hear, *Artemisia*, hear the song we bring,
Sophronia first in verse shall learn to chime,
And keep her Station, tho' in *Mira*'s Rhyme;
Sophronia sage! whose learned Knuckles know 115
To form round Cheese-cakes of the pliant Dough;
To bruise the Curd, and thro' her Fingers squeeze

Ambrosial Butter with the temper'd Cheese:
Sweet Tarts and Pudden, too, her Skill declare;
And the soft Jellies, hid from baneful Air. 120
O'er the warm Kettles, and the sav'ry Steams,
Grave *Colinnettus* of his Oxen dreams:
Then, starting, anxious for his new-mown Hay,
Runs headlong out to view the doubtful Day:
But Dinner calls with more prevailing Charms; 125
And surly *Gruffo* in his aukward Arms
Bears the tall Jugg, and turns a glaring Eye,
As tho' he fear'd some Insurrection nigh
From the fierce Crew, that gaping stand a-dry.
O'er-stuffed with Beef; with Cabbage much too full, 130
And Dumpling too (fit Emblem of his skull!)
With Mouth wide open, but with closing Eyes
Unwieldy *Roger* on the Table lies.
His able Lungs discharge a rattling Sound:
Prince barks, *Spot* howls, and the tall Roofs rebound. 135
Him *Urs'la* views; and, with dejected Eyes,
"Ah! *Roger*, Ah!" the mournful Maiden cries:
"Is wretched *Urs'la* then your Care no more,
That, while I sigh, thus you can sleep and snore?
Ingrateful *Roger*! wilt thou leave me now? 140
For you these Furrows mark my fading Brow:
For you my Pigs resign their Morning Due:
My hungry Chickens lose their Meat for you:
And, was it not, Ah! Was it not for thee,
No goodly Pottage would be dress'd by me. 145
For thee these Hands wind up the whirling Jack,
Or place the Spit across the sloping Rack.
I baste the Mutton with a chearful Heart,
Because I know my *Roger* will have Part."
Thus she – But now her Dish-kettle began 150
To boil and blubber with the foaming Bran.
The greasy Apron round her Hips she tries,
The purging Bath each glowing Dish refines,
And once again the polish'd Pewter shines. (ll.109-55) 155

We see Sophronia cooking, Colinettus dreaming of his oxen, Roger in a state of prostration stretched out on the kitchen table, and his admirer, Urs'la. The kitchen is the centre of the servants' lives, where they both work and spend their recreational time. This passage features a series of evocative nouns: "Knuckles", "Cheese-cakes", "Dough", "Curd", "Butter", "Tarts", "Pudden", "Jellies", "Kettles", "Hay", "Jugg", "Beef", "Cabbage", "Dumpling", "Pigs", "Chickens", "Pottage", "Jack", "Spit" and "Rack", all particular, everyday items uncommon to Augustan verse. We have a series of strong,

specific descriptions that attract emphasis in the first instance from their meaning: "Dish-kettle", "greasy Apron", "scalding Clout", "purging Bath", "glowing Dish", "learned knuckles", "unwieldy Roger", "whirling Jack". The sounds of some are of great incidental benefit as well. The 'chewy', mouth-widening effect of these combinations of words is 'awkward', and, if one is reading aloud, troublesome – just like polishing the pewter itself. Meanwhile the boiling of the water is onomatopoeically suggested by the recurrent 'b' sound: "To boil and blubber with the foaming Bran";[60] another example occurs in the lines prior to those on washing up, in which Urs'la admonishes a thoughtless Roger: "For thee these Hands wind up the whirling Jack, / Or place the Spit across the sloping Rack". She is describing work that is, despite going unappreciated, harsh and physically demanding. With this in mind, the brevity and sharpness of "Spit" complement the rebuke she administers, and the lines contain the actual words she could be saying in this situation. Furthermore, the rhythms of this everyday vocabulary might be said to impose themselves on the smooth versification and 'free it up'. Of the words in the list above, Leapor's "favourite Author" Pope never used "Knuckles", "Cheese-cakes", "Dough", "Tarts", "Pudden", "Kettles", "Jugg", "Chickens", "Pottage" and "Jack" – which is most of them. Hence, by definition, new (often sharp, abrupt, or 'jagged') sounds are deployed, whilst adhering to its metrical conventions (Leapor's 'mingling' of the everyday world of her experiences with the 'ingredients' necessary to dignify her work with the status of 'poetry'). Leapor's couplets could sometimes be 'tight' and compact – as when she engages in poetic debate about the 'public' issues characteristic of Pope, as in "An Essay on Woman", or "Man the Monarch". Yet in the above extract a number of lines run on into one another. What we have here seems far more reminiscent of Gay (what would be, in his hands, affectionate burlesque), and particularly "Tuesday" in *The Shepherd's Week*, Roger and Urs'la Leaporesque equivalents of Colin and Marian.[61] Once again, one is reminded of Doody's argument, summarised in chapter one, that Gay was an essential stepping stone towards Duck (and, therefore, the poetry of labour) in diagnosing that there was a material that existing forms could not reach.

In ll.150-51 also, we have a particular vocabulary that we would not expect to find commonly in much canonical verse of the period: apart from "Dish-kettle" and "Bran", we also have "Apron", "Clout", "Bath" and "Dish", specific everyday objects. To avoid the appropriate vocabulary would be to falsify experience. There is, for instance, something worthy about a "Dish-kettle", because it is actually used, and fulfils a real

purpose in the 'real' world. Instead of being interested primarily in 'elevation', stylisation, euphemism and surface elegance, the poet of labour is interested not in making things seem pretty but in *evoking* them, just as a Spanish or Dutch still-life painter was interested in making objects look not pretty, but solid and 'well used'. Despite her discipleship to Pope, merely including these nouns gives Leapor's verse a specificity he only rarely offers.

Another comparison may help to crystallise differences between Leapor's engagement with 'ordinary life', and Pope's. In their introduction to "Crumble-Hall", Fairer and Gerrard write that "... a satiric element emerges that reminds the reader of Timon's villa in Pope's *Epistle to Burlington*."[62] The contrast is instructive. These are Pope's lines on a meal at Timon's Villa:

> Is this a dinner? this a Genial room?
> No, 'tis a Temple, and a Hecatomb.
> A Solemn Sacrifice, perform'd in state,
> You drink by measure, and to minutes eat.
> So quick retires each flying course, you'd swear
> Sancho's dread Doctor and his Wand were there.
> Between each Act the trembling salvers ring,
> From soup to sweet-wine, and God bless the King.
> In plenty starving, tantaliz'd in state,
> And complaisantly help'd to all I hate,
> Treated, caress'd, and tir'd, I take my leave,
> Sick of his civil Pride from Morn to Eve;[63]

Pope's aim is to castigate Timon; it is hardly surprising that he does not go into detail about the meal itself. The formal mode will effectively not allow him to particularise, so a generalised account is the most he can include. He alludes to "soup and sweet-wine" – which only stand for the beginning and end of the meal anyway. He is writing a moral essay on the use of riches; he wants to denounce ostentation and vulgarity. Hence he distils generalisations about the rich, whereas Leapor particularises about the daily life of a family and those who work for them. The former conduces towards abstraction, whereas the latter obviously does not. Pope is not trying to make his reader think about any particular person, but about luxury.

In Pope's description of the villa he remarks that Timon's:

> ... building is a Town,
> His pond an Ocean, his parterre a Down:

> Who but must laugh, the Master when he sees,
> A puny insect, shiv'ring at a breeze! (ll.105-8)

The building and pond are compared to grandiose, generalised entities – a town and ocean respectively. The "Puny insect" contrasts with Leapor's "Pleas'd Spider" planting "her peaceful Loom", and the mice running "through yon dark Passage". Pope does not even name his metaphorical "insect". Whereas the adjective in Pope's poem describes the physical state of the insect, by contrast the spider at "Crumble-Hall" is "Pleas'd"; we are told how the spider is *feeling*. Leapor, as a servant, hidden away in the servants' quarters, understands that just as servants, largely insignificant to their Masters, have their feelings, standards and ways of judging things, so does the spider. Planting her loom, as spiders do, the latter seems contented in her own world of activities unimportant to human beings, as our activities are irrelevant to spiders. Again, though, the question concerns what Pope *can* write in the mode he employs. He could on occasion describe spiders, or birds, very well. In *Essay on Man*, for example, "The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine! / Feels at each thread, and lives along the line ..."[64] In *Windsor Forest*, "Where Doves in Flocks the leafless Trees o'ershade, / And lonely Woodcocks haunt the wat'ry Glade".[65] It is a talent, however, that Pope makes use of relatively infrequently. Leapor does so more often. Her lines on spiders and mice continue the nascent 'tradition' in labouring poetry (perhaps first seen in Duck's empathy with the exhausted courser) of writing sympathetically about animals, a 'tradition' continued through the works of Yearsley, Woodhouse, Bloomfield and others. There are political connotations, relatively little investigated to date, about the tendency of marginalised poets to empathise with overworked, put upon creatures like dogs or horses, and / or ignored insects and mice.

The passages in Pope's Epistle and in Leapor's poem – the contrast between the two is worth developing – in which their sentiments are most obviously similar are as follows. Writing of Timon's villa Pope exclaims:

> His study! with what Authors is it stor'd?
> In Books, not Authors, curious is my Lord;
> To all their dated Backs he turns you round,
> These Aldus printed, those Du Sueil has bound.
> Lo some are Vellom, and the rest as good
> For all his Lordship knows, but they are Wood.
> For Locke or Milton 'tis in vain to look,
> These shelves admit not any modern book. (*EB*, ll.133-40)

Leapor expresses a not dissimilar sentiment about an occupant of "Crumble-Hall":

> Here *Biron* sleeps, with Books encircled round; 90
> And him you'd guess a Student most profound.
> Not so – in Form the dusty Volumes stand:
> There's few that wear the Mark of *Biron's* Hand. (ll.90-3)

Leapor's point is simply that Biron surrounds himself with books with which he is unacquainted to try and appear studious and well-read. Timon does something akin to this, although rather than trying to appear studious, Timon is a pseudo-antiquarian, interested in old books only for their financial value. He shows off by parading them on his bookshelves. Leapor's point is not the same: 'Biron' would never make such a boast as Timon's to a servant. If, though, Leapor had overheard such a boast to a visitor, she might just have remarked that her master boasted of owning books printed / bound by famous names. She might conceivably have named them – but arguably not as unhesitatingly as Pope. This is an instance in which Leapor might have generalised where Pope would be prepared to particularise, the reverse of the situation generally encountered in the two poems.

Leapor's unusual technique of taking the reader on a 'tour' is important (in ll.84-5 she asks, "Shall we proceed? – Yes, if you'll break the Wall: / If not, return, and tread once more the Hall"), because it helps to further develop a quest to achieve informality of tone and address within simultaneously 'formal' verse also seen in Duck, Collier and Tatersal. It is closely related to Leapor's ability to 'free up' neo-classical verse forms since the two phenomena work together to help make one another possible:

> Then step within – there stands a goodly Row 35
> Of oaken Pillars – where a gallant Show
> Of mimic Pears and carv'd Pomgranates twine,
> With the plump Clusters of the spreading Vine ...
>
> Would you go farther? – Stay a little then:
> Back thro' the Passage – down the Steps again; 95
> Thro' yon dark Room – Be careful how you tread
> Up these steep Stairs – or you may break your Head.
> These Rooms are furnish'd amiably, and full:
> Old Shoes, and Sheep-ticks bred in Stacks of Wool;
> Grey *Dobbin's* Gears, and Drenching-Horns enow; 100
> Wheel-spokes – the Irons of a tatter'd Plough. (ll.38-5, 94-101)

Rumbold points out that Leapor's 'guided tour' of her reader coincides with the fact that "it was only in the 1740s that guidebooks and the tourism which they both served and helped to create became a major factor affecting attitudes to leisure and to the ownership of land", adding that a poetic precedent is Charles Cotton's *The Wonders of the Peake* (1681) "which takes its implied tourist on a markedly unappreciative survey of the established sights of the Peak District".[66] It has, however, a forebear in the annals of labouring verse – Mary Chandler's "The Description of Bath"[67] (and later in the century the technique was used by another maid-poet guiding her reader around a house in which she works).[68] Leapor's directions, paced by the dashes, seem infused with movement, a point stressed by Fairer.[69] Whilst nimble,[70] however, this movement is not necessarily smooth – the dashes mimic the 'real life' pauses needed to ensure that one heeds the advice not to fall foul (literally) of the steep stairs, or to bang one's head. The 'tour' also mirrors – and surpasses – the intimacy Duck and Collier achieve in their poems by taking the reader into the circle of workers with them, and is surely partly possible because of Leapor's personal circumstances: Bridget Freemantle, although of superior social status, was roughly of the same age, and the two were on friendly terms, which allows Leapor to address her with informality. Furthermore, the above passage, introducing the reader to the environment in which she works (and lives), is a good example of a Leaporesque style; these lines are not Pope, not Gay, and are far livelier and more diverse than anything produced by Duck, a more expressive version of what has been termed the Duckian mode. Leapor writes in this style not because she cannot imitate an admired canonical author but because she wishes to occupy a space otherwise unoccupied – unless by Duck, and the other poets discussed in this chapter.

Leapor deviates from some of the concerns of self-defining poems in the preceding decades – such as lack of sleep, exhaustion, and inadequate provisions – befitting her markedly individual poetic capacity – but provides a thorough account of her work and that of her fellows, utilising, varying (and developing) the mode under investigation. It is precisely this difference that leads Rumbold to define Leapor's position in the poem as "detached". The exact nature of the identity Leapor claims has also divided critics, with Rumbold, despite the afore-mentioned claim, arguing that although Leapor's characterisation of the servants "... as individuals" serves "... to dignify them ... Leapor's treatment tends more to the satirical than to any idealization of

the dignity of labour."[71] By contrast, Fairer characterises the poem as one in which what would be "mock-heroic juxtapositions" in another context are here "friendly associations", adding that "there seems to be room for everything to cohabit happily." The kitchen, he says, is "the heart of the building", a house full of "sensuous and vivid life."[72] This seems the more persuasive view; Leapor may satirise the house's owners, and even the concerns of the 'country house' poem itself, but this is not the same as satirising labour, for which the proud detail of the poem suggests respect. Leapor is comfortable in, and accustomed to, her environment.

Leapor's poetic achievement is probably greater than that of her fellows in this chapter. She takes greater risks, shows greater imagination and inventiveness, and reaps proportionately greater rewards. By her death in 1746, the 'self-definition' poem had come a long way, with the Duckian mode of poeticising labour at its centre. It was not the only specifically labouring-class poetic 'kind' – Haslett has made a similar case for the 'reception' and 'wish' poems[73] – although these 'kinds' rarely feature actual labour itself. The distance travelled included the movement of the 'self-definition' poem from the rural arena into other areas (although Leapor's poetry actually had a stronger pastoral foundation than the discussion of "Crumble-Hall" here suggests).[74] The verses of Leapor and Collier have weathered the centuries extraordinarily well, despite the relative lack of critical attention they have received until recently. Everyday work in verse provides a depiction of common experience, utilising its own vocabulary of resonance, richness, texture, and longevity. When sound and tone complement subject matter, it can also achieve immediacy and vividness. By 1750 a number of different authors had each seized an opportunity to respond to Duck with an account of their work and so claim their right to a poetic identity.

IV: Agency and Religion

The limited 'resistance' seen in the works of mid-century poets has been widely acknowledged, and in some cases conceded. Landry has even titled an article "The Resignation of Mary Collier: Some Problems in Feminist Literary History".[75] It is clear that these "problems" are not without foundation when such an influential figure in women's social history as Bridget Hill writes:

> ... the history of eighteenth-century women is sometimes anything but heroic ... If among labouring women ... there were those who protested against their exploitation, who pondered on a new and better world for the female poor, the brutalising conditions of many of their lives, and the desperate urgency of making a living ensured that they were but a small minority.[76]

Some critics have responded by advancing arguments that poets like Collier and Leapor wrote broadly in the style of a male, 'establishment' poet like Pope as a means of 'answering back' as, indeed, sometimes they do;[77] others like Dustin Griffin, who describes Leapor's stance as one of "resignation and bemused deference", have argued the opposite.[78] Rejecting Griffin's position, Greene asserts,

> While Leapor is detached, indeed Horatian, in many of her poems, the view does not account for her claim, for example, that 'with ten thousand Follies to her Charge / Unhappy Woman's but a Slave at Large'. There is nothing bemused or resigned or deferential in these words, and many comparable examples could be adduced.[79]

Which critic is right? The answer is both – in relation to the poems each invokes to support his position. Yet neither does full justice to Leapor's complex relation to authority, or the equally complicated reasons for this stance, as Greene's opening admission above clearly implies.

Both views are borne out only by a partial and selective reading, neither entirely convincing on its own. Analogous to this, Burke has rightly condemned the "rather familiar" view that

> envisages the labouring-class poet as striking two poses only. The first of these attitudes involves the author clinging, gratefully, to the coat-tails of high culture: the poet invokes the sublime via Milton or the Bible, or the georgic via Thomson's *Seasons*, or the arguments of Augustan wit via Pope or Prior. The second conceives of the author employing satire, parody or revision to subvert texts or genres which exclude matters of concern to the labouring classes.[80]

Labouring poets were capable of both anger and irony, complicity and critique, rejecting and admiring 'high' culture, and of adopting these positions *simultaneously* – just like their non-labouring counterparts. Meanwhile, as Landry concedes,

> ... the radical potential of Collier's writing is limited. Her utopian impulses tend to manifest themselves in an assumed faith in a higher authority ... capable of rectifying injustices sometime in the future ... Collier tends to ... [suggest] ...

> women's interests can best be served by a humble commitment to fulfilling God's will, for which they will be rewarded.[81]

As in the last chapter, a reading of the use and function of Christianity in their works does much to account for the (seeming) inconsistency of the poets' positions. If labouring poets shift between seemingly contradictory complicity and protest, it is the double-edged nature of their religious beliefs that is surely most responsible. Landry's reading of Collier's relationship with religion is certainly partially correct, but does not do justice to the equally evident levelling tendency of the Christianity to which Collier was attracted, which inspires what complaint or agitation for social change *is* present. Whilst faith in a higher authority inspires confidence that injustices can be rectified in the future, God's will *is* that these injustices be corrected. Collier, in particular, contests 'customary' interpretations of Christianity more openly than Duck in order to legitimise complaint, though like him never violates the fundamental principles of Nietzschean 'slave morality' – piety, tolerance, respect, modesty. Leapor too, whilst going further than Duck or Collier in poeticising conflicts with a superior, and subtly critiquing the complicity with ideology of women of her own 'class', praises these values. They preclude, however, explicit protest or criticism of the upper 'classes' as seen in Woodhouse's work, fuelled by the expansion of Methodism (and other factors) during the second half of the century: neither Collier nor Leapor launch into lengthy polemical passages explicitly accusing social superiors of religious hypocrisy or Godlessness, instead registering complaint about their own circumstances, and allowing wider points to emerge through comparison or allegory. Dodsley, meanwhile, alluded to briefly above as author of "The Footman", clearly uses the 'New Testament Christianity' to which numerous labouring poets felt naturally inclined as a strategy to urge better treatment from masters or mistresses of (often ill-used) domestic servants. He even produces what can only be described as a prescient poetic recognition of (in today's parlance) religion's status as a crucial ideological field of contest.

Dodsley displays his understanding of the (from his point of view, usefully) double-edged nature of Christianity in 1729's *Servitude*. Organising the poem around a series of virtuous Christian precepts as required in the conduct of domestic servants – "honesty", "carefulness", "obedience", "diligence", "Of Submission to Rebukes", "neatness", and "Of Receiving and Delivering Messages" – Dodsley reminds not just the

servants to whom the poem is notionally addressed but also employers that these values 'work both ways'. Just as employers are entitled to expect certain minimum standards from employees, the latter should not endure 'unchristian' behaviour from masters. In an age of widespread perceptions amongst employers that servants were routinely dishonest and untrustworthy, and therefore that harsh methods were merited to deal with them, such an argument was more than worthwhile. Sexual abuse of young female servants by employers, for instance, was rife.[82] The following lines from Dodsley's advice to servants on "Rebukes" demonstrate his method. A degree of "Submission" is necessary, but:

> Not that we should submit to hear the Blame
> For others Crimes, and, Guiltless, suffer Shame;
> We are not bound to hear ourselves abus'd,
> Falsely calumniated and accus'd. 140
> Without presuming in our own Defence,
> To speak a Word to clear our Innocence.[83]

Although masters have a right to expect reasonable obedience, this does not necessarily include all commands, only "all *just* commands"(l.86, my italics). Similarly, this same justness decrees that, "If we dislike, and think it too severe, / We're free to leave, and seek a Place elsewhere." (ll.95-6). Dodsley does not rail aggressively against injustice, but promotes Nietzsche's 'slave' morals, depicting the tyrannical exercise of power by the master class as worthy of condemnation, and 'unchristian'.

In "Religion: A Simile" Dodsley castigates those who make use of religion for their own ends rather than those who appreciate "its proper view" (l.63). Having spoken of "A hideous threatening Gorgon head" that is "enough to fright the dead", he comments "But place it in its proper light, / A lovely face accosts the sight"[84] and continues:

> Thus true Religion fares. For when
> By silly, or designing men,
> In false or foolish lights 'tis plac'd,
> 'Tis made a bugbear, or a jest. 25
> Here by a set of men 'tis thought
> A scheme, by politicians wrought,
> To strengthen and enforce the law,
> And keep the vulgar more in awe:
> And these, to shew sublimer parts, 30
> Cast all religion from their hearts;
> Brand all its vot'ries as the tools
> Of priests, and politician's fools. (ll.22-33)

Showing an appreciation of the political appropriation of religion, Dodsley specifically condemns its use for the purposes of keeping the masses "more in awe"; his conception of "true Religion" is rather the reverse. Continuing, he condemns those who "blindly place" religion "In superstitions that disgrace it" (ll.36-7):

> With these it is a heinous crime,
> To cough or spit in sermon-time:
>
> 'Tis worse to whistle on a Sunday,
> Than cheat their neighbours on a Monday: 45
> To dine without first saying grace, is
> Enough to lose in heaven their places;
> But goodness, honesty and virtue,
> Are what they've not the least regard to. (ll.42-9)

Here he exposes the pedants who pay lip service to Christianity whilst ignoring its precepts whenever it suits, hiding behind selective interpretations of the Christian message. Still Dodsley is not finished, and condemns the ascetics who think Christianity "consists in strange severities: / In fastings, weepings, and austerities."(ll.52-3). Dodsley's 'New Testament' Christianity is of a kind that allows him to urge the honesty, fairness, justice and mercy in dealings with servants in "Servitude", and is the "true Religion" of "Religion: A Simile". His references to the "proper view" of this religion echo those of labouring poets throughout the century, propagating the values of 'New Testament Christianity'.

Female labouring-class poetry of the early century is generally more bitter towards employers than that written by men. These attitudes are certainly evident in *The Woman's Labour*, in which depictions of Collier's Mistress seem tinged with resentment – see, for instance, ll.170-81, quoted above. Goodridge draws attention to the Mistress' "range of bad qualities".[85] She is, he argues, "idle", since the women have been working for several hours by the time the former arrives, also "noting the meagre bribe of a mug of beer in her hand".[86] He also charges her with meanness – "The Mistress 'most strictly' insists the washerwomen are to 'save her Soap, and sparing be of Fire'," before making a final claim about ll.180-1: "This final shot from the Mistress is clearly not believed, and serves only to add dishonesty to her character."[87] If this seems a little harsh – after all the supervisor's job is to keep an eye on her charges, and soap was both expensive and scarce in the first

half of the century[88] – one need only contrast this with Blamire's behaviour towards her well-to-do aunt's maid, Fan (see "An Epistle to her Friends at Gartmore"): she allows her to leave early, knowing the latter wants to go to the village dance, and tells the fortunate maid that she will intercede with the aunt if there are any consequences.[89] Likewise Anne Hughes' diary suggests she treated her servant maid Sarah uncommonly well.[90] Employers and supervisors could be indulgent, and even kind, always allowing for the possibility that Collier could be exaggerating her Mistress' bad qualities, and Blamire could be exaggerating her kindness. Landry, too, praises Collier's "effective critique of the hard-nosed middle-class mistress for whom poor women "char" – do the laundry, polish the pewter ..." [91] and in ll.204-5, yet again, the Mistress complains.

There cannot be much doubt about the unequivocal tone of the climax of *The Woman's Labour* (ll.243-6, quoted above, the closest thing to a theory of exploitation in the labouring poetry of the first half of the century, though nothing like as developed as it would later become). The way in which employers "reap the gains" of the toil of their employees is "sordid", what Goodridge terms "social parasitism".[92] This is uncommonly frank criticism of the social and economic relations between what we would now think of as the employing and labouring classes in the 1730s, and would hardly look out of place in the writings of a Yearsley, Woodhouse, Joseph Mather or John Learmont (two other particularly radical late-century labouring poets). Much of the critique in the poem relies on religion, however, for its basis, and it is significant that Collier establishes at the outset that a masculine-constructed "Custom" has subverted the Creator's originally intended role for women:

> Oft have I thought as on my Bed I lay,
> Eas'd from the tiresome Labours of the Day,
> Our first Extraction from a Mass refin'd,
> Could never be for Slavery design'd;
> 'Till Time and Custom by degrees destroy'd 15
> That happy State our Sex at first enjoy'd.
> When Men had us'd their utmost Care and Toil,
> Their Recompense was but a Female Smile;
> When they by Arts or Arms were render'd Great,
> They laid their Trophies at a Woman's Feet; 20
> They, in those Days, unto our Sex did bring
> Their Hearts, their All, a Free-Will Offering;
> And as from us their Being they derive,
> They back again should all due Homage give. (ll.11-24)

This reliance upon religion, then, forms the basis for whatever complaint ensues in the poem, and that this is the case is underscored by a variety of Collier's other works. Like Duck she poeticises myths, tales and Biblical stories, ironically, for a proponent of an explicitly New Testament levelling theology, from the *Old* Testament. Noteworthy examples include "The Three Wise Sentences. From the First Book of Esdras, Chapter III. and IV" (appended to *The Woman's Labour* on first publication in 1739), and "The First and Second Chapters of the First Book of Samuel Versified" (from 1762's *Poems*). In the former, three guards to Darius, King of Persia "... leave in Writing, for the King to read, / What, in their Judgments, did in Strength excel / All other Things ...":

> The first of them, in Writing did declare,
> That *nothing could for Strength with* Wine *compare*;
> The second then his Sentence in did bring,
> *Nothing, for Might, is equal with the* King;
> With like Assurance did the third decree 25
> Women *do bear away the Victory*
> *From all on Earth*; but yet he knew full-well
> Great was the *Truth* that did in Heaven dwell.[93]

The three are summoned and asked to account for their choices. After the first two have justified themselves (ll.54-75 and 78-117), the third gives an explanation very much of a piece with Collier's defence of women in *The Woman's Labour*:

> Wise *Zorobabel* then appears in place,
> A royal Youth of *David*'s kingly Race;
> (Much nobler he than those that spake before, 120
> Because he did the *Living God* adore)
> And thus his Mind and Writing did declare
> Before them all, that sate in Judgment there.
>
> Most worthy Princes! I do freely own
> The Strength of *Kings* throughout the Word is known; 125
> The Force of *Wine* all Mortals know full well;
> Yet neither of them doth in Might excel:
> *Women* alone must bear the Prize away,
> Whom all Mankind do honour and obey.
> And well they may, because from them do spring 130
> The Poor and Rich, the Peasant and the King;
> The greatest Heroes that the World can know,
> To *Women* their Original must owe ... (ll.118-33)

Zorobabel goes on to argue that since women plant the vine, and give birth to the men

whose feats of strength they often inspire, they supercede both in primacy. Throughout, it is stressed that Zorobabel merely propounds the "Almighty *Truth*" (l.216); and, naturally, he wins the competition. The poem ends with his lavish praise of God (ll.291-8).

In "The First and Second Chapters of the First Book of Samuel Versified" Collier depicts, and celebrates, the "Pious Soul" of Hannah receiving the (earthly) Grace of God in terms very similar to Duck's celebration of the Shunamite woman's receipt of the same. Hannah, one of Elkanah's two wives, is respected by all except his other wife, the jealous Peninnah, who delights that God has not favoured Hannah with a child. Hannah:

> To Israel's God alone ... did complain,
> Of her illnatur'd Rival's proud disdain,
> And to the Heav'nly Throne herself addrest,
> With sighs and Tears that cannot be exprest ... 65
>
> While thus She did disclose her pain and Grief
> To him, who able was to grant relief,
> No Friend on Earth was privy to her moan,
> Unto pure Omniscience She pray'd alone.[94] 75

Collier's celebration of such conduct suggests that for her the values of 'New Testament Christianity' *preclude* overt, explicit complaint of the kind seen later in the century. Helped by the Priest, Ely, Hannah's request is heard and granted, and she gives birth to Samuel, as well as, eventually, a "num'rous Progeny" (l.145). Collier's adherence to the values of 'slave morality' is further seen in the following passage, uttered by Hannah, in which God is said not just to reward the humble, but to disdain those who glory in the "Strength and might" that are key features of Nietzsche's 'master morality':

> O! lay your haughty Arrogance aside,
> The God of Israel will correct your Pride,
> He knows our Hearts, the Proud he doth despise, 120
> But humble Souls are precious in his eyes;
> While those who glory in their Strength and might,
> By his all conqu'ring Arm are put to Flight.
> Yet they, that in his Truth and Mercy trust,
> Shall find a God both tender, kind and just; 125
> She that was barren, his praises shall prolong
> Whose love fires my breast and joy swells my Song. (ll.118-27)

Again, we note that it is a levelling theology that underlies the progressive views in Collier's verse, rather than any proto-Marxist sentiment.

It is in the work of Mary Leapor, however, that the reader discovers the most determined objection to authority and / or customary behaviour in the poetry of the first half of the century, directed towards her unfair treatment by other (mostly female) members of the labouring classes who resent her literary pretensions. "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame", includes an account of what is believed to be Leapor's dismissal / resignation from Edgcote House ("Crumble-Hall"):

> Then comes Sophronia, like a barb'rous Turk:
> "You thoughtless Baggage, when d'ye mind your Work?
> Still o'er a Table leans your bending Neck: 155
> Your Head will grow prepost'rous, like a Peck.
> Go, ply your Needle: You might earn your Bread;
> Or who must feed you when your Father's dead?"
> She sobbing answers, "Sure, I need not come
> To you for Lectures; I have store at home. 160
> What can I do?"
> " – Not scribble."
> "But I will."
> "Then get thee packing – and be aukward still."[95]

Greene has compared this passage with those previously discussed on attitudes to employers in the poetry of Duck and Collier. Having observed that the latter two both show some resentment but ultimately adopt a resignatory stance, he adds that it is hardly a fair comparison since Leapor could presumably return to her father whereas, for the other two, the choice was "most likely obedience to an employer or destitution." He also notes that Leapor, unlike the other two, does not object to the actual amount of work required of her. Even so, he concludes:

> ... only Leapor chooses to represent her treatment as an injustice to which the correct response was not submission but resistance. Leapor's verses on her dismissal take on the form of explicit protest, whereas those of Duck and Collier, though moving and admirable, go little past complaint.[96]

It is interesting that the passage depicts not so much a straightforward dispute between a supervisor – Sophronia repeatedly appears throughout Leapor's Edgcote House poems in this guise – and a junior employee. Rather, as Greene notes, it is an instance of a member of the labouring classes receiving a hard time from one of her own who resents her literary ambitions.

Yet even if Leapor refrains from the bitter explicit tirades seen later in the century, that she is prepared to rebel is significant, as is the fact that this rebellion is legitimised by Sophronia's behaviour, which resembles that of a "barb'rous Turk"; a comparison placing her conduct well outside of the Christian 'slave' morality to which Leapor's religious poetry reveals she subscribes as much as any other poet in this chapter. Yet if Leapor, like her fellows in the first half of the century, engages in a 'self-interpellation' of her own by allowing religion to limit the degree of (overt) rebellion she will / can entertain, she also provides, on numerous occasions, a critique of the 'self-interpellation' of labouring-class women who collude with the ideology that constructs literate labouring women as outside both normality and respectability. The topic merits exploration, since it adds to our understanding of the practical everyday difficulties faced by pioneering labouring-class women poets. Even today, whilst critical studies about the oppression of women by men abound, the role women play in resisting the emancipation of other women is often overlooked.[97] When it is treated, it is most usually the 'policing' of their labouring sisters by 'Bluestockings' that is considered. Yet a woman labouring autodidact and would-be poet like Leapor was doubly disadvantaged (being both female and labouring-class), and the prejudices of other labouring-class women were palpable. As Laclau and Mouffe observe, questioning the romantic view of the working classes advanced by Classical Marxism, "The divisions within the working class are ... more deeply rooted than many wish to allow; and they are, to a certain extent, the result of the workers' own practices."[98]

Although Sophronia is sometimes a personification in Leapor's verse of such a figure 'policing' the poet, Leapor could react to her with kindness and understanding, as in "Advice to Sophronia". Another of Leapor's successful poems about her treatment by labouring-class women is "The Epistle of Deborah Dough", written in the guise of the eponymous Deborah to her cousin:

> But I forgot our neighbour Mary; 10
> Our neighbour Mary – who, they say,
> Sits scribble-scribble all the day ...
> She throws away her precious time
> In scrawling nothing else but rhyme;
> Of which, they say, she's mighty proud,
> And lifts her nose above the crowd; 20
> Though my young daughter Cicely
> Is taller by a foot than she,

And better learned (as people say);
Can knit a stocking in a day;
Can make a pudding, plump and rare; 25
And boil her bacon to an hair;
Will coddle apples nice and green,
And fry her pancakes – like a queen.[99]

"Deborah Dough" is an amusingly constructed caricature, an embodiment of the prejudices the uneducated felt towards those attempting to raise themselves above the common herd. Whilst this is humorous satire, it also makes a serious point. Apart from Deborah's disdain because of what she perceives as the poet's air of superiority, the value she ascribes to an individual revolves around what and how they produce. Cicely's 'productions' are viewed as *useful*; the poet's are not.[100] Leapor differentiates herself from her fellow servants by the pursuit of literary pastimes, and suffers as a result; the danger is that she will end up not being accepted by anyone. Her servant status denies her the acceptance of the educated classes; by educating herself she risks being perceived by fellow servants as having 'ideas above her station'. As she writes in "An Epistle to a Lady", she is "dejected more as more I know".[101]

If she offends labouring-class expectations of what she should be by reading and writing instead of learning to "fry a pancake like a queen" she also risks in unforeseen ways compromising her physical appearance, and therefore her 'value' in the marriage market. Caricaturing her appearance in "Mira's Picture", Leapor imagines how she must appear to a couple of country "swains":

PHILLARIO
But who is she that walks from yonder Hill,
With studious Brows, and Night-cap Dishabille? 30
That looks a stranger to the Beams of Day;
And counts her Steps, and mutters all the Way?

CORYDON
'Tis *Mira*, Daughter to a Friend of mine;
'Tis she that makes your what-d'ye-call – your Rhyme.
I own the Girl is something out o'th'way: 35
But how d'ye like her? Good *Phillario*, say!

PHILLARIO
Like her! – I'd rather beg the friendly Rains
To sweep that Nuisance from thy loaded Plains;
That –

CORYDON
– Hold, *Phillario*! She's a Neighbour's Child:
'Tis true, her Linen may be something soil'd. 40

PHILLARIO
Her Linen, *Corydon*! – Herself you mean.
Are such the Dryads of thy smiling Plain?
Why, I could swear it, if it were no Sin,
That yon lean Rook can shew a fairer Skin.

CORYDON
What tho' some Freckles in her Face appear? 45
That's only owing to the time o'th'Year.
Her eyes are dim, you'll say: Why, that is true:
I've heard the Reason, and I'll tell it you.
By a Rush-Candle (as her Father says)
She sits whole Ev'nings, reading wicked Plays.[102] 50

Whilst this, again, is clearly a humorous piece, it has a serious implication: no young labouring-class male would marry Leapor.[103] When she does meet a labouring-class female friend of her own age – "Cressida" in "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame" – in another humorous exchange, the latter only wants to talk about her ruffles, aprons and lace, and the poet cannot get rid of her quickly enough. Leapor has cut herself off from her social background by pursuing literary aspirations and furthermore does so, it appears, aware of what she is doing.

Leapor's religious poetry must be viewed in the light of her evident belief, as stressed by Greene, that she would die young.[104] This is not to imply that her work does not exhibit the same preoccupation with a levelling New Testament Christianity as the other poets discussed – it clearly does – just that it must be a natural temptation to fixate on the next world if one knows one is not long for this. Hence she writes a number of poems that appear fatalistic in nature, as well as a poetic will, and epitaph, stressing the function of death as the ultimate leveller. The end of "An Epistle to a Lady", quoted in my Introduction, is not unrepresentative of her writing in this vein. (Intriguingly, it bears at least some resemblance to Tatersal's writing on the subject).[105] Greene writes of these lines, "For Leapor, the final context of self-understanding is the Judgement of God. Identity cannot be fully understood except in its eschatological perspective ... this poem evokes the image of death as leveller, and God as no respecter of persons." Greene reads the poem foreseeing justice only in the next world – "The last assizes will hold Mira to

account for her own sins, but they will also give redress for the injustices she has suffered and fulfil the hopes that this world denied"[106] – and is probably correct in relation to this specific poem. Apart from the fact that the natural progression of such a theology in the longer term was for the labouring classes to use it as a means of arguing for Divinely sanctioned equality in *this* life, however, Leapor arguably uses it in this way *herself* on occasion.

In the first half of the century a number of women poets used Christianity to show up the unfairness and double standards inherent in (what we would term) patriarchal attitudes, castigating its customary interpretation,[107] including both Collier and Leapor. An example is in "Man the Monarch"[108] where Leapor reinterprets the Bible, offering a critique of how the creation story represents the beginning of women's oppression by men that ensues from this point onwards (a form of 'writing back' – the religious – little examined hitherto). Elsewhere Leapor celebrates the same virtues of 'slave morality' as many of her brethren, as in "An Ode on Mercy: In Imitation of the 145th Psalm" which begins:

> 'Tis Mercy calls – Awake, my grateful String;
> Ye worlds of Nature, listen while I sing;
>   'Tis not his dire and avenging Rod,
>   I sing the Mercies of a God ...[109]

In spite of the third line above, however, a note of contradiction is sounded later in the poem when, after a reminder that "The Lord, though seated far beyond the Sky, / Yet sees the wretched with a pitying Eye" (ll.17-18), the reader encounters:

> His Justice next employs the heavenly String,   25
> And hymning angels tremble while they sing;
>   The Lord is just and holy, then
>   O weep ye thoughtless Sons of Men:
>   For who can from his Anger fly;
>   Or shun the Frown of God most high? (ll.25-30)   30

Such lines effectively represent a new strategy in the religious labouring-class poetry examined here – a direct reminder that if the labouring class were poor and weak, the God their more privileged brothers and sisters worshipped and who declared His love for the wretched and pitiable, as all acknowledged, was not. In this respect, it prefigures the final poem in Leapor's second and final posthumous collection, "The XVIIIth Psalm

Imitated, to the15th Verse", which makes the point rather more forcibly. In this sense this particular poem makes a logical end to the present section since Leapor's choice of scripture to poeticise, perhaps unexpectedly, foreshadows the more strident religious writing of labouring poets later in the century:

> Bleak Envy trembled at his awful Nod,
> And frighted Malice dropt her baneful Rod:
> The God of Mercy view'd my bleeding Wrongs;
> His fury kindled at the impious Throng; 30
> The Darts of Vengeance at my Foes He threw,
> And forky Lightnings shone with dreadful Hue:
> Then Wrath descended from the heav'nly Fields,
> And hurling Tempests drove the rapid Wheels ...[110]

The above harks forward to Woodhouse's religious writing, although he applies the influence of the scriptures from which the above derive directly to his own experience, and that of those around him. This results in the rather brutal suggestion that the death of Elizabeth Montagu's son John was the result of the Divine judgement and vengeance of a God of the poor and lowly, on an ostentatious, exploitative sinner. In her choice of religious material Leapor, a poet of contradictions who prompts a partially justifiable characterisation of her from Griffin as "bemused" and "resigned", registers perhaps her greatest contradiction of all.

1 She alludes to Duck in a letter to her patroness Bridget Freemantle. See *The Works of Mary Leapor*, ed. by Richard Greene and Ann Messenger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.302. A related phenomenon at this time was that of the poem explicitly addressed to Duck. Both Tatersal ("To Stephen Duck", and "The Introduction, to Mr. Stephen Duck"), and Robert Dodsley (*An Epistle from a Footman in London to the Celebrated Stephen Duck*, London: J. Brindley, 1731) wrote such poems, and John Bancks included verses alluding to Duck at the beginning of *The Weaver's Miscellany: or, Poems on Several Subjects* (London, 1730). See also "To Stephen Duck. By an Irish Miller" (*The Gentleman's Magazine* 3, February, 1733, p..95) by John Frizzle, and James Eyre-Weekes' *The Cobler's Poem. To a Certain Noble Peer. Occasioned by the Brick-layer's Poem* (Dublin, 1745). *The Bricklayer's Poem to the Countess of Chesterfield, on Her Ladyship's Saving the Soldiers from being Shot* (Dublin, 1745), by Henry Jones, makes no direct reference to Duck, and does not discuss Jones' bricklaying experiences either. Weekes' response (notionally to Jones) does discuss Duck though; see William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2001), p.135.

2 On this question see H. Gustav Klaus, 'Mary Collier (1688?-1762)', *Notes and Queries* 47 (2000), 201-4, *Literature Resource Centre* (hereafter *LRC*).

3 Cited in *Eighteenth-Century Poetry, an Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.257.

4 Cited by Fairer and Gerrard, p.257.

5 See the 'Remarks' quoted in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, an Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp.171-2.

6 The "List of the Subscribers' Names" reveals none of the great and the good who subscribed to Duck, containing only ten members of the aristocracy, and only one 'Honourable'. Instead, it is full of the local 'middle' classes, such as "R. Aylmer, Attorney at *Petersfield*" and residents of places such as Oakhanger, Midhurst, Ashford and Storington. See Mary Collier, *Poems on Several Occasions* (Winchester, 1762), pp.63-8, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (The Gale Group).

7 Goodridge dates the beginnings of modern interest to the recovery work of Sheila Rowbotham and Mary Chamberlain in the mid-nineteen seventies (*Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.15). Ferguson and Landry have been particularly instrumental in Collier's recuperation.

8 Goodridge, p.13.

9 On this point see Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*, 2nd edn. (London: University College London Press, 1994), p.110.

10 See Soame Jenyns, "Living in the Country", from "An Epistle from the Country", *The Penguin Book of Everyday Verse*, ed. by David Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.323.

11 See Barbauld's "Washing-Day", Lonsdale (1989), pp.308-10.

12 See "Living in the country", ll.31-50; and "Washing Day", ll.33-43, 46-57. As late as 1810, Rowlandson's print 'Matrimonial comforts – washing day' depicts the man of a household greeting a newly arrived friend in hat and overcoat: "Ah! my old Friend. I wish you had called at some more convenient time this is a washing day. I have nothing to give you but cold fish, cold tripe & cold potatoes ... you may smell soap suds a mile! Ah Jack, Jack you don't know those comforts! You are a bachelor!" See Caroline Davidson, *A Woman's Work is Never Done: A History of Housework in the British Isles 1650-1950* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1982), p.150; *ibid.*, pp.150-1, which details the great antipathy aroused by washing day, as does Hill (1994), p.111.

13 Davidson, pp.136-7.

[14] See Jenyns, "Living in the country", ll.43-50.

15 *The Woman's Labour*, ll.149-79, Fairer and Gerrard, pp.260-1. Subsequent references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[16] Edwin Abbott, *A Concordance to the Works of Alexander Pope*, repr. (New York: Kraus, 1965).

[17] See Davidson, p.151. The convention of washing on Mondays is believed to have originated through a mixture of having just had a day's relative rest, and the desire to have clothes laundered in time to wear one's best to Church the following Sunday. (*Ibid.*, p.149).

[18] On cleaning, see *ibid.*, p.121 fol.

[19] *Ibid.*, p.44. These utensils were known by a variety of (localised) names: "crocks", "cauldrons" and / or "catherins" in Devon; "kettles" in Bedfordshire; and "pots" in Yorkshire.

[20] For more about the Copper see *ibid.*, pp.145-6.

[21] Fairer and Gerrard, pp.261-2.

[22] *Ibid.*, p.257.

[23] See Dodsley, "THE FOOTMAN. An Epistle to my Friend Mr. Wright", in *A Muse in Livery: or, the Footman's Miscellany* (London, 1732).

[24] Jonathan Swift, "A Pastoral Dialogue", l.24, *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, vol. 2, ed. by Harold Williams, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), p.881.

[25] *The Thresher's Labour*, ll.163-70, 175-84, Fairer and Gerrard, pp.253-4.

[26] See, for instance, Christmas (2001), pp.119-29, or Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in English 1739-96* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.59-77.

[27] Christmas (2001), p.119.

[28] Goodridge, p.19.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] *Ibid.*, p.20.

[31] See Collier, "An Elegy Upon Stephen Duck", *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. I: 1700-40*, ed. by William J. Christmas, gen. ed. John Goodridge, (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp.340-1. She calls him "That wond'rous Man, in whom alone did join / A Thresher, Poet, Courtier, and Divine." (ll.5-6).

[32] Collier's italicised allusion is to *The Thresher's Labour*, l.253.

[33] Landry, p.67.

[34] *Ibid.*, p.57. There are exceptions, most obviously Mary Barber, a labouring-class woman poet married (to a Dublin linen draper) with four children. See her *Poems on Several Occasions* (1734). As critics have noted, Barber turns her status to her advantage, arguing that her verses were written to instruct her children.

[35] See Bridget Hill, *Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984),

Part 1, "Ideas of Female Perfection", pp.16-24; and Part 2, "And the Greatest of These was Chastity", pp.25-43. See also Part 3, "Female Education", pp.44-68, Part 4, "Approaching Marriage", pp.69-88, Part 5, "Marriage and After", pp.89-107, Part 6, "Women's Legal Position: Marriage Law and Custom", pp.108-122, Part 7, "Women without Husbands", pp.123-36.

[36] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* rev. edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.31.

[37] Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p.79.

[38] Christmas (2003), p.275.

[39] Cited by Christmas (2001), p.111, and by Christmas (2003), p.275.

[40] Tatersal, "To the Right Honourable Richard Lord Onslow, Lord Lieutenant of the County of Surrey", Christmas (2003), p.276.

[41] Tatersal has been critically discussed by Unwin, Gustav Klaus and Christmas, and anthologised by Lonsdale and Christmas.

[42] Fairer and Gerrard, p.261. This figure appears to derive from the preface to the unauthorized *Poems on Several Subjects* (1730).

[43] Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.17. The figure of £3. 10s. relates to what the Cartwright family, owners of a large estate at nearby Aynho, Northamptonshire, paid a kitchen-maid.

[44] These figures come from Christmas (2001), p.160. For further information on wages / pay, see the extracts from Josiah Tucker, *Instructions for Travellers* (1758), in *Literature and the Social Order in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. by Stephen Copley (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp.83-8, and especially p.85; and the extracts from Arthur Young, *A Six Weeks' Tour through the Southern Counties of England and Wales* (1769), in Copley, pp.166-70.

45 Robert Tatersal, "The Bricklayer's Labours", ll.21-42, *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.278-9. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[46] "Chaws" was a term for chewing tobacco.

[47] See Frederick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life*, in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, vol. 1, gen. ed. Nina Baym, , 5th edn, (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), p.2006. As Duck points out – *TTL*, ll.52-63 – pastoral shepherds sing to make beautiful sounds; for threshers "The Voice is lost, drown'd by the noisy Flail." (l.53). If labourers sing it is as a diversionary tactic, to rally morale by engaging in a common pastime. Presumably for bricklayers too, there are times when the noise of their work obscures the singing.

[48] For more detail about Brackley, see *Brackley Historic Town Centre Trail* (Northamptonshire: South Northamptonshire Council, 2001). For information on Magdalen College School, see p.6, and for St. John's Chapel, p.8.

[49] For further detail, see Francis Sitwell, *Weston Hall: A Brief Guide* (Northampton: The Guildhall Press Ltd., 1990).

[50] *The Works of Mary Leapor*, ed. by Richard Greene and Ann Messenger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). See pp.xxvii-xxxiii for an overview of critical work undertaken on Leapor to date.

[51] This list includes "Crumble Hall", "The Headache. To Aurelia", "Strephon to Celia. A Modern Love-

Letter", "Soto. A Character", "Mira to Octavia", "Man the Monarch", "An Epistle to Artemisia", "An Essay on Woman", "The Epistle of Deborah Dough", "The Visit", "Mira's Picture. A Pastoral", "Mira's Will", "An Epistle to a Lady", "Dorinda at her Glass", and "The Enquiry".

[52] See Greene and Messenger, p.300. Leapor's debt to Pope has been most fully documented by Betty Rizzo in 'Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence', in *The Age of Johnson*, 4 (1991), 313-43.

[53] Those to write on it include Greene, Landry, Christmas (see 2001, pp.170-8), and Valerie Rumbold ('The Alienated Insider: Mary Leapor in "Crumble Hall"', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19 (1996), pp.63-76, *LRC*).

[54] For a discussion of the poem placing it within the context of this 'country house' tradition, see Rumbold, in which she examines how Leapor appropriates the form to convey the perspective of a labouring-class woman, and that of her co-workers. Rumbold builds on Greene's work (1993), pp.137-45.

[55] Hill (1994), p.132. See also Hill (1984), pp.229-44.

[56] Hill (1994), p.132-3.

[57] Cited by Greene, (1993), p.17.

[58] Mary Leapor, "Crumble-Hall", ll.17-22, 39-59, Fairer and Gerrard, pp.298-9. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[59] Fairer and Gerrard, p.298.

[60] Boiling bran-water was traditionally used as a stain-remover. See Hill (1994), pp.109-10.

[61] John Gay, "Tuesday; or, the Ditty", *The Shepherd's Week*, in *Poetry and Prose,* vol. 1, ed. by Vinton A. Dearing (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.101-4.

[62] Fairer and Gerrard, p.297.

[63] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Burlington*, ll.155-6, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt, (London and New York: Routledge, 1963), p.594. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[64] Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* (I: ll.217-8), *ibid.*, p.512.

[65] Alexander Pope, *Windsor Forest*, ll.127-8, *ibid.*, p.199. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[66] See Rumbold, *LRC*, p.4 of 11.

[67] Mary Chandler, *The Description of Bath. A Poem. Humbly Inscribed to her Royal Highness the Princess Amelia*, 3rd edn. (London, 1736), *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992-5, hereafter *EPFTD*)

[68] See Janet Little, "An Epistle to a Lady. November 1789", in *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. III: 1780-1800*, ed. by Tim Burke, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp.240-1.

[69] Fairer (2003), p.196.

[70] Leapor's nimbleness here bears comparison with that in Dodsley's "The Footman", a 'self-definition' poem in which his task is made easier by his ability to appropriate the conventionally 'light' and 'chatty'

style of the verse epistle.

[71] Rumbold, *LRC*, p.8 of 11.

[72] Fairer (2003), pp.195-6.

[73] Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.54-7. Other poems about the everyday by poets considered in this chapter, and by other labouring poets, even when not explicitly addressing the topic of labour, often employ the other poetic characteristics identified in the poems studied here – i.e. an 'everyday' vocabulary that 'frees up' poetic form, an informal mode of addressing the reader, nimble poetic 'movement' etc.

[74] See Ann Messenger's *Pastoral Tradition and the Female Talent: Studies in Augustan Poetry* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 2001), pp.173-94, for the most comprehensive treatment of the theme yet undertaken.

[75] See *The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature*, ed. by Laura Brown and Felicity Nussbaum (New York and London, 1987), pp.99-120.

[76] Hill (1984), p.3.

[77] See, for instance, Landry, p. 6 (and elsewhere), where I take it that this is what is intended by Landry's allusion to "ventriloquism with a subversive twist." This approach has obvious parallels with that taken (within the post-colonial context) by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989).

[78] See Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp.195. Griffin writes in relation to "Crumble-Hall" and other poems, and argues for "a more detached Leapor" than Greene.

[79] Greene and Messenger, p.xxxi. Greene quotes from Leapor's "An Essay on Woman", ll.59-60. Greene adds, "Griffin, implicitly, takes the view that Leapor is best understood as a cool ironist. It seems more accurate to say that in Leapor's work ... anger coexists with various forms of irony. This question goes to the root of her literary sensibility, and has not yet been examined in the detail it requires."

[80] Burke, p.xxvii.

[81] Donna Landry, 'Mary Collier', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 95: Eighteenth-Century British Poets, First Series*, ed. by John Sitter (Bruccoli Clark Layman: The Gale Group, 1990), 3-6, *LRC*, p.3 of 4.

[82] For an overview, see Hill (1994), pp.132-3. See also Hill (1984), pp.8-9, 229-44; Greene, (1993), p.17; and, for an older, though still worthwhile treatment, J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge and Kogan Paul, 1956), pp.71-101.

[83] Robert Dodsley, "Servitude", ll.137-42, *The Footman's Friendly Advice* (London: T. Worrall, 1731), *EPFTD* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992-5). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[84] Robert Dodsley, "Religion: A Simile", ll.16-19, *Trifles ... with Several Others, not more Considerable*, 2nd edn. (London: J. Dodsley, 1777), *EPFTD*. Subsequent line references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[85] Goodridge (1995), p.49.

[86] *Ibid.*, p.50.

[87] *Ibid.*, p.51.

[88] See Davidson (1984), p.142-3.

[89] Susanna Blamire, "An Epistle to her Friends at Gartmore", ll.61-88, *The Poetical Works of Miss Susanna Blamire ("The Muse of Cumberland")*, ed. by Henry Lonsdale and Patrick Maxwell (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1852), pp.153-8; see also Lonsdale (1989), pp.279-83.

[90] Anne Hughes, *The Diary of a Farmer's Wife 1796-1797*, ed. by Suzanne Beedell (London: Countrywise Books, 1964). See entries for the following dates: 4th March 1796; 24th March 1796; 3rd, 6th, 7th, 12th April 1796, 12th July 1796; 29th August 1796.

[91] Landry, p.59.

[92] Goodridge (1995), p.51.

[93] Mary Collier, "The Three Wise Sentences. From the First Book of Esdras, Chapter III. and IV", ll.16-18, 21-8, Christmas (2003), p.320. Subsequent references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[94] Mary Collier, "The First and Second Chapters of the First Book of Samuel Versified", ll.62-5, 72-5, *ibid.*, pp.337-8. Subsequent references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[95] Mary Leapor, "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame", ll.153-64, Fairer and Gerrard, p.296.

[96] Greene (2003), pp.119-21.

[97] As Hill (1984) sums up, "Many women never questioned their allotted role; there were stupid and silly women as well as stupid and silly men. Such women would themselves be the first to cry out against the failure of members of their own sex to conform." (p.12). Hill includes a variety of such material, most often from Bluestockings prescribing appropriate behaviour for lower-class women. Poems about women (constraining other women by) being complicit with patriarchal values have been a commonplace of women's verse for centuries. For eighteenth-century examples, see Janet Little's "Given to a Lady who Asked me to Write a Poem" (1792), (in Lonsdale (1989), pp.454-5), and Lady Sophia Burrell's "The School for Satire" (1793, *ibid.*, pp.344-5).

[98] Ernesto Laclau, and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, trans. by Winston Moore and Paul Cammack (London: Verso, 1985), p.82.

[99] Mary Leapor, "The Epistle of Deborah Dough", ll.10-12, 17-28, Lonsdale (1989), p.209.

[100] Many condemnations of labouring-class poetry throughout the century stress that the function of labourers is to be useful to society; and patrons' apologies for labouring verse at the beginning of volumes are often at pains to stress that their protégées did not let writing verse distract them from this primary function. Janet Little's "Given to a Lady who Asked me to Write a Poem", (ll.45-56), is very similar in its depiction of a condemnation of the poet by "a critic" (Lonsdale (1989), pp.454-5). The critic, clearly learned from her earlier allusions in the poem to Swift, Thomson, Addison, Young and Johnson, expresses dismay that a mere labourer like Burns should be accepted as a poet. She is prepared, however, to accept on trust that his verses have merit – but draws the line at a versifying milk-maid. Like Leapor in "An Epistle to a Lady", Little ends with resignatory dismay (ll.61-4).

[101] Mary Leapor, "An Epistle to a Lady", l.14, Fairer and Gerrard, p.288.

[102] Mary Leapor, "Mira's Picture", ll.29-50, *ibid.*, pp.302-3.

[103] On this theme see also Mary Leapor, "An Essay on Woman", ll.27-38.

[104] Greene (1993) discusses "how Leapor's experiences as a woman and as a labourer shaped her writing, and in both respects ... draws attention to conservative beliefs underlying social protest. The book also examines Leapor's education and her expectation of an early death as it affected her writing ... He places some emphasis on Leapor's religious sensibility and sees her as both honouring and questioning the cultural authorities of her time." (Greene's own summary of his work in Greene and Messenger, p.xxx).

[105] As we know little about Tatersal we have little idea about the state of his health. On the one hand, that he was a bricklayer would seem to imply he was physical vigorous, but as "The Bricklayer's Labours" shows, the toll taken on both body and mind was great. He published fewer poems than any poet considered in this chapter, and few on religion, but in "To Death, 1733" wrote:

> Oh, mighty Death, whose irresistant Dart,
> Regards no mortal Force, nor human Art!
> In vain, alas! we would our Fate command,
> Death levels all with an impartial Hand ...
>
> When the Creator first pronounc'd our Fate,
> Vile Dust thou art, to that I will translate,
> And turn thy sinful Flesh again to Earth,
> To that dark Place whence I first gave thee Birth.
> This Sentence pass'd th'irreversible Decree,
> Fast stands confirm'd, till Time shall cease to be:
> The wisest Princes must submit to Fate,
> The meanest Peasant with the rich and great;
> Death knows no Honour, no Respect will show,
> But whom he calls, them he compels to go ... (ll.1-4, 9-18)

The text comes from Christmas (2003), pp.280-1. Tatersal goes on to contrast the attitude to death of "the Man who lives voluptuous here" (l.37) who clings to material possessions, deceiving himself about the inevitability of death, with that of the "laborious Swain" (l.43). Tatersal went on to include an "Elegy on a Bricklayer; written by himself" in his second collection, although its tone is considerably lighter than Leapor's.

[106] Richard Greene, 'Mary Leapor: The Problem of Personal Identity' in *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), 218-27 (p.226).

[107] See, for a selection, Sarah Fyge Egerton's "The Emulation" (Lonsdale (1989), pp.31-2), Elizabeth Thomas' "Epistle to Clemena. Occasioned by an Argument she had Maintained against the Author" (*ibid.*, pp.25-6), Hetty Wright's "Wedlock. A Satire" (*ibid.*, pp.114-5), or Mary Chandler's "My own Epitaph" (*ibid.*, pp.152-3). All can be interpreted as implying that Christianity is compatible with a more egalitarian relationship between the sexes than was 'customary'.

[108] See Lonsdale (1989), pp.202-3, especially ll.54-65.

[109] Leapor, "An Ode on Mercy: In Imitation of Part of the 145th Psalm", ll.1-4 (Greene and Messenger, pp.9-11). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[110] Mary Leapor, "The XVIIIth Psalm Imitated, to the15th Verse", ll.27-34, Greene and Messenger, pp.227-8.

The Poetry of Physical Labour 1767-1800

It has been argued that eighteenth-century plebeian poets published in two or three distinct 'waves'. Gustav Klaus suggests there were two, one sparked by Duck, comprising his immediate successors in the 1730s, and another in the 1770s onwards, consisting of James Woodhouse, Ann Yearsley, John Frederick Bryant and John Bennet.[1] Cafarelli contends there were three between 1730 and 1830: the first beginning with Duck in 1730, the second with Woodhouse in the 1760s (extending as far as Burns), and a third in the early nineteenth century, comprising Burns' immediate heirs.[2] Labouring poets did not, however, publish only in such 'waves'. Between Leapor's *Poems upon Several Occasions* in 1751 and Woodhouse's *Poems on Sundry Occasions* in 1764 (discussed in chapter five), other relevant publications included several each by Henry Jones, James Eyre Weekes, Thomas Blacklock, and James Maxwell. Robert Dodsley, Mary Masters, William Vernon, Cuthbert Shaw, Collier, and William Falconer also published collections and / or individual poems.[3] Even this list is selective. A number, however (see Jones, Maxwell, Falconer and early Woodhouse) whilst writing poems to patrons, poems about the poor and poverty generally, 'reception' and 'wish' poems, wrote very little of labour *itself*.[4]

Whilst a study focused on labouring *poets* would undoubtedly examine this material, the focus here will be on poems featuring the manner of writing previously defined and illustrated. Such poems were plentiful in the final third of the century, and although often written from the point of view of sympathetic observers rather than participants, they not only describe but evoke detailed labouring experiences. As Keegan observes:

> It is not merely the poetry produced by labouring-class writers that make the middle of the eighteenth century a decisive point in the history of labouring-class literature. It is in this period that the representation of lower classes by non-plebeian writers also undergoes significant shifts ... protagonists such as Pamela or Joseph Andrews argue for a growing sympathy and willingness to allow those from marginal backgrounds a place in literature.[5]

Keegan records that such sympathetic responses were sponsored by the literature of sensibility, the "overall contours" of which "facilitated writing ... intended to inspire appropriately emotional and charitable responses to the poor".[6] During this period, detailed treatment of labour and those who undertake it becomes apparent in verse by

poets from non-labouring backgrounds, sometimes in works engaging with sensibility and sometimes not.[7] Hence non-labouring poets are also included in this chapter where relevant. It will divide into three subsections: the topographical poems of Susanna Blamire and Anne Wilson, the rural narrative poetry of Robert Bloomfield, and the industrial poetry that emerged by the turn of the nineteenth century.

The Poetry of Rural Labour I: Topographical Verse

Fairer suggests that in the latter part of the eighteenth century "the georgic became subsumed into the topographical poem".[8] Descriptions of labour certainly appear in numerous 'topographical' or 'loco-descriptive' poems in the tradition of Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, or Pope's *Windsor Forest*. These 'topographical labouring poems' are 'mixed', moving between various modes. Unlike Denham and Pope, however, who include little particularised work, the writers concerned not only include descriptions of labour but labouring experiences so specific they are unknown to those outside the labouring-classes, or locals like Blamire who take a close interest in them. There are two principal differences between the descriptions of labour in these 'topographical' poems and those often found in the formal georgic: firstly, unlike the periphrasis that frequently characterises the latter, the former are written in the homely, amiable language and tone of Duck. Secondly, they are most usually *experiential*, rather than the mixture of the experiential and the *prescriptive* commonly found in formal georgic. Such 'topographical labouring poems' include Richard Jago's *Edge-Hill*, Blamire's "Stoklewath", Wilson's *Teisa*, Joseph Cottle's *Malvern Hills* and Anna Seward's *Colebrook Dale*.[9] The first, fourth and fifth poems in this list predominantly depict industrial scenes.

On the basis of her background, Blamire initially appears an unlikely poet of labour. Born in 1747 about six miles from Carlisle, she was raised in Cumberland, the daughter of a yeoman farmer. Both her parents were dead by the time she was eleven and she and her siblings were brought up by a widowed, well-to-do aunt. Educated at the village school at Raughton Head, Blamire wrote verse from late adolescence.[10] She also spent time in the highlands with her sister and brother-in-law, a soldier stationed there. Scotland made a great cultural – and personal – impact upon her. Although she never married, "According to family tradition" she formed an attachment in the border country to a young member of the nobility for whom she was

deemed an unsuitable match. He was sent abroad to put an end to the dalliance.[11] An accomplished musician who played both guitar and flageolet, as she continued writing into adulthood her verses displayed a sustained interest in the labouring classes. Apart from poems such as "An Epistle to her Friends at Gartmore", "Stoklewath", and "Bride-Cake", excellent at poeticising the daily customs of life in the time and place in which she was writing, it is on the Cumberland dialect songs that Blamire's reputation depends, and for which she remains best known.[12] Like the Scot Alexander Wilson, therefore, who wrote both in dialect and the couplets of the topographical "Lochwinnoch", Blamire is distinguished by her ability to diverge into either an English, neo-classical, or Burnsian poetic medium. Although a contemporary of Burns', however, there is no external evidence that she ever read his work, or that of the poets considered by this study (even if a reading of her work might suggest the contrary). By her death, only a few of her songs had been published (and these anonymously). That we know even as much about her as we do is largely due to the endeavours of two local enthusiasts, one a physician. Realising that whilst Blamire's work endured in the local oral tradition, it risked one day dying out unless it became available in print, they collected, edited and published her entire oeuvre.[13] She still enjoys some popularity in her home county: a memorial tablet was erected to commemorate the bi-centenary of her death in Carlisle Cathedral in 1994, and the Lakeland Dialect Society publishes pamphlets of her work.

"Stoklewath; or, the Cumbrian Village", which describes a wide range of diurnal experience in its eleven hundred and fifty four lines of couplets, is an attempt to provide a panoramic view of the life of the working population of Stockdalewath[14] in a single day.[15] Its author's ability to move with equal conviction from domestic scenes to a bar-room episode in which an old soldier tells tall stories to an admiring throng, is particularly impressive. Parts of "Stoklewath" use language in a manner reminiscent of the poems considered in previous chapters. It is comparable in places with the works of Collier or Leapor:

> But now the sun's bright whirling wheels appear
> On the broad front of noon, in full career, 110
> A sign more welcome hangs not in the air,
> For now the sister's call the brothers hear;
> Dinner's the word, and every cave around
> Devours the voice, and feasts upon the sound.
> 'Tis dinner, father! all the brothers cry, 115

Throw down the spade, and heave the pickaxe by;
'Tis dinner father! home they panting go,
While the tired parent still pants on more slow.
Now the fried rasher meets them on the way,
And savoury pancakes welcome steams convey. 120
Their pace they mend, till at the pump they stand,
Deluge the face, and purify the hand,
And then to dinner. There the women wait,
And the tired father fills his chair of state;
Smoking potatoes meet their thankful eyes...[16] 125

The creation of an intimate tone and atmosphere is important if this passage is to be successful as a domestic scene. Here Blamire can excel where poets obliged to use a more 'formal' diction – like the writers of georgic – cannot, since it is obviously more difficult to establish a convincingly intimate atmosphere through formal language. With her amiable, genial style, Blamire creates intimacy well, even if to the modern reader parts of this passage may seem sentimental. Particularly in her use of language when writing of food, she emerges as a later eighteenth-century[17] heir to Leapor. "Fried rasher", "savoury pancakes" and "Smoking potatoes" are common foods that seldom appear in canonical verse. One notes also the presence of the "spade" and "pickaxe" put down by the three workers, everyday 'solid' objects we can picture immediately. The emphasis is on the sights, sounds and smells of the scene: ll.113-14 tell us the single word they hear, and as for Tatersal a single word is enough to signal respite from his labours, however temporarily.[18] Lines 121-2 tell us what they smell; in l.25 sight and smell converge in the shape of "Smoaking potatoes".

Such a passage may seem to essentially represent a (late) strain of (rationalist) pastoral. It is particularised, but Blamire also maintains the pastoral desire to present the more agreeable aspects of life. It is rather a celebration than an idealisation, though. A celebration seeks to present a view of life as it was on the better days, when things were going well, and does not cross the line into presenting a view so rosy that it could have no basis in known fact. In Philips' pastorals, discussed in chapter one, whilst some particular implements, foods etc. find their way into the poem, the swains still play their instruments and sing elegies to beautiful dead shepherdesses, in accordance with the pastoral ideal; any particularities of rustic life are incidental. This is not the case, however, in "Stoklewath", where the focus remains firmly on the details and pastimes of contemporary rural life *itself* (for instance, Blamire notes that the village boys play "foot-ball" (l.157), and the girls with "chuckstones, dolls, and

totums" (l.164), none of them widely described in verse at the time). The celebration in the above passage is noticeably not of labour itself – the family are only too pleased to throw down spade and pickaxe – but of the respite provided by nourishment, a recurrently popular preoccupation of the poetry of labour. The poem is not blind to the harsher realities, but wishes to dwell on the positive: hence the "lingering patient" "rarely" dies in the hands of the physician (intended to represent, it has been suggested, the poet's brother);[19] rarely, but sometimes. The problem with seeking to portray life at its best in this way is two-fold. Firstly there is the dilemma of how one avoids patronising such a way of life – presenting people's lives as happy and contented despite the fact that those concerned lived and toiled in difficult conditions. Secondly there is the difficulty that relegating the unpleasant into the background may result in a picture so generalised as to lack definition.

Blamire attempts to avoid the second problem by describing pastimes and customs so specific to the local community as to be known to an outsider. Goodridge was quoted in the Introduction observing that the poet is not a social historian – but *may* incorporate the role. It would be wrong to pay insufficient attention to the poeticisation of the material, but as with several poems in this chapter, it is of benefit to read "Stoklewath" alongside social history. It simultaneously makes a contribution *to* such history as when Blamire poeticises the baking of bread in the following passage. What results is an account of an unusual, alternative means of procuring it when the baker runs out that does not, to the best of my knowledge, appear elsewhere within eighteenth-century verse, suggesting a localised custom. Unlike a number of families who had to bake their bread at the bakery in the later eighteenth century due to the scarcity of fuel,[20] little Peggy's family have the problem of obtaining the bread in the first place since the baker has no yeast:

From noon till morn rests female toil; save come
The evening hours when lowing cows draw home. 190
Now the good neighbour walks her friend to see,
And knit an hour, and drink a dish of tea.
She comes unlook'd for, – wheat-bread is to seek,
The baker has none, got no yeast last week;
And little Peggy thinks herself ill sped, 195
Though she has got a great piece gingerbread.
Home she returns, but disappointment's trace
Darkens her eye, and lengthens all her face;
She whispers lowly in her sister's ear,
Scarce can restrain the glistening, swelling tear. 200

The mother marks, and to the milk-house goes,
Blythe Peggy smiles, she well the errand knows;
There from the bowl where cream so coolly swims,
The future butter generously skims,
And flour commixing, forms a rural bread 205
That for the wheaten loaf oft stands in stead;
Cup after cup sends steaming circles round,
And oft the weak tea's in the full pot drown'd;
It matters not, for while their news they tell
The mind's content, and all things move on well. (ll.189-210) 210

The modern reader may be initially unsure here what exactly is described because it seems so remote from our own experience; yet because of the poet's commitment to enabling us to visualise her subject matter it is not difficult to picture what occurs. The language could hardly be more specific: "yeast", "gingerbread", "cream", "butter", "flour", "loaf" and "tea" all find their way into these lines. Nor is the passage exceptional:

A crust for 'tween-meals in a corner stows,
And guarded butter oaten-cakes enclose;
And shining tin-flasks of new milk, which seem
Best to demand the name of good thick cream! (ll.147-50) 150

Here there is an emphasis on the physical properties of food, even of the ingredients that go towards making a humble, substitute loaf, the very opposite of the tendency in canonical verse to avoid the particular that leads to a blurring of everyday life. This description is a celebration of glorious solidity, of particularity, of the essence of what makes food seem physically 'real', of edibility.

Blamire, like Collier and Leapor, also manipulates sound to create effects. We see this in these lines on food and cooking, such as ll.203-5 (quoted above); as in Bloomfield's lines on the subject, Blamire captures – and even evokes – the thick, dense, quality of the cream. This is evident in "There from the bowl where cream so coolly swims", with the languorous 'l' and 'm' sounds that force the tongue to linger over them. Like the cream itself, the sounds produced are 'sticky' and thick, an aspect of the relish for food. The technique is repeated two lines later with "flour, commixing, forms", the duplicated, soft 'f' sounds suggesting the physical state of the light, puff-powder flour. The effect produced by "commixing" is appropriate too because of the 'sticky', awkward quality of the word – just like the mixture that will become the substitute bread.

As befits an attempt to depict a panorama of the day's activities in the village, the wide range of occupations and tasks covered is eclectic. The harshness of rural life might not be foregrounded, but it *is* present – seen, for instance, in the fact that whilst the local boys have fun playing football, "many a shin is broke" (l.160). The following lines describe the attempts of an old widow to keep herself from the poor house:

> Along yon hedge now mouldering and decay'd,
> In gather'd heaps you see the fragments laid;
> Piled up with care to swell the nightly blaze,
> And in the widow's hut a fire to raise.
> See where she comes with her blue apron full, 235
> Crown'd with some scatter'd locks of dingy wool.
> In years she seems, and on her well patch'd clothes
> Want much has added to her other woes.
> There is a poor-house; but some little pride
> Forbids her there her humbled head to hide; 240
> O'er former scenes of better days she runs,
> And every thing like degradation shuns! (ll.231-42)

The widow is depicted not as miserable, or as a victim, but with dignity – the struggle is worthwhile, if it keeps her from the workhouse. The passage illuminates several aspects of rural life in the latter part of the century. The determination to remain self-sufficient was a characteristic identified with poor widows, who made up as much as 8 or 9 per cent of the population, and tended

> to predominate in the lists of those in receipt of poor relief, as well as those who were inmates of workhouses ... A combination of pride and determination kept many of them from relying on poor relief.[21]

The passage also touches on the recurrent eighteenth-century necessity in rural areas to collect sufficient fuel to provide light and heat. Porter describes a world ill-lit by candlelight, rushlight and moonlight.[22] A number of jobs requiring this heat and light were regarded as women's work, although men would sometimes help with the kind of fuel gathering that occupies the widow (above),[23] male assistance that a widow, by definition, might not receive. If, as suggested in the previous chapter, being a woman poet effectively equated to a triple burden of labour, being *without* a husband could, in certain respects, equate to a double burden also – that of both 'male' and 'female' labour.[24] This scramble for fuel led people to go to extreme lengths, particularly as the

century wore on and fuel became scarcer, and hence the need to assemble whatever ragged "fragments" upon which one could lay one's hands. On the Isle of Portland, where cow and horse dung were primary sources of fuel for the poor, an observer recorded "an old woman hobbling after our horses in hopes of a little fuel from their excrement."[25]

Other depictions of labour in the poem range from the sketch of "Two aged females turn[ing] the weary wheel" (ll.249-64) – again Blamire presents them with affection and dignity, recording, but resisting the urge to patronise or mock their lament, "How long is't, think ye, since th'old style was lost? / Poor England may remember't to her cost!" (ll.253-4) – to those on parenting (i.e. unpaid domestic labour, l.365) to those on the blacksmith, cobbler and tailor (ll.493-4). The poem culminates, however, with an extended and varied vignette describing tales told by a returning soldier ("Sixpence Harry", l.497) to the assembled labouring community in the local inn. This was a favourite theme of Blamire's – see, for instance, "Old Harry's Return".[26] She has a special interest in how specifically local myths and legends start, and in the particulars of social gatherings involving the local labouring population. Harry has been fighting in the North American wars, and after an account of the storming of a town in which he saved the lives of some inhabitants even though they expected him to slaughter them (ll.512-47) he tells how he got lost in the forest and taken prisoner by a tribe of Indians (ll.556-71). Despite his fears, he finds they are "Kind to their fellows, doubly kind to me" (l.607), and subsequently tries to use his practical skills to improve the tribe's quality of life. The following passage is one of the most concentrated depictions of physical labour in eighteenth-century verse:

A winter-store now rose up to their view,
And in another field the clover grew:
But, without scythes or hooks, how could we lay 630
The rigid swathe and turn it into hay;
At last, of stone we form'd a sort of spade,
Broad at the end, and sharp, for cutting made;
We push'd along, the tender grass gave way,
And soon the sun turn'd every pile to hay. 635
It was not long before the flocks increased,
And I first gave the unknown milky feast.
Some clay I found, and useful bowls I made,
Tho', I must own, I marr'd the potter's trade:
Yet use is every thing – they did the same 640
As if from China the rude vessels came.
The curdling cheese I taught them next to press;

And twirl'd on strings the roasting meat to dress.
In all the woods the Indian corn was found,
Whose grains I scatter'd in the faithful ground; 645
The willing soil leaves little here to do,
Or asks the furrows of the searching plough;
Yet something like one with delight I made,
For tedious are the labours of the spade,
The coulter and the sock were pointed stone, 650
The eager brothers drew the traces on,
I stalk'd behind, and threw the faithful grain,
And wooden harrows closed the earth again;
Soon sprung the seed, and soon 'twas in the ear,
Nor wait the golden sheaves the falling year; 655
In this vast clime two harvests load the field,
And fifty crops th'exhaustless soil can yield. (ll.628-57)

This is then succeeded by material about how Harry helped to build a house (ll.658-67). The passage is positively Crusoe-esque, illustrating how hard work can bring both practical and financial rewards, an image completed when Harry claims: "My fame was spread ... I gain'd much honour ... Riches were mine" (ll. 670, 674, 680). It is not especially plausible, which raises the issue of whether this has anything to do with 'experience' at all – it reads as a 'tall' story. Nonetheless, the passage mingles specificity with stock phrases from an earlier period, e.g. "the unknown milky feast". Perhaps more so than in the occupational poems of 1730-51, Blamire's account shows how all these tasks were accomplished in a necessarily improvisational way (e.g. the making of the makeshift spade), serving as a celebration of the ingenuity of the practical working man (even if the ultimate ingenuity lies in Harry impressing his audience with this kind of far-fetched tale).

Numerous lines in the passage are close to 'natural' speech, but Blamire is unable to sustain 'natural' word order throughout, and Latinate constructions and other variations on everyday English intrude, with verbs often needed at the end of the line. Compare "We push'd along, the tender grass gave way, / And soon the sun turn'd every pile to hay. / It was not long before the flocks increased" with subsequent lines such as "Some clay I found, and useful bowls I made" or "The curdling cheese I taught them next to press; / And twirl'd on strings the roasting meat to dress". The latter are forced and awkward, precisely because of this recurrent need to tamper with 'natural' word order, and they jar set against the previous examples. These points can be reinforced with another look at the earlier quoted passages on baking and food (ll.189-210 and 147-50). Large swathes of the extract are adversely affected: "walks

her friend to see", "and to the milkhouse goes", "she well the errand knows", "flour commixing", "the weak tea's in the full pot drown'd", "for while their news they tell", "in a corner stows".[27] In the couplet "Home she returns, but disappointment's trace / Darkens her eye, and lengthens all her face" we find, even in a passage as specific as this, a characteristic Augustan usage of both the abstract noun, and a parallel. The issue, however, is as sketched in the Introduction: to write in a wholly 'naturalistic' idiom would presumably entail writing prose. Blamire's challenge lay not so much in introducing this vocabulary but in *mingling* it with other verse 'ingredients' to produce a poem rather than a prose sketch. Throughout, the diurnal detail she includes floats suspended amid the commonplaces of neo-classical versification. Against this, the poem features a varied use of the caesura, with lines often divided by semi-colon or full stop in order to provide variation of pace and rhythm.

Nonetheless, a contrast with the more Burnsian "Wey, Ned, Man!" is helpful in bringing into focus the incongruity of mingling Augustanism and everyday speech. "Wey, Ned, Man!" is inscribed "*The subject of this song was actually overheard*" – and one could believe this to be true. Here are the first two stanzas:

'Wey, Ned, man! Thou luiks sae down-hearted,
Yen wad swear aw thy kindred were dead;
For sixpence, thy Jean and thee's parted, –
What then, man, ne'er bodder thy head!
There's lasses enow, I'll uphod te, 5
And tou may be suin as weel matched;
Tou knows there's still fish i' the river
As guid as has ever been catched.'

'Nay, Joe! tou kens nought o' the matter,
Sae let's hae nae mair o' thy jeer; 10
Auld England's gown's worn till a tatter,
And they'll nit new don her, I fear.
True liberty never can flourish,
Till man in his reets is a king, –
Till we tek a tithe pig frae the bishop, 15
As he's duin frae us, is the thing.' [28]

This dialogue between Ned and Joe allows for almost direct transposition of spoken dialect into verse. The diction demonstrates the distinctive blend of Highland and Cumbrian brogue that Blamire often incorporates into her work, always accompanied by a verse form other than the neo-classical couplet. This dialect, possible because of the different tradition out of which she writes here, makes both word order and

cadences more conversational. The lines in the first two stanzas range between eight and ten syllables in length, allowing for further variation. Yet at the same time, elaboration and skill are both patently demanded – an *ababcded* rhyme scheme in the first two stanzas is followed by *abcbbdad* in the third, *abcbdefe* in the fourth and fifth and *abcbcded* in the sixth, hardly suggesting any lack of elaboration – allowing her to "make special" (in Dissanayake's phrase) at *the same time* as producing the 'naturalistic'.

"Stoklewath" concludes with Harry explaining how he came to leave the Indian tribe, before embarking on a lengthy digression (ll.756-1112) about his encounter, upon his return to England, with a solitary hermit who proceeds to tell Harry his life story. This lengthy passage, in the region of three hundred and fifty lines, again shows Blamire's fascination with local tales and stories, akin to the legend of the "Bride Cake".[29] When Harry is finished, one of his audience is sharply recalled home in a moment reminiscent of Urs'la's reproach to the lazy Roger in Leapor's "Crumble Hall":

> Now scolding Nancy to the ale-house flies –
> "What are you doing – hearing Harry's lies!
> Thomas, get in, and do not sit to drink,
> There's work enough at home, if you would think!" (ll.1117-20)

We are brought sharply back into the public house, away from Harry's tall stories – just as Thomas is brought out of his alcohol-induced haze. Of the three lines she speaks, two could be uttered just as here. The last memorable moment of the poem is, again, a passage that could pass for a superior extract from Collier or Leapor.

What Blamire does for the labouring population of Stoklewath, Wilson's *Teisa*[30] does for their counterparts in the area traced by the River Tees(e). The poem, consisting of sixteen hundred and fourteen lines of couplets,[31] may well be the only one Wilson published.[32] What little we know of her comes from its seemingly biographical extracts, which suggest that she was some kind of servant (see ll.381-90).[33] A succeeding passage seems to suggest that Wilson was also a widow (ll.391-412). Towards the poem's close, the impression of Wilson as un/self-educated is reinforced. In a passage obviously influenced by the speech of Father Thames at the end of *Windsor Forest* (l.327 fol.), "Father Teisus" rears "his reverend head" and thanks the "northern female bard" (l.1504) for attempting "our daughter's praise":

Tho' letter'd bard shou'd my lov'd Teisa praise,
In pompous verse, in learned stile and phrase;
Yet even thus, they wou'd but copy thee; 1510
Their song thy paraphrase would only be. (ll.1508-11)

By implication the "northern female bard" – Wilson is distinctly unusual since no other labouring poet yet considered by this study came from north of the Midlands – is *other* than "letter'd". Despite this, Wilson's grasp of the poetic mode in which she writes is generally competent, even if the poem does contain its naivetes in rhyme, scansion and grammar.[34]

To date, Keegan has done most to situate *Teisa* within the tradition of river poetry with which it engages,[35] arguing that "As rivers both fix and blur boundaries, Wilson uses the river Tees in her poem to play upon the boundaries of genre."[36] It is also a good example of the 'mixed' topographical poem, alternating between the tone and language associated with pastoral, formal georgic, and the more informal Duckian mode; *Teisa* does not just play upon the boundaries of genre, but collapses them into one another. The poem's engagement with labour and those who perform it extends from a lengthy passage that Keegan terms "mining pastoral", inverting the pastoral commonplace of the swain's lament for his dead sweetheart by depicting instead the lament of a miner's wife for her dead husband (ll.63-142), to passages speaking on behalf of the labouring classes in general, to extracts praising and defending the Huguenot weavers of Barnard (ll.565-10), to detailed descriptions of drainage (ll.679-702), and the production of cheese, a rural drink, whig, and even herb-gathering. It is on these latter activities that attention will be focused.

Keegan asserts that "The speaker in the poem appears to identify with rather than objectify the river that is, for the reader, the focal point of the poem ... both river and the poet are identified as feminine ..."[37] One might add that the speaker also seems to identify with the (female) *labour* in the poem. That making cheese and whig and gathering herbs were usually performed by women surely underlines the point.[38] A passage on cheesemaking reads:

The housewife to her house we next pursue, 261
Where we the management of cheese may view.
See th'earning homogeneous parts attract,
As frost on water, on milk here see it act!

The cheese by its own gravity descends, 265
Its motion at the kettle's bottom ends;
Collected in itself, we find it lay
Deep delug'd by a flood of wholesome whey;
From whence into a trough the mass they bear,
And all the glossy bulk in pieces tear. 270
With sacred salt then sprinkle it o'er,
Taking a cloth with wide and open pore;
In which the cheese now carefully is born
To a wooden mould of circular form;
The groaning press the little vase receives, 275
And finish'd soon, we view the new form'd cheese.

Now to the whey, O rural muse return;
We left it in the shining, brazen urn;
Which urn upon the sparkling flames is plac'd,
And e'er it boils, with butter-milk they haste; 280
Then with a thrivel stir it all around;
This being done, we see white froth abound
Upon the rising surf, which by degrees,
Hardens into a substance like to cheese;
But of consistence rich, and lighter far, 285
That, by the name of curds, distinguish'd are;
A grateful cooling and delicious treat,
Which lux'ry's sons with wine and sugar eat;
But otherwise the swains, with pleasure they
The curds eat up, with their own native whey. (ll.261-90) 290

Keegan argues that whilst this is "detail usually reserved for the georgic", Wilson's " 'we' helps to engage the reader in the work, and seems, moreover, to further distinguish Wilson's project from those of the 'gentleman' poets, such as Denham, and Pope, whose influence she elsewhere in the poem actively cites."[39] Certainly the "we" helps to create a more informal atmosphere in which we are drawn into the labour in the way Duck and Collier draw us into their circle of workers. Likewise, there is no doubt that this provides a marked contrast with the distanced accounts of labour of the formal georgic, however detailed and experiential they may be. With the possible exception of "homogeneous" the passage is devoid of periphrasis or 'elevated' diction. The second stanza above begins by describing the vatting (ll.265-8) and breaking (ll.269-70) – as it was termed – of cheese. These were the most arduous stages in the cheesemaking process, and the only stages at which a dairymistress or maid would customarily make use of an assistant, since the labour involved, particularly on a farm with many cows, would be overwhelming.[40] Here the housewife possesses only a lone cow (l.253, not quoted).

Whilst the processes depicted understandably seem antiquated, once we realise that what is termed a "kettle" in l.266 is what we would call a vat, we have little difficulty in envisioning what is described. This is in no small measure due to the detail with which the physical transitions the cheese undergoes are described. The "gravity" of the cheese forces its mass to the bottom of the vat. The sound of "Deep delug'd" (and the latter word especially) mimics the stickiness and viscosity of the substance described; the conventional alliteration of Augustan versification is turned to positive account in "... a flood of wholesome whey; / From whence ..." by using the repeated "wh" sounds to suggest the wispiness of the whey. In the trough "the mass", in all its "glossy bulk", is 'broken'. Here, one notes something equally true of the poetry of industry discussed later. One of the reasons why there is no periphrasis in this extract, unlike the later passage on herb-gathering, for instance, is that it describes labouring processes that use implements lacking in classical equivalents. Hence there is a *need* to use the only names by which they are known. What classical equivalent could there be of the kettle, or the kind of "groaning press" (l.275) to which Wilson alludes? As soon as the topic becomes herb gathering there is a whole vocabulary of pastoral euphemism and / or georgic periphrasis to fall back on (indeed that one might *wish* to fall back on in order to dignify the topic). This 'elevated' vocabulary simply did not exist for some of the implements in the cheese-making passage: material factors have a tangible effect upon poetic diction, leading to the evolution of poetic form and style, and ever-greater hybridisation. Meanwhile, there is further intricate detail in the description of the curds in the next stanza. It is stirred with a "thrivel" (the first time this word is used in English verse?)[41] What abounds is not just froth, but white froth *upon* "the rising surf", a substance emanating from the bubbles themselves rising from the heated urn. In four lines alone – ll.285-8 – we learn the density, colour, name *and* temperature of the substance produced. Neither is there anything pedantic about such detail. Like poetic descriptions of washing day, verse accounts of cheese-making are far more common in eighteenth-century poetry than one might expect, because it was standard, especially for those in rural areas, to make their own cheese. Cheese-making passages occur in Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*, and also in the verses of the Scottish poet Joanna Baillie.[42]

The following passage on the rural thirst-quencher, whig, is more 'mixed', incorporating some of the periphrasis seen in the georgic:

Of healthful whig it now remains to treat; 291
This cooling liquor ne'er amongst the great
Was introduc'd, it pleasantly allays
That thirst, which often on the peasant preys;
Its flavour tart, when summer heat prevails, 295
To please the country people seldom fails:
Of its salubrious pow'r, we ne'er can doubt;
Neither the juice of unconcocted fruit;
Nor yet th'alembic's stupefying dose,
Are any of the things that whig compose. (ll.291-300) 300

Whig was sour whey, or churned milk, gone stale after sedimentation.[43] In a sense, just including such material takes Wilson's poem outside of the province of formal georgic: as noted in chapter one, when Dyer includes the words "term'd by shepherds 'the halt' "[44] this is unusual in incorporating a rustic diction so often precluded by the formal georgic's inability to encompass informality. Here Wilson provides an insight into an area of labouring experience largely unavailable, then, in the georgic, since there is no option but to call it by the particular, and only, name by which it is known. Once we reach the description of the properties it possesses, however, linguistic options do emerge, and hence one finds references to "salubrious pow'r", "unconcocted fruit" and "th'alembic's stupefying dose".

Finally, the succeeding passage on herb-gathering clearly drifts into the mode associated with formal georgic:

When the diluting whey has boil'd its full, 301
The housewife to her garden goes to cull:
Various herbs of fine cooling pleasant taste;
Pursuing her the rural Muses haste.

Alecost she gathers, with edge indented fine, 305
Unerring plastic nature's fair design;
With spotted sage, from its own humble bed,
And that which loftier grows, whose hue is red.

New mint, but mints of various sorts there are,
The best to choose deserves her utmost care: 310
She burgamot well careful will avoid,
Lest by its too strong flavour be annoyed:
Those herbs that less emissive are of smell;
This, for the chymist's use, may do full well:
Of fiery pepper-mint let her beware; 315
The search of cooling herbs is now her care:
Here water-mint she must refuse,
And that whose pale green leaf is pointed, choose.

Fresh leaves of baum the Muse would next advise;
In baum, diaphoretic virtue lies; 320
And sudorific marigolds; but these
From the stamina and impalement, please
To pick for ropy juice, cohesion here
Oft will retain, making fluids less clear. (ll.305-24)

When the topic becomes herbs, it appears there is an immediate inclination to fall back on the long-established poetic precedents for writing about such material. There is no less detail in the above passage, in its way, than elsewhere, and neither is its celebratory, laudatory tone greater just because of its 'formality' – but veers into a *different* mode to that of the cheesemaking passage. Hence we have herbs "less emissive ... of smell", and "In baum, diaphoretic, virtue lies; / And sudorific marigolds ...", a technical means of stating that balm (possibly lemon-balm), like marigolds, induces perspiration.[45] One is again reminded that poetic forms and conventions widespread during the Augustan period enjoyed particular longevity in labouring-class poetry. Likewise, a subsequent line urges "The succedaneum, O Muse, express!" (l.331), the Latin word signifying 'substitute'.[46]

Like "Stoklewath", *Teisa* has far more to offer than just its descriptions of labour, such as its unusual (and gendered) contribution to the topographical / loco-descriptive tradition, and its engagement with contemporary politics and ideas of nationhood, topics beyond the remit of the present study. At one point it even offers a reminder – much more relevant here – of a labouring-class tendency (the example given is of a miller) to 'fill in the gaps' of ideology by persuading themselves that Christianity requires complicity with ideology in return for heavenly reward (see ll.1360-79). The two poems discussed are, of course, by no means the sum of the descriptive poetry of rural labour in the period, and neither is Blamire the sole non-labouring–class poet to sympathetically describe, or evoke rural labour in this way.[47] They clearly demonstrate, however, how a descriptive, narrative, evocative mode survived during the final third of the century, communicating labouring experiences as an aspect of poems with multiple aims, moving between correspondingly numerous poetic modes.

The Poetry of Rural Labour II: The Rural Narrative Poetry of Robert Bloomfield

Bloomfield was born in Honington, Suffolk, in 1766, the son of a tailor who died when his son was less than a year old, and a schoolmistress mother who taught her six children to read and write. Bloomfield was sent to school for several months in Ixford,[48] before his mother remarried when he was seven and had another family. At eleven, Bloomfield was apprenticed to the farmer William Austin of Sapiston, who subsequently informed his mother that her son was too small and frail to earn his living by manual labour.[49] On 29 June 1781, his mother took him to London to learn the shoe-making trade from two of his brothers. The latter would often get him to read to them while they were at work "because his time was of least value".[50] When not working, the young Bloomfield would spend his time listening to the radical preacher Fawcett,[51] attending a debating society, and going to Covent Garden Theatre.[52] On 12 December 1790 he married Mary Anne Church, later an ardent Methodist and follower of Joanna Southcott,[53] and between October 1791 and April 1801 they had three daughters and a son. He became a ladies shoemaker for Davies of Lombard Street.[54]

Bloomfield is principally remembered as the author of *The Farmer's Boy*, edited[55] and introduced by Capel Lofft, "a leading patrician radical",[56] and illustrated with engravings by Thomas Bewick. It tells the story, in a little over fifteen hundred lines of couplets, of an orphan farm labourer, Giles, as he moves through the seasons.[57] Completed in April 1798, and first published in 1800, "A vogue for tales of rustic life led to the immense sale of 26,000 copies in under three years, and translations into Italian and French".[58] Whilst this figure has been widely quoted, it is less well known that

> ... his poetry remained in fashion throughout the nineteenth century: from 1835 to 1895, the publishing firm of Milner, under its various names, sold 65,550 copies of his poetry, which ranks him as the fifth most popular British poet during those six decades, behind Burns, Byron, Milton, and Pope.[59]

As this suggests, Bloomfield followed up his early success with numerous other verse tales and collections.[60] Whilst he never abandoned the couplets of *The Farmer's Boy*, partly chosen, as established in my Introduction, because of his inability to memorise blank verse whilst working,[61] he increasingly adopted meters derived from folk songs

and ballads. Bloomfield again lapsed into poverty in his last years, however, suffering from melancholy, poor eyesight, general health, and memory. He died in 1823. Despite the struggles towards the end of his life, by the second half of the twentieth century he had attracted sustained critical attention.[62]

The Farmer's Boy (1800)[63] represents neither Bloomfield's attempt at the seizure of poetic identity that emerged in the 1730s and 40s in the wake of *The Thresher's Labour* – although 'The Farmer's Boy' *was* a literary identity repeatedly foisted upon him as a result of the poem's success – nor the kind of 'topographical labouring poem' previously discussed. Though fictionalised, parts of the poem were based around Bloomfield's experiences as a ploughboy working for Austin at Sapiston,[64] and it suggests a mixture of experience and research comparable to, for instance, Dyer's *The Fleece*. Bloomfield's "Spring" describes, amongst other things, "Seed time, Harrowing, Milking, The Dairy, Sheep fond of changing Lambs at play, and the Butcher"; "Summer" deals with turnip sowing, wheat ripening, reaping, "the labours of the barn", and harvesting; "Autumn" details wheat-sowing and fox-hunting; "Winter" is concerned with the treatment of cattle and other animals.

Alluding to the inter-generic nature of the poem, Lucas argues:

> Bloomfield's poem is a kind of palimpsest ... *The Farmer's Boy* is remarkably successful in adapting a variety of styles and genres in order to make a poem which, if not *sui generis*, brings real distinction to the various traditions out of which it emerges ... [the poem] ... adeptly blends various stylistic registers.[65]

The poem often provides a strong example of how the mode examined by this study marries the conventions of neo-classical verse with informal detail. Its standpoint is frequently described as 'nostalgic' and / or 'idealised'. However, like Blamire, whilst Bloomfield celebrates the natural world, he does so without ignoring the pain, suffering and the harshness of nature.[66] Clare was fond of referring to Bloomfield as "the English Theocritus", not because he saw any 'artificial' pastoral presentation of the countryside in Bloomfield's work, but because Bloomfield "told the truth".[67] The issue has provoked controversy and will be returned to, following a consideration of some of the poem's most noteworthy passages.

Perhaps oddly, given that a repeated charge against him is one of reinforcing the pastoral myth by idealising the past, Bloomfield's poem has a good deal in common with *The Thresher's Labour*. Apart from displaying the influence of both

Milton and Pope,[68] many vignettes feature similar material: in "Spring" the plowing and harrowing leaves Giles fatigued just as agricultural work wearies Duck and his fellows; in "Summer" Giles feels the strain of reaping and mowing under the heat of the sun, before drinking ale to quench his thirst; he partakes of a harvest banquet as a reward for his pains; and, like Duck, Bloomfield sympathises with the lot of a horse as a fellow labouring creature (a more developed episode than Duck's epic simile on the courser). Whether these similarities are by design, rather than the result of the same influences (e.g. *The Seasons*) is uncertain, since it is unclear whether Bloomfield was aware of Duck; nonetheless critics have assumed that he *was*. Lucas, for instance, argues, "It is ... apparent that as a young man [Bloomfield] must have studied Duck, Thomson, and their many imitators ..."[69]

Many of the attributes of the Duckian mode are visible in this early passage from "Spring":

> ... unassisted through each toilsome day,
> With smiling brow the ploughman cleaves his way,
> Draws his fresh parallels, and, wid'ning still,
> Treads slow the heavy dale, or climbs the hill:
> Strong on the wing his busy followers play, 75
> Where writhing earth-worms meet th' unwelcome day
> Till all is chang'd, and hill and level down
> Assume a livery of sober brown:
> Again disturb'd, when Giles with wearying strides
> From ridge to ridge the ponderous harrow guides; 80
>
> His heels deep sinking every step he goes,
> Till dirt adhesive loads his clouted shoes.
> Welcome green headland! firm beneath his feet;
> Welcome the friendly bank's refreshing seat;
> There, warm with toil, his panting horses browse 85
> Their shelt'ring canopy of pendent boughs;
> Till rest, delicious, chase each transient pain,
> And new-born vigour swell in every vein.
> Hour after hour, and day to day succeeds;
> Till every clod and deep-drawn furrow spreads 90
> To crumbling mould; a level surface clear,
> And strew'd with corn to crown the rising year;
> And o'er the whole Giles once transverse again,
> In earth's moist bosom buries up the grain.
> The work is done; no more to man is given; 95
> The grateful Farmer trusts the rest to Heaven. (I: ll.71-96)

This is a familiar mingling of neo-classical versification and experiential specificity. As in much of the poem (an obvious exception is the passage on cheese-making in I: ll.251-88, clearly stylistically modelled on the formal georgic) there is little periphrasis or technical vocabulary, the word "adhesive" apart. It is a passage of harrows, earth-worms, clouted shoes and crumbling mould; but also of heavy dales and pendent boughs. Lucas rightly suggests that pastoral idealisation in the poem is often, after the example of *The Thresher's Labour* and the "attention it pays to unglamorous daily work", neutralised by the inclusion of mimetic detail. He gives the example of the account of the "clatt'ring Dairy-Maid immers'd in steam, / Singing and scrubbing midst her milk and cream, / [who] Bawls out, "Go fetch the Cows!" " (I: ll.165-7) before arguing that "pastoral 'sweetness' ... is dispelled by terms such as 'clatt'ring' and 'bawls'." He terms this "neo-Theocritean poetry" and sees ll.71-5, quoted above, as another example of such a mode.[70]

Such "dispelling", then, ensures that the extract is some way from pastoral idealisation: the day is "toilsome"; the ploughman, in a poem featuring frequent detailed attention to animals, encounters "writhing earth-worms"; Giles' strides are "wearying", "His heels deep sinking every step he goes, / Till dirt adhesive loads his clouted shoes". Giles welcomes the chance to sit on the friendly bank, because he is "warm with toil" and his horse, in a poem of recurrent equine suffering, is "panting" from exertion; "delicious" rest chases the pain away but, although Bloomfield comes nowhere near Duck's desolation at being compelled to partake in an unremitting cycle of toil, the work, and the intermittent periods of exhaustion, go on (ll.89, 93). There are multiple 'Augustanisms', in the shape of conventionally 'balanced' lines and couplets (e.g. ll.83-4); Augustan euphemism (e.g. "earth's moist bosom", "clouds propitious shed their timely store", "a livery of sober brown" "shelt'ring canopy", "crown the rising year" etc.); and Augustan abstraction (e. g. toil, pain, vigour etc.); the need to make the rhyme at the end of each line determines the word order on numerous occasions. Nonetheless, despite the fact that many lines are end stopped, Bloomfield provides plenty of medial variation as in (for instance) ll.83, 91, 95.

Similar points can be made about the following passage on dairy work. Even here, where idealisation appears to intrude far more, there are counter-points to be made:

Forth comes the Maid, and like the morning smiles;

The Mistress too, and follow'd close by Giles.
A friendly tripod forms their humble seat,
With pails bright scour'd, and delicately sweet.
Where shadowing elms obstruct the morning ray, 195
Begins the work, begins the simple lay;
The full charg'd udder yields its willing streams,
While Mary sings some lover's amorous dreams;
And crouching Giles beneath a neighbouring tree
Tugs o'er his pail, and chants with equal glee; 200
Whose hat with tatter'd brim, of nap so bare,
From the cow's side purloins a coat of hair,
A mottled ensign of his harmless trade,
An unambitious, peaceable cockade.
As unambitious too that cheerful aid 205
The Mistress yields beside her rosy Maid;
With joy she views her plenteous reeking store,
And bears a brimmer to the dairy door;
Her cows dismiss'd, the luscious mead to roam,
Till eve again recall them loaded home. (I: ll.191-210) 210

On one hand, idealisation seems present in lines such as "The full charg'd udder yields its willing streams, / While Mary sings some lover's amorous dreams", not to mention Giles' "glee" and the Mistress' "joy". A key point, however, is that whatever the diction, the reader finds Mary *at work* in the above passage, milking, singing as she goes. The udder is *in use*. Not only this, but all three characters are described busily milking – even the Mistress – which hardly suggests a pastoral intention. Another important point is that the aim, as in most of the rest of the poem (passages such as I: ll.251-88 are again the exception) is primarily to deliver a *descriptive narrative*. Lucas raises another key point, observing that "Bloomfield's serviceable couplets, end-stopped though they mostly are, have sufficient flexibility to allow him to snap rhymes neatly shut or, more usually, develop small narratives ... *The Farmer's Boy* ... [is] ... made up of small narrative blocks – it might be better to call them sequences".[71] As Lucas clearly implies, and as argued in my Introduction, end-stopped couplets are not ideal for the transmission of narrative. Yet the overall impression created is one of *mingling* particularly in view of the fact that the work described co-exists with the Latinate constructions characteristic of neo-classical poetic vocabulary that again militate against the word order of everyday speech, e.g. "Her cows dismissed", "Begins the work, begins the simple lay"; abstract nouns (and euphemism) – although they hardly depart much from usage in ordinary speech – in "the morning smiles", "the morning ray", "amorous dreams", "his harmless trade",

"As unambitious too that cheerful aid"; and neo-classical parallelism in the couplet "An unambitious, peaceable cockade / As unambitious too that cheerful aid".

Bloomfield includes a number of passages dealing with the harvest:

Here, midst the boldest triumphs of her worth, 131
Nature herself invites the reapers forth;
Dares the keen sickle from its twelvemonth's rest,
And gives that ardour which in every breast
From infancy to age alike appears, 135
When the first sheaf its plumy top uprears.
No rake takes here what Heaven to all bestows - - -
Children of want, for you the bounty flows!
And every cottage from the plenteous store
Receives a burden nightly at its door. 140

Hark! where the sweeping scythe now rips along
Each sturdy Mower, emulous and strong,
Whose writhing form meridian heat defies,
Bends o'er his work, and every sinew tries;
Prostrates the waving treasure at his feet, 145
But spares the rising clover, short and sweet. (II: ll.131-46)

Again, Bloomfield's account initially seems more idealised than Duck's equivalent (*TTL*, ll.213-16): it was customary for the poor to receive the gleanings, but ll.137-40 go rather far.[72] Bloomfield, however, writes in an age of enclosure and poverty when the temptation to reminisce about happier times was strong, something several critics have linked with the poem's impressive sales (discussed below). Hence Bloomfield's account of the physical labour itself contrasts with Duck's memorable passage (*TTL*, ll.239-67) recording how the labourers would even dream of their toils, culminating in the crescendo of activity marking the harvest's completion. Nonetheless, this passage returns to the kind of "dispelling" of pastoral visions to which Lucas alludes, pastoral vocabulary brought together with the sickles and scythes that do the work. Just like Duck and his mates, the "writhing form" of the mowers defies the "meridian heat", and they are compelled to strain "every sinew"; l.141 creates both a dynamic image of vigorous action, and mimics the sound of the mowers' 'ripping'.

It is hardly surprising that Bloomfield's account of the harvest home feast ostensibly differs from Duck's "The Cheat" passage:

Now, ere sweet Summer bids its long adieu, 287
And winds blow keen where late the blossom grew,
The bustling day and jovial night must come,

The long-accustom'd feast of Harvest-home... 290

For all that clear'd the crop, or till'd the ground, 302
Are guests by right of custom: --- old and young;
And many a neighbouring yeoman join the throng,
With artisans that lent their dext'rous aid, 305
When o'er each field the flaming sunbeams play'd ...

Here once a year Distinction low'rs its crest, 323
The master, servant, and the merry guest,
Are equal all; and round the happy ring 325
The reaper's eyes exulting glances fling,
And, warm'd with gratitude, he quits his place,
With sun-burnt hands and ale-enlivened face,
Refills the jug the honour'd host to tend,
To serve at once the master and the friend; 330
Proud thus to meet his smiles, to share his tale,
His nuts, his conversation, and his ale. (II: ll.287-90, 302-6, 323-32)

There is perhaps less, however, distinguishing this from ll.268-77 of Duck's poem than one might anticipate. Certainly Duck goes on to record how the labourers at the harvest-home feast felt afterwards, but then there is a greater emphasis on the psychological effects of labour throughout his poem. Duck spends less time than Bloomfield in describing the actual feast, merely referring to "A Table plentifully spread we find, / And Jugs of humming Beer to cheer the Mind" (*TTL*, ll.270-1). Like Duck, Bloomfield confers dignity upon the labourers' toils by comparing them to those of the heroes of classical epics; e.g. the "blood stain'd victories" and "rage and death". The references to "custom" are also noteworthy, bearing in mind Christmas' comments about the term, discussed in previous chapters. "Custom" decrees that the harvest-home is a right, and that whilst at it, "...master, servant, and the merry guest, / Are equal all". In an age in which enclosure had made substantial inroads into rights and privileges formerly guaranteed by custom, in which rural labourers related to farmers no longer as men of the same locale whose fortunes were bound up with their own in the success or failure of the harvest, but as workers to bosses, these lines must have stirred wistful fondness for times past.

The passage that ensues is one not just of wistfulness, however, but of *protest*:

Such were the days, — of days long past I sing,
When Pride gave place to mirth without a sting;
Ere tyrant customs strength sufficient bore 335
To violate the feelings of the poor;

To leave them distanc'd in the mad'ning race,
Where'er refinement shows its hated face:
Nor causeless hated; — 'tis the peasant's curse,
That hourly makes his wretched station worse; 340
Destroys life's intercourse; the social plan
That rank to rank cements, as man to man:
Wealth flows around him, Fashion lordly reigns;
Yet poverty is his, and mental pains. (II: ll.333-44)

It is not difficult to see why Bloomfield would feel moved to protest in such terms. After all, during the harvest in the first part of the century, workers would not just get, but expect, "as a matter of customary right"[73] generous provisions of food and drink. During harvest times, feasts shared between employers and employees were commonplace: for instance, in 1764, "the Duke of Norfolk gave a supper to 350 of his labourers".[74] By the turn of the century the old customs and common rights had largely disappeared, though, due to "the revolution in agricultural techniques, and the influence of urban capitalism".[75]

Other points of comparison between *The Thresher's Labour* and *The Farmer's Boy*, are the thunder storms based on classical (Virgilian) sources that appear in both (*TTL*, ll.185-90 and *TFB*, II: ll.263-86), and passages detailing the farmer's advice and instruction to his workers (*TFB*, IV: l.89 fol.). Bloomfield also provokes comparisons with other poets within the Duckian tradition of poeticising labour. He includes a passage on the work taking place in the dairy reminiscent of the mode of writing about food by Collier, Leapor, or Blamire:

Slow rolls the churn, its load of clogging cream
At once forgoes its quality and name;
From knotty particles first floating wide 215
Congealing butter's dash'd from side to side;
Streams of new milk through flowing coolers stray,
And snow-white curd abounds, and wholesome whey,
Due north th'unglazed windows, cold and clear,
For warming sunbeams are unwelcome here. (I: ll.213-20) 220

Like Blamire's bowl "where cream coolly swims" (see above), or Leapor's writing on the subject, these lines emphasise the physical properties (hence "knotty particles") of the foods described by mimicking the dense, 'sticky' qualities of the cream. The passage functions as a celebration of 'solidity', helping us to imagine what is described by actually evoking it. Hence "Slow rolls the churn, its load of clogging

cream" employs recurrent 'l' sounds that linger on the tongue and elongate the line when enunciated; the long vowel sounds in "slow", "rolls", "load" and "cream" have the same effect, as do "Streams", and "flowing coolers stray", and "Congealing" and "wholesome whey".

An increasing number of poets who write of physical labour by the end of the century show, like Bloomfield, a specific knowledge of flowers, insects, birds and other animals. Whilst Spacks notes that sympathy with animals was a common feature of the poetry of sensibility,[76] Bloomfield's writing about animals appears within – and extends – a tradition in labouring poetry. Some of the best passages in *The Farmer's Boy* concern not just dogs and horses, but also small animals:

> Just where the parting bough's light shadows play, 71
> Scarce in the shade, nor in the scorching day,
> Stretch'd on the turf he lies, a peopled bed,
> Where swarming insects creep around his head.
> The small dust-colour'd beetle climbs with pain 75
> O'er the smooth plantain-leaf, a spacious plain
> Thence higher still, by countless steps convey'd
> He gains the summit of a sh-iv'ring blade,
> And flirts his filmy wings, and looks around,
> Exulting in his distance from the ground. 80
> The tender speckled moth here dancing seen,
> The vaulting grasshopper of glossy green,
> And all prolific *Summer's* sporting train,
> Their little lives by various pow'rs sustain. (II: ll.71-84)

The mere fact that Bloomfield distinguishes a "dust-colour'd beetle" from an anonymous 'insect' separates him from the Augustan norm. Like Leapor's lines on the spider in "Crumble-Hall", Bloomfield's account *dignifies* the beetle. All things are relative; and the "smooth plaintain-leaf" is as daunting to a beetle as a "spacious plain" to a human being. Having scaled "the summit of a shiv'ring blade", he is just as entitled as a person climbing a high hill to "exult ... in his distance from the ground". The final lines above also demonstrate Bloomfield's debt to Pope, being derivative of his lines on small creatures in *Windsor Forest.*

The lines on Ball the cart horse (II: ll.205-24), Trouncer the dog (III: ll.303-32) and on Dobbin are some of the poem's most memorable. It is significant that the passage on the cruelty of docking is prefaced by a preview of the (later) harvest home passage – "Of wholesome viands here a banquet smiles, / A common cheer for all; — e'en humble Giles" (II: ll.193-4). The latter, as we are reminded, deserves his reward

since he is "Oft doom'd in suffocating heat to bear / The cobweb'd barn's impure and dusty air" (II: ll.197-8, another 'Duckian' reminder of the material conditions in which rural work is performed that serves to "dispel" pastoral illusions). Giles enjoys

> To ride in mirky state the panting steed,
> Destin'd aloft th' unloaded grain to tread, 200
> Where, in his path as heaps on heaps are thrown,
> He rears, and plunges the loose mountain down:
> Laborious task! with what delight when done
> Both horse and rider greet th' unclouded sun! (II: ll.199-204)

However, whilst *both* Giles and his steed brave the conditions of their labour and rejoice at its completion, the harvest home actually does not offer "common cheer" for *all* who toil. Whilst the human workers get their reward, some have nothing to look forward to but pain and misery, as the succeeding twenty lines (not quoted) remind us. Hence Bloomfield takes the tradition of sympathy with animals even further than other poets of labour, not just sympathising with them as fellow creatures, but as *fellow labourers* who suffer the same pains as their human counterparts, and merit the same rewards.

Bloomfield's later passage on Dobbin is in a similar vein:

> Ah, well for him if here his sufferings ceas'd, 186
> And ample hours of rest his pains appeas'd!
> But rous'd again, and sternly bade to rise,
> And shake refreshing slumber from his eyes,
> Ere his exhausted spirits can return, 190
> Or through his frame reviving ardour burn,
> Come forth he must, though limping, maim'd, and sore;
> He hears the whip; the chaise is at the door: ---
> The collar tightens, and again he feels
> His half-heal'd wounds inflam'd; again the wheels 195
> With tiresome sameness in his ears resound,
> O'er blinding dust, or miles of flinty ground.
> Thus nightly robb'd, and injur'd day by day,
> His piece-meal murderers wear his life away.
> What sayst thou, *Dobbin*? What though hounds await 200
> With open jaws the moment of thy fate,
> No better fate attends *his* public race;
> His life is misery, and his end disgrace.
> Then freely bear thy burden to the mill;
> Obey but one short law, --- thy driver's will. (IV: ll.186-205) 205

This passage is the perfect hybrid. On one hand there is the 'modern' sense of compassion for animals and the specific detail such as the whip, collar, "half-heal'd wounds" and the braided mane (IV: l.195, not quoted); on the other there is Augustan apostrophe ("What say'st thou, *Dobbin*?"), balanced antithetical clauses ("Thus nightly robb'd, and injur'd day by day"; "His life is misery, and his end disgrace") and rhetorical exclamation ("Ah, well for him if here his sufferings ceas'd, / And ample hours of rest his pains appeas'd!"). This is an exercise in sentimentality and compression conveyed through an Augustan medium; the result is necessarily transitional in style. III: ll.319-26 (not quoted), in favourably comparing Trouncer's qualities with those of the human beings commonly the subjects of elegies, make a case, common by 1800, for the democratisation of poetry in order to accommodate a wider range of material. Similarly, the excellent lines describing the fatigue that will eventually bring about Dobbin's end are not dissimilar to those detailing human exhaustion in *The Thresher's Labour*.

Is this sympathy with the animal kingdom merely another symptom of the poem's alleged preference for idealisation, a tendency that, according to some critics, blights its treatment of the past most of all? Various commentators have examined the relationship between the poem's treatment of the past, and its success. Sales, who accepts that Bloomfield's work *can* be adequately defined within terms of the pastoral, argues

> There were ... social pressures on any pastoral poet to serve up something to the taste of the reading public. Bloomfield ... was successful because he knew that the reading public expected farmers' boys to show that they were blissfully contented with their place in society ... Like Clare, Bloomfield moved from the shadows of obscurity to the sunshine of popularity because, despite certain differences of opinion, it was felt that his life and poetry supported the *status quo* ... Bloomfield ... made sure that his book was popular by cooking the economic books.[77]

This, on its own, creates an uneven impression. II: ll.333-44, quoted above, hardly bears out this view, and the vivid passages of animal suffering that permeate the poem seem more indicative of a rural 'realism' than any idealisation. Lawson posits an alternative reading, distinguishing poets like Duck and Bloomfield from pastoralists and Romanticists alike. As demonstrated in chapter one, irrespective of whether set in the English countryside or not, pastoral (of either neo-classical or rationalist variety)

necessarily *excludes* the sympathetic portrayals of labour that were primary features of the work of both Duck and Bloomfield. Lawson identifies both with Hesiod, noting

> Rosenmeyer uses the term "Hesiodic" to indicate a type of verse that is traditionally "hostile to the pastoral chant." Tibullus' distinction between real agricultural scenes of labor, sweat, and pain, and what Rosenmeyer calls a pre-agriculturalist utopia" approximates between rural and pastoral poetry.

He goes on to quote Rosenmeyer arguing for the existence of a tradition beginning with Hesiod and Aristophanes that is "activist, critical, and realistic". This tradition does not conceal the burden of labour:

> The Hesiodic strain demands self-imposed regimentation. One of its prominent organizing techniques is the calendar or almanac, arranging the tasks of the farmer in accordance with the seasons and the environment.

Lawson agrees with Rosenmeyer that the tradition he describes demonstrates "that a good life furnish[es] evidence of effort and suffering" and that such a tradition is, plainly, incompatible with pastoral. Lawson sees Bloomfield, Burns (who pursued similar aims to poets within the tradition examined by this study, yet by means of a different poetic medium), Crabbe and Clare as inheritors of this tradition and suggests *The Thresher's Labour* also corresponds to this model.[78] Lawson distinguishes such poets by the descriptor "rural poets", arguing, as stated in chapter one, that the latter differ from pastoralists and Romanticists alike because their primary concern is "the things, folk, and events of the countryside which are important *in themselves*." (my italics).[79] It is hard to disagree, and Lawson's differentiation of the rural poet from the Romanticist also raises relevant points.[80]

Whilst Sales alleges that Bloomfield's perspective affects "to present 'things just as they were' " but "reconstructs the past to lighten the shadows of the present", it should be noted that Bloomfield presents his image of the past, like Goldsmith but with detailed descriptions of labour, partly with the intention of *criticising* his present, a view argued for by Zimmerman.[81] Keegan also notes that Bloomfield invokes the pastoral for the purposes of subverting, or as Lucas would have it, "dispelling" such a vision.[82] Sales himself acknowledges Bloomfield's "comments on poor law relief and the French Revolution" that "indicate that he was a politically conscious artisan", and a "double chatterer".[83] Christmas agrees that the seeming idealisation of rural life in *The Farmer's Boy* contributed to its phenomenal success, arguing that "Throughout

… Bloomfield adopts a safely resistant strain", yet embraces its double-edged nature by appropriating Sales' description: "he is an ideological "double chatterer" extraordinaire who utilizes methods of poetic displacement and subterfuge to walk the fine line between complicity and critique."[84] Was Bloomfield complicit with the ideology implicit in the pastoral? To some extent, perhaps, but like almost all of the labouring poets examined by this study, *The Farmer's Boy* suggests a more complex stance. What it unquestionably reveals is an extensive appropriation of the Duckian mode of poeticising labour, not just alive and well in 1798, but featuring in poetry that enjoyed unprecedented success and sales.

Industrial Poetry

Duck himself was an unlikely pioneer of industrial poetry, writing about shipbuilding in "A Description of a Journey to Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth, &c.":

Departing hence, the Dock we travel round,
Where lab'ring Shipwrights rattling Axes sound:
Some bend the stubborn Planks, while others rear
The lofty Mast, or crooked Timber square; 370
Some ply their Engines, some direct the Toil,
And carefully inspect the mighty Pile;
See ev'ry Chink securely stopt, before
The winged Castle ventures from the Shore.

So, when the youthful Crane intends to fly 375
Her first long Journey thro' the spacious Sky;
Before she rears herself sublime in Air,
She ranges ev'ry Plume with prudent Care;
Tries if her Pinions can her Flight sustain;
Then springs away, and soars above the Main. 380

But see! the smoking firy Forge appears;
Vulcanian Sounds surprize our list'ning Ears:
See! busy Smiths around their Anvils sweat;
Their brawny Arms the glowing Anchor beat;
Alternately the chiming Hammers fall, 385
And loud Notes echo thro' the sooty Hall.
Such, haply, on the sounding Anvil rung,
When first the Harp melodious TUBAL strung:
As TUBAL-CAIN the ductile Metal wrought,
And VULCAN'S heav'nly Art to Mortals taught; 390
The Brother, pleas'd to hear his Hammers chime,
Soon harmoniz'd their Notes to proper Time:

Man's Bosom then sonorous Organs warm'd,
The softer Lyre his gloomy Sorrows charm'd;
While Tyrants' Hearts unusual Pity found, 395
And savage Tempers soften'd with the Sound.[85]

This demonstrates the Duckian mode as surely as any of his writing about agricultural labour. More than ever, Duck's subject matter harks forward, because by the final third of the century there was a proliferation of industrial poetry, as befitting the gathering momentum of the industrial revolution.[86] Just like this later poetry, the passage utilises a specific labouring vocabulary – "Dock", "Shipwrights", "Axes", "Mast", "Timber", "Engines", "Chink", "Forge", "Anvils", "Anchor", "Hammers" – whilst the heroic potential of the subject matter is highlighted by epic similes (two in only thirty lines above, in ll.375-80 and 387 fol.) and the invocation of a classical past in which those who performed feats of manual strength were celebrated. The second actually shows Duck also invoking the Old Testament to extol the glory of work – even if "Tubal", in l.388, in what was presumably a printer's error, should read "Jubal".[87] Jubal, a Biblical father of music, takes advantage of Tubal-Cain's technology, and Duck suggests not just that Jubal made use of the metal his brother wrought, but that he was actually (ll.391-2) inspired to create music by the sound of his hammers. Due to the strong dependence on classical precedent, the vocabulary above is arguably less innovative than it would become in the later poetry of industry: apart from the kind of "Engines" referred to, much of the rest of the diction was previously available in verse. Yet the passage does demonstrate the dynamic mimetic verbal energy that would become distinctive of industrial verse. It is synaesthetic in its concentration on conveying the combination of vivid sights and sounds that a witness would experience. Such a witness would hear the "rattling Axes" and the "chiming Hammers", and see (as we are implored in ll.373 and 381) the "smoking firy Forge", smiths beating the "glowing Anchor", sweating around their anvils. There is a sustained emphasis on the physical constitution of the objects described: the Planks are "stubborn"; the Timber "crooked"; the smiths brawny-armed.

A number, though not all, of later poets who took advantage of what *was* a new and rich vocabulary, did so in poems, like Duck's, ostensibly topographical in nature. Industrial poems in the final third of the century included Richard Jago's *Edge-Hill or The Rural Prospect Delineated and Moralised*, Anna Seward's "Colebrook Dale" (wr. 1790, pub. 1810), Erasmus Darwin's georgic *The Botanical*

Garden (1791), Charles Dibdin's "The Anchorsmiths" (1798), Joseph Cottle's "Malvern Hills" (1798), Mary Alcock's "The Chimney Sweeper's Complaint" (1798-9), and James Bisset's "A Poetic Survey through Birmingham" and "Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham", (1800).[88] Like Woodhouse's *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* (*c*.1795-1800), most are set in and around the Midlands, a hotbed of industrial growth.[89] Elsewhere in the British Isles, industrial scenes were similarly depicted in verse.[90] A number of the above poems are in forms other than the couplet (reflecting the waning of its popularity by the turn of the century, if not with labouring poets then elsewhere): "The Anchorsmiths" is written in hexameter couplets, *Edge-Hill*, "Malvern Hills" and "Colebrook Dale" in blank verse. Whilst blank verse presents the poet with different challenges to the couplet, what is produced has enough parallels with the mode under investigation to make a look at one of these poems worthwhile.

Jago's[91] *Edge-Hill* was first published in 1767, and revised for publication in the posthumous *Poems, Moral and Descriptive* seventeen years later. A celebration of the south Warwickshire landscape, when discussed at all it has generally been classified as part of the 'topographical' school.[92] *Edge-Hill* runs to (by the 1784 revised version) nearly two thousand three hundred and thirty lines. A glance at "the Argument" at the beginning of each of its four books gives some indication of its proportions, structure and aims. Describing what can be seen from the hill during the course of a single day, the poem includes plenty of work, and views of those performing it. Although accounts of labour feature intermittently, it is in the third book – "Afternoon" – that the most concentrated and sustained depictions of industrial scenes occur in the portrait of "Bremicham", a thinly veiled fictionalisation of Birmingham, that comprises passages on "Its Manufactures. Coal-Mines. Iron-Ore. Process of it. Panegyric upon Iron".

Here is an extended passages on industrialisation from Book Three:

HERE, in huge cauldrons, the rough mass they stow,
Till, by the potent heat, the purer ore
Is liquefied, and leaves the dross afloat.
Then, cautious, from the glowing pond they lead
The fiery stream along the channelled floor; 5
Where, in the mazy moulds of figured sand,
Anon it hardens and, in ingots rude,
Is to the forge conveyed; whose weighty strokes,
Incessant aided by the rapid stream,

Spread out the ductile ore, now tapering 10
In lengthened masses, ready to obey
The workman's will, and take its destined form ...

How the coarse metal brightens into fame,
Shaped by their plastic hands! what ornament!
What various use! See there the glitt'ring knife
Of tempered edge! The scissors' double shaft, 45
Useless apart, in social union joined,
Each aiding each! Emblem how beautiful
Of happy nuptial leagues! The button round,
Plain, or embossed, or bright with steely rays!
Or oblong buckle, on the laquered shoe, 50
With polished lustre, bending elegant
Its shapely rim. But how shall I recount
The thronging merchandise? From gaudy signs,
The littered counter, and the show-glass trim,
Seals, rings, twees, bodkins, crowd into my verse, 55
Too scanty to contain their num'rous tribes.[93]

The characteristically Augustan overuse of exclamation (also a marked feature of Bloomfield's verse) produces an effect akin to Duck's euphoria at the culmination of the harvest in *The Thresher's Labour.* As with Duck's passage on shipbuilding, the above actually evokes the sights and sounds of a particular occupation, here the iron industry. Wishing to describe the "rough mass" of liquefied pure ore, Jago produces lines awkward of enunciation, suggesting the physical properties of the substance described. This is nowhere better seen than in the juxtaposition of the words "purer ore". The reader is obliged to slow down in order to separate the words, drawing attention to each individual word, and to its particular importance. More so than in Duck's shipbuilding vignette, however, we see another step towards the mingling of greater informality with existing verse conventions, because in describing industrialisation the poet is driven to use 'direct' description in the absence of any available 'formal' terminology, as confirmed by vocabulary such as "cauldrons", "ingots", "scissors" and "buckle". That what is produced is a transitional medium is reinforced by the simultaneous presence in the passage of expressions and formulations of Augustan origin such as "The fiery stream", and "Of happy nuptial leagues!", not to mention the comparison of "... The scissors' double shaft, / Useless apart, in social union joined, / Each aiding each!" and the rhetorical question contained within ll.52-3. Although "Seals, rings, twees, bodkins, crowd into my verse,

/ Too scanty to contain their num'rous tribes", verse *does*, of course, increasingly "contain" such vocabulary.

As a further illustration of the potential of industrial material, it is worth examining its effect when incorporated into, and celebrated by (what is clearly intended to be) the georgic. Erasmus Darwin's[94] *The Botanic Garden* possesses the hallmarks of the formal English georgic, as discussed in chapter one. A physician and scientist, Darwin spent much of the 1780s indulging his passion for botany by translating the works of Linnaeus. In 1789 he published the lengthy *The Loves of the Plants* (1,936 lines of couplets apparently modelled on Pope's).[95] This became the second part of *The Botanic Garden* when Part One – "Containing the Economy of Vegetation", another 2,440 lines of couplets – was published in 1792. Part One is somewhat misleadingly titled since it celebrates a wide range of industrial and scientific phenomena, anticipating science's potential to improve the lot of mankind. Dividing his poem into four cantos, "ostensibly on the subjects of fire, earth, air and water ... Darwin selected whatever subjects he fancied" creating "a real ragbag of topics."[96]

The poem celebrates its subject matter, the instructive function of the formal georgic complemented by "more than a hundred pages of "Notes" providing an up-to-date, select encyclopedia of science."[97] It is enthusiastic, wide-ranging, knowledgeable, verbally inventive and at times experiential. Like the georgics examined in chapter one, it aims at serious literary imitation, not just in certain passages as when Duck employs the epic simile within the framework of a poem inter-generic in nature, but in its closeness to the genre of georgic, as originated by Virgil. Accordingly its tendency is to employ a diction elevated to the point of periphrasis in order to aggrandise its subject matter. The other characteristics of formal georgic such as Augustan euphemism, pastoral language / diction, 'learned' or 'bookish' scientific / terminology, lengthy engagement with classical mythology including plentiful use of classical figures and place names, and passages celebrating nationhood, are all in evidence.

However, the colonisation of verse by the vocabulary of industry is such that in Part One's industrial passages, something more direct and less 'literary' is produced. Not only were there few classical alternatives for the nascent vocabulary of industry, but nor were there yet technical / scientific terms for industrial processes or implements known by everyday names to workers. Hence in the following passage

from Canto I. vi. which deals, according to the "Argument", with "Steam-engine applied to Pumps, Bellows, Water-engines, Corn-mills", and "Coining", we find:

> "The Giant-Power from earth's remotest caves
> Lifts with strong arm her dark reluctant waves;
> Each cavern'd rock, and hidden den explores,
> Drags her dark coals, and digs her shining ores. —
> Next, in close cells of ribbed oak confined, 15
> Gale after gale, He crowds the struggling wind;
> The imprison'd storms through brazen nostrils roar,
> Fan the white flame, and fuse the sparkling ore.
> Here high in air the rising stream He pours
> To clay-built cisterns, or to lead-lined towers; 20
> Fresh through a thousand pipes the wave distils,
> And thirsty cities drink the exuberant rills.
> There the vast mill-stone with inebriate whirl
> On trembling floors his forceful fingers twirl,
> Whose flinty teeth the golden harvests grind, 25
> Feast without blood! and nourish human-kind.
>
> "Now his hard hands on Mona's rifted crest,
> Bosom'd in rock, her azure ores arrest;
> With iron lips his rapid rollers seize
> The lengthening bars, in thin expansion squeeze; 30
>
> Descending screws with ponderous fly-wheels wound
> The tawny plates, the new medallions round;
> Hard dyes of steel the cupreous circles cramp,
> And with quick fall his massy hammers stamp.
> The Harp, the Lily and the Lion join, 35
> And George and Britain guard the sterling coin.[98]

Despite the presence of some scientific or periphrastic language – e.g. "cupreous circles" – in the main there are few of the usual characteristics of formal georgic. Nor were there many classical heroes who could easily be incorporated into writing about industry, as Hercules, Sisyphus or Odysseus could be invoked when writing about general feats of manual strength. The obvious exceptions were Vulcan and his forge, and Cyclops and the hammer, which accounts for their presence in a good number of industrial poems, including *The Botanic Garden*, *Edge-Hill*, Dibdin's "The Anchorsmiths" and Bisset's poems (below); beyond this, by definition, the options were limited. What alternative in the above passage, could there be, either by means of periphrasis or euphemism, to the "sparkling ore", the "thousand pipes" (within the context used here), "iron lips", "rapid rollers", or "fly-wheels"? Hence the vocabulary

of the new phenomenon of industry, patently of such enormity as to warrant epic treatment, or at least georgic celebration, was such as to necessarily force linguistic, and therefore tonal changes within these literary forms. This resulted in passages dealing with the topic standing out from the rest of the works in which they featured in their 'directness', as new modes necessarily resulted within georgic.

Another interesting case is James Bisset's neglected poetry about Birmingham industry. Bisset's "A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham" and "Ramble of the Gods Through Birmingham", both from *A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham; With a Brief Description of the Different Curiosities and Manufactories of the Place: Intended as a Guide to Strangers* (1800), were, as the title page notes, "Accompanied by a magnificent directory; with the names, professions, &c. superbly engraved in emblematic plates". The poems offer the reader a guided tour of the manufactories of the city in a manner recalling the amiable tours around a house or town found in Leapor's "Crumble-Hall" or Mary Chandler's *A Description of Bath* respectively. Bisset's text is also accompanied by extensive footnotes directing the reader to specific plates in order to see a visual image of the building or process described.

Bisset (1762-1832), a poet and artist and former artist's apprentice, was educated at a dame school, and made his money as a museum owner, shopkeeper and coiner of medals. He wrote several popular volumes of verse that earned him "a considerable profit."[99] In "A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham", a descriptive poem of two hundred and twenty three lines (a hundred and ten couplets and a triplet, not including a twenty-four-line Introduction) he produces fluid, malleable couplets that allow the nimbleness necessary for a fleet-of-foot tour guide, sometimes regularly end stopping couplets but at others driven to run on passages. He goes *beyond* even the specificity found within much of the poetry of labour, however, because rather than just mimetically evoking work, Bisset's descriptions are so specific as to name and describe individual factories, buildings, streets, and their exact locations. The poem combines a little of the instructive function and laudatory tone of the georgic – e.g. "SOHO! – where GENIUS and the ARTS preside, / EUROPA's wonder and BRITANNIA's pride" (ll.72-3) – with a good deal of the amiable informality seen in "Crumble-Hall", as, for instance, in the undertaking at the outset that

> … strangers, freely, shall command my pow'r,
> To guide their footsteps, at a leisure hour; 20
> And, whilst surrounding objects they survey,

Some knowledge of the diff'rent scenes convey.
Tho' little of the kind I have to spare,
Yet what I have, I'm sure, I'll freely share … (ll.19-24)

Some idea of the informality, easiness of movement, and detail that gets into the poem is conveyed by the following:

Near north by east, BARR BEACON greets your eye,
More to the right, you'll ASTON's turrets spy. 95
BRITANNIA BREW'RY, nearer view, between,
And o'er that CONIC TOW'R lies NECHELL's GREEN.
In that neat SQUARE, ST. MARY's you'll behold,
Whose vane is tipp'd and shines with burnish'd gold.
Beyond it, ASTON JUNCTION's plainly seen, 100
Where boats seem sailing o'er the verdant green;
The busy WHARFINGERS, intent on gain,
Their vessels load – and ply the rattling crane.
The boatmen sit at ease, their pipes they smoak,
Or, with each other, crack a harmless joke; 105
Whilst some of the sluices ope – the waters flow
In torrents, rushing, to the locks below,
Where, by the hedge-row masts, in numbers glide,
Boats, carts, and coaches, passing side by side. (ll.94-109)

One difference between Bisset's verse and that examined elsewhere is that whilst, on the one hand, this is so detailed that a brewery is specifically named, at the same time information is given in footnotes. "Barr-Beacon", "Aston", "Conic Tow'r", "Nechell's Green", "St. Mary's" and "Aston Junction" all elicit explanatory (prose) footnotes, though they tend to be brief and restricted to information about geographical location. There is, however, almost no euphemism in the above at all. Bisset harnesses a particularised vocabulary – "turrets", "rattling crane", "sluices" – providing detailed description; we learn not just that there is a weather vane in St. Mary's Square but that it is both tipped and gold coloured, information provided in a single line because of Bisset's directness and verbal economy. Above all, one notes how pliable the couplets are, enjambment invariably meaning that just as "… the waters flow / In torrents, rushing, to the locks below", so *the verse* flows. Just as the sluices he describes control and vary the distance between one passage of water and the next, so Bisset varies the pace, caesura and syntax, to maintain a brisk, yet varied movement that evades repetition or predictability.

Bisset leads his reader past Union Mill, through Duddeston, Washwood Heath, Bennet's Hill, Saltley, Vauxhall, Ashted, Bartholomew's Chapel, Small Heath – "Where curling eddies of black smoke ascends, / STEAM ENGINES wond'rous force and power portends" (ll.134-5) – Deritend, Bordesley, Camp-Hill, Fair Hill, Moseley, Norton, Moor Green, Selly Oak and Smethwick, where "...BRASS-WORKS meet your sight; / where clouds of smoke in lofty columns rise, / And sable exhalations dim the skies." (ll.195-7). Rather than go into equal detail about each of "The different MANUFACT'RIES of the place" (ll.217), our guide tells us that "To view them all, would take some length of days" (l.219) but that "...I'll do the best I'm able, / And give a brief DESCRIPTION – in a FABLE." (ll.221-2). What follows is "Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham. A Tale" (composed of two hundred and eighty two lines of couplets, and followed by a 'Postscript' composed of an additional forty four couplets).

When "Ramble of the Gods" engages with industrial labour, in order to aggrandise industry, a loftier, laudatory (georgic) tone is struck than in its predecessor; other factors such as the celebration of child-labour (ll.225-36), a feature of several eighteenth-century georgics, likewise suggest this intention. Detailed depictions are now given in the form of a tour of the town taken by the Gods, after "...a rambling fit / Seiz'd on APOLLO, GOD of Song and Wit; / He spoke to MERCURY, and ask'd if he / To Earth a while would bear him company?" (ll.1-4). There are moments at which one suspects Bisset has the mock-heroic in mind – e.g. "they ... / Propos'd that their example he might follow, / Which was with joy accepted by APOLLO." (ll.10-12). Overall, however, the enthusiasm, evident pride in the industrial accomplishments of the city, and factual tone of the footnotes suggest otherwise. As seen in *The Botanic Garden*, the specificity of the vocabulary, not periphrastic or 'scientific', is at odds with the 'elevated', euphemistic language of (for instance) the rural / agricultural georgic. After a hundred and forty lines of general description of Birmingham, encompassing the police and bailiffs, churches, charities, banks, places of public amusement, libraries, streets, markets, inns and public houses, all described in everyday language, the Gods reach Birmingham's industrial landmarks:

> THEY visited our WHARFS, and, wond'ring, found
> Some thousand tons of COAL pil'd on the ground,
> And scores of boats, in length full sixty feet, 145

With loads of mineral fuel, quite replete;
Whilst carts, and country wagons, fill'd each space,
And loaded teams stood rang'd around the place …

They next, attracted by the vivid gleams,
Saw MARCASITES dissolve in liquid streams,
And stubborn ORES expand, and smelting, flow
By strength of Calefaction, from below. 160
To see the PIN-WORKS then, the GODS repair,
Nor wonder'd less at what they met with there,
To find it was in any mortal's pow'r,
To POINT, and CUT, twelve thousand PINS an hour;
And fifty thousand HEADS their shapes acquire, 165
In half that time, spun round elastic wire. (ll.143-8, 157-66)

The emphasis is on sights and sounds, and the physical properties of the phenomena described, the "vivid gleams", "liquid streams", the "stubborn ORES" that "expand, and smelting, flow". It reads not unlike Collier, Leapor, Blamire or Wilson describing the physical transitions undergone by foodstuffs. Bisset continues to incorporate an impressive range of material: ll.167-78 describe the button works, an environment of fantastically coloured ores, and of gilding, rich gilt, semilore, stamps, lathes, presses and Japanning paper trays. We visit the mint, home of the Coining Mill, the mechanical means of striking coins first operational in 1788 (ll.189-94); and the foundry and gun works (ll.207-12) "Whilst peals, like rattling thunder, shook the roof, / When nit'rous powers proclaimed them STANDARD Proof." (ll.209-10). We visit the buckle works (ll.213-42)[100] where toys, as well as scimeters, swords, faulchions, poignards, sadres, spikes, spears and lances are manufactured; and Lloyd's mill (ll.243-6) and Whitmore's factory (ll.247-74) where we encounter hydraulics, machines, rolling mills, anvils and plastic dyes. Finally, as the tour builds to a climax, we encounter a lengthy list of the factory's wonders, comprising multiple newly-patented inventions (ll.261-74).

Like Duck, both Darwin and (in the second of his two poems discussed above) Bisset marry 'new' material with older forms, and hence the similarities with Duck's enterprise, and the new hybrids formed. Neither can be didactic in quite the same way as the writers of formal georgic before them, however, since they both write about such wide-ranging areas that there is no single equivalent of the gentleman farmer (or, in the case of Grainger's *Sugar-Cane*, the plantation owner) who is the implied reader of *The Fleece* or *Agriculture*. Yet, beyond being

incorporated into poems aiming at topography and georgic, evocations of industry were also drawn upon by poems with radical political intentions, championing the labouring classes and protesting their exploitation. One such example was Woodhouse's *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*, the principal subject of the next chapter.

[1] See H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour: Two Hundred Years of Working-Class Writing* (Brighton: Harvester Press Ltd., 1985), p.6.

[2] See Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, 'The Romantic 'Peasant' Poets and their Patrons', *Wordsworth Circle*, 26 (1995), pp.78, 83.

[3] See Henry Jones, *Merit. A Poem: Inscribed to the Right Honourable Philip Earl of Chesterfield* (1753); *The Relief; or, Day Thoughts: A Poem. Occasioned by the Complaint, or Night Thoughts* (1754); *The Invention of Letters, and the Utility of the Press* (1755); *Poems* (1756); *The Patriot Enterprize: or an Address to Britain ... Inscribed to the Right Hon. William Pitt* (1758); and *Kew Garden: A Poem* (1763); James Eyre Weekes, *A New Geography of Ireland* (1752); *The Young Grammarian's Magazine of Words*, (1753); and *Solomon's Temple, an Oratorio*, (1753); Thomas Blacklock, *Poems on Several Occasions*, 3rd edn. (1756); and *An Essay towards Universal Etymology, in Verse* (1756); James Maxwell, *Divine Miscellanies; or Sacred Poems* (1756); *The Good Tidings of Salvation Revealed* (1757); and *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* (1759); Robert Dodsley, *Agriculture* (1753); Mary Masters, *Familiar Poems and Poems on Several Occasions* (1755); William Vernon, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1758); Cuthbert Shaw, *Liberty* (1756); *Ode on the Four Seasons* (1760); *The Four Farthing Candle* (1762); Mary Collier, *Poems on Several Occasions* (Winchester, 1762); and William Falconer, *The Shipwreck* (1762).

[4] Presumably figures emerge, by this time, who wished to be seen, in the light of self-defining work already done, no longer as *labouring poets*, but *just* as *poets*. Both Dodsley and Duck went on to write plentiful non-labouring verse.

[5] *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. II: 1740-1780*, ed. by Bridget Keegan, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p.xxvii.

[6] *Ibid.* See Patricia Meyer Spacks, 'The Poetry of Sensibility' in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, ed. by John Sitter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 249-69 (p.250). See also Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986), especially pp.1-31 – the 'Introduction' and 'Historical Background' – and pp.49-64 – focusing on poetry, and Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: a Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). Fairer provides a reading of sensibility as a means of interrogating philosophical, metaphysical questions, such as the relationship between the Ideal and the material; see *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Harlow and London: Longman, 2003), pp.215-38 (especially p.216). An overview of recent critical approaches to sensibility, including as a desire to fall back on the human emotions people still shared in the face of great material change in the late eighteenth century, is provided by Moyra Haslett, *Pope to Burney, 1714-1779: Scriblerians to Bluestockings*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp.73, 106.

[7] As McGann states, "tears are the proper emblem of the literatures of sensibility and sentiment" (p.7). Given that that the literature of sensibility is often as concerned with the *expression* of sympathy and sentiment as with its causes, sensibility might seem incompatible with a concern with the specific, material conditions of labour. Yet the Duckian mode is used in a number of poems that elsewhere clearly invoke sensibility.

[8] Fairer (2003), p.209.

[9] I exclude from this list poems that might be expected to appear such as Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village* and Crabbe's *The Village*. Neither can be aptly defined as 'topographical' or depicts the labouring experiences of any particular community, be it occupational or geographical. Whilst both poems were based on specific source material – Goldsmith's 'Auburn' was "probably modelled on childhood memories of Lissoy in Ireland, where he grew up" (*Eighteenth-Century Poetry, An Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p.420), and Crabbe's village was "based largely on his bitter memories of Aldeburgh" (*ibid.*, p.430) – the places Goldsmith and Crabbe write about are intended to represent a number of rural villages. Golsmith's Auburn is "an idealized imaginary village", whilst

> ... Crabbe finds it useful to create a village that is both strongly characterised and yet generic,

> less a visual observation than a timeless record ... Although it gives us a vivid landscape, *The Village* is not ... a topographical poem. (Fairer (2003), p.202).

By contrast, "Descriptions of specific places ... became increasingly popular in the second half of the century. Areas of Britain were being veritably mapped out by poems ..." (*ibid.*)

[10] (Roger) Lonsdale records that Blamire's earliest surviving poem dates from 1766 (*Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, an Oxford Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p.278), when she would have been nineteen years old. As he points out, "All information about her derives from the investigations of Patrick Maxwell and Henry Lonsdale" (p.529).

[11] *Ibid.*, p.278.

[12] Some of the most noteworthy are "I've Gotten a Rock, I've Gotten a Reel", "When Home we Return", "O Why Should Mortals Suffer Care", "Old Harry's Return", "The Nabob", "The Siller Croun", "The Waefu' Heart", "Wey; Ned, Man!", "The Cumberland Scold", "We've Hed Sec a Durdum", "Auld Robin Forbes", and "O There is not a Sharper Dart".

[13] *The Poetical Works of Miss Susanna Blamire ("The Muse of Cumberland")*, ed. by Henry Lonsdale and Patrick Maxwell (Edinburgh: John Menzies, 1842).

[14] There is disagreement about the correct spelling of the village. Lonsdale (1989) initially spells it "Stokedalewath" (p.278), then "Stockdalewath" (p.529). Lonsdale and Maxwell spell it "Stokdalewath" (p.1).

[15] The village, colloquially pronounced "Stoklewath" (Lonsdale and Maxwell, p.1), "is some 8 miles south of Carlisle near Raughton Head." (Lonsdale (1989), p.529). Thackwood, the farm home of Blamire's guardian aunt Mary Simpson, was situated just outside the village.

[16] Susanna Blamire, "Stoklewath", ll.109-25, Lonsdale and Maxwell, pp.5-6. Subsequent references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[17] "Stoklewath" is believed to have been written *c.*1775-80, perhaps 1776: see Lonsdale (1989), p.287.

[18] As in the poems examined in the previous chapter, the sons are recalled to work by an authority figure, after the passing of a requisite amount of time indicates that labour must be resumed; see "Stoklewath", ll.134-8.

[19] See Lonsdale (1989), p.278, who suggests that in ll.1121-4, the sister famed for "joke" and "physic" is in fact Blamire herself. Ll.1129-30, "The brother then his skill of medicine tries, / And rarely in his hands the lingering patient dies", presumably refer to Blamire's eldest brother, at one time a naval surgeon (*ibid.*).

[20] See Bridget Hill, *Women, Work and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England*, 2nd edn. (London: University College London Press, 1994), p.114.

[21] Bridget Hill, *Eighteenth-Century Women: An Anthology* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1984), p.157.

[22] Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century,* rev. edn. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.19.

[23] See Hill (1994), p.113.

[24] See Hill (1984), p.6, for an account of how (due in no small measure to enclosure) in the later century, "All women of the labouring classes suffered, but among those that suffered worst were widows and single women."

[25] Hill (1994), p.113.

[26] Lonsdale and Maxwell, pp.196-7.

[27] Presumably "Though she has got a great piece gingerbread" (l.196) was a vernacular usage. It would have been straightforward to 'tidy' the line, i.e. "Though she has had a piece of gingerbread."

[28] Susanna Blamire, "Wey, Ned, Man!", ll.1-16, Lonsdale and Maxwell, pp.208-9; see also Lonsdale (1989), pp.290-1.

[29] Susanna Blamire, "Bride Cake", Lonsdale and Maxwell, pp.92-5.

[30] *Teisa* is a "Poetic name for the river Tees." See Keegan (2003), p.440, for a description of its dimensions, geographical location etc.

[31] Anne Wilson, *Teisa: A Descriptive Poem of the River Teese, its Towns and Antiquities* (Newcastle Upon Tyne, 1778), *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (The Gale Group, hereafter *ECCO*). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text. See also Keegan (2003), pp.364-73; extracts are anthologised in Lonsdale (1989), pp.354-5. Despite the poem's 1164 lines, the original 1778 text finishes at l.1615, because of a mistake where l.330 (pp.17-18) is said to occur only four lines after l.325 meaning, in effect, that the poem has no l.329. The line numbering that Keegan provides retains that of the 1778 original text. For the sake of consistency with other versions of the poem, I have retained the erroneous numbering.

[32] There is uncertainty about this issue: see Keegan (2003), p.364.

[33] Regarding Wilson's probable labouring-class status, see Keegan (2003), p.363.

[34] See, for instance, ll.273-6; ll.271, 303, 317; ll.267 (where "lay" should be "lie", "laying", or "laid"), 300 (where "are" should be "is"), 312.

[35] *Teisa* shows Wilson's "astute awareness of the specific subgenre of loco-descriptive poetry devoted to rivers" seen in Pope's writing about the river Thames in *Windsor Forest* (Keegan (2003), p.363). On *Teisa*'s debt to Denham see ll.1237-54. Keegan contrasts Wilson with the tradition of Pope and Denham on the grounds that the river in *Teisa* is 'feminized', and "the eye / I who sees and speaks in *Teisa* quite literally follows the river as it moves through the landscape, rising and falling with the river as it flows, narrating the scenes that pass, almost as if from a boat ... The speaker predominantly locates the visual perspective not as stationary and looking down on a scene ... but rather, in motion and looking upward." (Bridget Keegan, 'Writing against the Current: Anne Wilson's *Teisa* and the Tradition of British River Poetry', *Women's Studies*, 31 (2002), 267-85, *Literature Resource Centre* (hereafter *LRC*), p.3 of 12). Keegan further distinguishes Wilson's poem from what Tim Fulford has identified in the works of Thomson, Jago and others as the gentlemanly perspective "on the landscape ... frequently meant to demonstrate the masculine speakers' literal ownership of the land surveyed and moreover, their freedom from having to labor on it." (*Ibid.*) See also Fairer (2003), pp.209-12.

[36] Keegan (2002), p.3 of 12.

[37] *Ibid.*

[38] See *ibid.*, p.4 of 12. For social historical accounts, see Hill's chapter 'Women and Agriculture' (1984, pp.177-96).

[39] Keegan (2002), p.4 of 12.

[40] See *The Rural Economy of Gloucestershire* (1796), vol. 2, p.156, *fn.*, cited by Hill (1984), p.182.

[41] Various eighteenth-century dictionaries, including Johnson's and Richardson's, do not include the word, which suggests a possible vernacular usage.

[42] The following passage describes a housewife and her maid making a cheese substance by setting curds within a mould:

> The housewife, up by times, her morning cares
> Tends busily; from tubs of curdled milk
> With skilful patience draws the clear green whey 55
> From the press'd bosom of the snowy curd,
> While her brown comely maid, with tuck'd-up sleeves
> And swelling arm, assists her. Work proceeds,
> Pots smoke, pails rattle, and the warm confusion
> Still more confused becomes, till in the mould 60
> With heavy hands the well-squeezed curd is placed.

(Joanna Baillie, "A Summer's Day", ll.53-61, *The Domestic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie. Complete in One Volume.* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1851), *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992-5, hereafter *EPFTD*)). The poem was published with its companion piece "A Winter's Day" in Baillie's *Poems; Wherein it is Attempted to Describe Certain Views of Nature and of Rustic Manners* (1790). Extracts from both poems appear in Lonsdale (1989), pp.430-4. Due to Baillie's Scottish nationality, and the fact that both are blank verse poems, I have omitted them from my main argument, but they are frequently detailed, covering a wide range of labouring experiences. See Lonsdale (1989), p.429. Both depict twenty-four hour periods in the working life of a locality probably modelled on Long Calderwood, near Hamilton, Lanarkshire, where Baillie grew up (*ibid.*). Like other poems discussed by this study, they feature the particular sights, sounds and smells of labour – as above where "Pots smoke" and the pails onomatopoeically "rattle" – and use a specific vocabulary, mingling these details with pastoral language such as "swains" and "maids". Bearing in mind the local variation of labouring experience during the eighteenth century, the process described above makes an instructive contrast with that provided by Wilson, writing in the North East approximately a dozen years previously.

[43] Keegan (2003), p.440.

[44] See John Dyer, *The Fleece*, I: ll.274-5.

[45] Keegan (2003), p.440.

[46] *Ibid.*

[47] Excellent blank verse examples include Thomas Hood's *The Life of Hubert: A Narrative, Descriptive and Didactic Poem* (1795) – see *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp.796-9 for extracts – and Baillie's poems.

[48] See Capel Lofft's preface to Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy; A Rural Poem*, 7th edn. (London: Vernor and Hood and Longman and Rees, 1803), p.vi.

[49] *Ibid.*, pp.vi-vii. His physical build was equally slight in adulthood (see *ibid.*, p.xvii). On Bloomfield's time working for Austin, see William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses; Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry 1730-1830* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2001), p.269.

[50] Lofft, p.viii. Bloomfield's early reading included "an *History of England*, *British Traveller*, and a *Geography*", the *London Magazine* (p.x) and Thomson's *The Seasons* (p.xiv).

[51] See John Lucas, 'Bloomfield and Clare' in *The Independent Spirit: John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition*, ed. by John Goodridge (Helpston: The John Clare Society and the Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), pp.55-68, *LRC*, p.3 of 10. Lucas records that the young Wordsworth was also "Among Fawcett's audience".

[52] Lofft, pp.ix-x.

[53] Robert Bloomfield, *Selected Poems*, ed. by John Goodridge and John Lucas, intro. by John Lucas (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 1998), p.xix.

[54] Lofft, pp.xvi-xvii.

[55] Although not credited on the poem's title page, Lofft claims his "part" in the text's production was "to revise the MS." before describing this process (*ibid.*, p.xix), which surely equates to such a role. According to Lucas (p.vii), Bloomfield did not appreciate Lofft's efforts and "in the stereotype edition of his first four volumes, *The Poems of Robert Bloomfield* (two volumes, 1809) ... took the opportunity to correct the text, and in some cases restore manuscript readings."

[56] Roger Sales, *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1983), p.21. Lofft's politics are suggested by his defence of the rights of gleaners in the Court of Common Pleas in 1788; see Jonathan Lawson, *Robert Bloomfield* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1980), pp.94-154, *LRC*, p.26 of 43.

[57] Like Duck, and later Clare, Bloomfield was greatly influenced by *The Seasons;* see Christmas (2001), p.270.

[58] Christmas (2001) records the actual number as 26,100 (p.278). The poem ran to fourteen editions in Bloomfield's lifetime, most published during 1800-3. In his preface to the seventh edition (1803), Lofft claimed 26,100 copies had already been printed since the first edition in 1800 (p.xxx). These figures are put into context by the fact that "Wordsworth was an also-ran by comparison, since *Lyrical Ballads* sold hundreds rather than thousands of copies." (Sales, p.18). In addition to French and Italian translations, "The first book was early translated into *Latin*" (Lofft, p.xxx).

[59] Donald Mark Zimmerman, 'The Medium of Antipastoral: Protest between the Lines of Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*', in *ANQ*, 17 (2004), i2, pp.35-8, *LRC*, p.1 of 4. Zimmerman credits B. C. Bloomfield, "The Publication of *The Farmer's Boy* by Robert Bloomfield", The Library 15.2 (1993): 75-94, including a note that on this list of the best selling British poets between 1835 and 1895, "Wordsworth and Shelley were numbers nine and ten, respectively."

[60] For a full list of these subsequent publications see Jonathan N. Lawson, 'Robert Bloomfield', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 93: British Romantic Poets, 1789-1832, First Series*, ed. by John R. Greenfield (The Gale Group, 1990), pp.59-67, *LRC.*

[61] See also Lucas (1998), p.xii.

[62] Those to have written critically and / or biographically about Bloomfield include Edmund Blunden, *Nature in English Literature* (London: Leonard and Virginia Woolf, 1929), Unwin, *The Rural Muse: Studies in the Peasant Poetry of England* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1954), pp.87-109, William Wicket and Nicholas Duval, *The Farmer's Boy: The Story of a Suffolk Poet, Robert Bloomfield* (Levenham, Suffolk: Terence Dalton, 1971), Lawson, 'Robert Bloomfield', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography, LRC*, and *Robert Bloomfield, LRC*, Sales, *English Literature in History 1780-1830: Pastoral and Politics,* pp.18-22, Lucas, 'Bloomfield and Clare', *LRC*, Christmas (2001, pp.267-82), Goodridge, 'John Clare and Eighteenth-Century Poetry: Pomfret, Cunningham, Bloomfield', *Eighteenth-Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), 264-78, and Zimmerman, 'The Medium of Antipastoral: Protest between the Lines of Bloomfield's *The Farmer's Boy*'. The first scholarly edition of Bloomfield's poems was Lucas and Goodridge (1998).

[63] The edition used here is Robert Bloomfield, *The Farmer's Boy* from *The Poems: Volume I: The Farmer's Boy, and Glad Tidings* (London, 1827), *EPFTD*. The 1827 text is very similar to that provided by Lucas and Goodridge (1998), with the exception of some variation in capitalisations. Subsequent references are to this edition, and given in parentheses in the text.

[64] See Lawson, *Robert Bloomfield, LRC*, p.26 of 43, for examples.

[65] Lucas (1998), p.xii.

[66] Also relevant is Bloomfield's *Good Tidings; or, News from the Farm* (1804). It praises "Jenner's discovery of vaccination against smallpox", and reveals his "concerns with the horrors of disease" which "aren't to be softened by thoughts of an ultimately benevolent deity." See *ibid.*

[67] Lucas quotes Polwhele's 1692 comment that Theocritus "...described what he saw and felt. His characters, as well as his scenes, are the immediate transcript of nature." This, Lucas adds, "is why John Clare called Bloomfield 'the English Theocritus.' " Lucas coins the term "Theocritean realism" to describe the verse of Crabbe and Bloomfield (see *ibid.*, pp.x, xv).

[68] See *ibid.*, p.xii for examples of Bloomfield's borrowings from Milton and Pope.

[69] Lucas (1998), p.xii. Lawson (*Robert Bloomfield, LRC*, p.26 of 43) also identifies Duck with Bloomfield, and suggests they were writing with the same broad aims. See also a contemporary review of *The Farmer's Boy*, in the *Monthly Review*, or *Literary Journal*, 32 (September 1800), 50-56, *LRC*, p.3 of 3, for an identification of Duck with Bloomfield.

[70] See Lucas (1998), p.xi.

[71] *Ibid.*, p.xii.

[72] See "Gleaning: a Customary Right", in Hill (1984), pp.191-3.

[73] Robert W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England 1700-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1981), p.37.

[74] Porter, p.64.

[75] Lawson, *Robert Bloomfield, LRC*, p.25 of 43. See pp.24-6 of 43 for a fuller explanation.

[76] Spacks, p.249.

[77] Sales, pp.19-22.

[78] See Lawson, *Robert Bloomfield, LRC*, p.30 of 43. His quotations from Rosenmeyer come from *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp.20-1.

[79] *Ibid.*, p.33 of 43.

[80] Fairer has argued that conventional wisdom about the 'Romantic period' might be challenged by an alternative focus on a 'Romantic mode' discernible from the early eighteenth century onwards (2003, pp.102-21). Nonetheless, views of the period as traditionally conceived persist strongly. Whilst the poets of labour discussed in this chapter often write as observers, they are all keenly interested in labour *itself*; amongst canonical Romantic figures, by contrast, one often finds that despite apparent interest, the real focus is on not the work(er) but the observing poet, *as a poet*. One also often finds different priorities and concerns, resulting in the opposite of Duckian specificity. A potential source of late echoes of Duck might seem to be Wordsworth, with his shepherds, old beggars, huntsmen, farmers and reapers. In, for instance, "The Old Cumberland Beggar", ll.125 fol. (*The Oxford Authors: William Wordsworth*, ed. by Stephen Gill, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, pp.49-54), Wordsworth dissolves the individuality of the beggar into generalisation. His interest in the latter is not in the work he performs, but the effect upon his mind and spirit of living close to nature. Hence Wordsworth feels compelled to present workers as universalised exemplary figures, never getting near the 'real' speech of shepherds or leech gatherers unlike, for example, Burns. Wordsworth is interested in a kind of stasis in which Man is immobilised in Nature. Hence in some major poems – "Michael", "Resolution and Independence", "The Ruined Cottage" (see Gill, pp.224-36, 260-4 and 31-44 respectively) – he moves towards a position in which the character concerned is *doing* nothing, but simply *is*, a kind of ultimate Romanticism: the reduction to an Idea. The figure who arguably emerges to combine both the roles of Romantic observer *and* worker is John Clare, identified by numerous critics as Bloomfield's successor (see, for instance, Lucas (1998), p.xxii).

Until the recent work of Cafarelli, Scott J. McEathron (*Poets, Peasants, and Reading Publics: Wordsworth and the Peasant Poet Tradition*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Duke University, 1993), Ann Janowitz (*Lyric and Labour in the Romantic Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and others (see also *Beyond Romanticism: New Approaches to Texts and Contexts, 1780-1832*, ed. by John Whale and Nicola Watson, London: Routledge, 1992, and *At the Limits of Romanticism: Essays in Cultural, Feminist, and Materialist Criticism*, ed. by Mary A. Favret and Nicola J. Watson, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) relatively few critics had considered the relationship between labouring poetry and Romanticism in detail.

[81] Zimmerman concentrates on a quite literal 'protest between the lines' of *The Farmer's Boy*, focussing on Bloomfield's inclusion of a footnote in the some editions of the poem after II: ll.341 "from Capt. James Cook's second voyage to liken the damaged class structure on the British farm to the disruption of Tahitian society by Europeans", expanding "the local into the global." See Zimmerman, *LRC*, p.2 of 4.

[82] See Bridget Keegan, 'Lambs to the Slaughter: Leisure and Laboring-Class Poetry', *Romanticism on the Net*, 27 (August 2002), http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2002/v/n 27/006562ar.html, pp.4-6 of 15. Whilst the lambs, obviously a pastoral signifier, frolic in I: ll.312-20, Giles is unable to enjoy the scene like a pastoral swain, because he must *work* (p.5 of 15). In I: ll.341-52, these lambs are slaughtered by the butcher. See p.6 of 15 for Keegan's conclusion that "for Bloomfield and other labouring-class poets, pastoral devices may also convey a subtle critique."

[83] Sales, p.19.

[84] Christmas, p.278.

[85] Stephen Duck, "A Description of a Journey to Marlborough, Bath, Portsmouth, &c. To the Right Honourable the Lord Viscount Palmerston" (1736), ll.367-96, Christmas (2003), pp.165-6.

[86] For social historical accounts see 'Towards Industrial Society', Porter, pp.329-57; John Rule, *Albion's People: English Society 1714-1815* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp.252-4 (and elsewhere); and Roy Porter, 'Science, Provincial Culture and Public Opinion in Enlightenment England', in *The Eighteenth-Century Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1688-1820*, ed. by Peter Borsay (London and New York: Longman, 1990), 243-67.

[87] See Genesis 4:21-2.

[88] For "Colebrook Dale", see Lonsdale (1984), pp.754-5; for extracts from *The Botanical Garden*, see *ibid.*, pp.761-3, or Erasmus Darwin, *The Botanic Garden. A Poem. In Two Parts. Part I. Containing the Economy of Vegetation, Part II. The Loves of the Plants. With Philosophical Notes. The Fourth Edition.* 2 vols. (London: printed for J. Johnson (etc.), 1799), *EPFTD*; for "The Anchorsmiths", see Lonsdale (1984), p.627; for extracts from "Malvern Hills", see *ibid.*, pp.832-3; for "The Chimney Sweeper's Complaint", see *ibid.*, pp.830-1, or Lonsdale (1989), pp.463-4; for extracts from "Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham", see Lonsdale (1984), pp.836-8, or James Bisset, *A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham; With a Brief Description of the Different Curiosities and Manufactories of the Place: Intended as a Guide to Strangers* (Birmingham, 1800), *ECCO*. For "A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham", see pp.9-20; and for "Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham: A Tale", pp.21-36.

[89] See 'Poetry and the Industrial Revolution in the West Midlands *c.*1730-1800', www.search. revolutionaryplayers.org.uk/content/files/60/84/327.txt.

[90] The Scottish pedlar Alexander Wilson, the 'father of American ornithology' as he became known after emigration to Pennsylvania in 1794 (*Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. III: 1780-1800*, ed. by Tim Burke, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003) pp.179), most usually wrote in the diction and verse forms of the Scottish oral tradition. However, "Lochwinnoch. A Descriptive Poem" (1790) is composed of couplets. He includes various views of Scottish industry, such as:

> But these are harsh extremes; rough labour now

Bathes each firm Youth, and hoary Parent's brow; 85
Nought shews, but brisk activity around,
The Plough-boy's song, the tradesman's hamm'ring sound.

See! from yon Vale, in huge enormous height,
Glitt'ring with the windows on th'admiring sight,
The Fabric swells – *within*, ten thousand ways 90
Ingenious BURNS his wond'rous Art displays:
Wheels turning wheels, in mystic throngs appear,
To twist the thread, or tortur'd Cotton tear,
While toiling wenches songs delight the list'ning ear. (ll.84-94)

The above is taken from *The Poems and Literary Prose of Alexander Wilson ... for the First Time fully Collected and Compared with the Original and Early Editions ... Edited ... by the Rev. Alexander B. Grosart ... with Portrait, Illustrations, &c.* 2 vols. (Paisley: Alex Gardner, 1876), *EPFTD*, but was first published in *Poems* (1790). See also Burke, p.191. Interestingly, at one point Wilson fits his "native language" (l.222) into couplets, in the shape of the supposed composition of a local poet:

"How bonny morning speels the eastlin lift,
An' waukens lads an' lassies to their thrift;
Gars lavrocks sing and canty lamies loup, 225
And me mysel' croon cheary on my doup" (ll.222-6)

Grosart's 1876 edition also includes a poem on a labouring theme in octosyllabic couplets, "Verses, Occasioned by Seeing Two Men Sawing Timber in the Open Field, in Defiance of a Furious Storm".

[91] Jago (1715-81), the son of a Warwickshire rector, was educated at Solihull School, where he met William Shenstone, a lifelong friend. Jago followed his father into the church, was appointed curate of Snitterfield (near Stratford) in 1737, and then vicar in 1754. In 1744 he married Dorethea Fancourt, with whom he had seven children. After her death in 1751, he remarried (in 1758) and, sharing Shenstone's passion for landscape gardening, devoted himself to enhancing the grounds of his vicarage. Despite years of neglect, a number of critics have discussed his verse recently. See Tim Fulford, ' "Nature" Poetry', in *The Cambridge Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 109-32 (pp.112-13); Fulford also discusses Jago in his *Landscape, Liberty and Authority: Poetry, Criticism and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). See also Fairer (2003), pp.203-4, Stephen Bending, 'Prospects and Trifles: The Views of William Shenstone and Richard Jago', *Qwerty*, 10 (2000), 125-31, and Rudolf Beck, 'English Poetry and the Early Stages of the Industrial Revolution', *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 27 (2004), 17-36.

[92] Alternatively, Beck sees *Edge-Hill* as an "eighteenth-century 'industrial' georgic" (p.24).

[93] Richard Jago, *From Edge-Hill*, or *The Rural Prospect Delineated and Moralised*, Book III, "The Iron Industry in Birmingham" (Lonsdale's sub-title for this passage), ll.1-12, 42-56, Lonsdale (1984), p.546. Lonsdale uses the 1767 edition, whilst the revised version, published in *Poems, Moral and Descriptive* (London: J. Dodsley etc., 1784), is accessible courtesy of the *EPFTD*.

[94] For an account of Darwin's life and career see Desmond King-Hele, 'Erasmus Darwin', *Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 93: British Romantic Poets, 1789-1832, First Series*, ed. by John R. Greenfield (The Gale Group, 1990), pp.148-59, *LRC*. See also Maureen McNeil, 'Industrialisation, Poetry, and Aesthetics', in *Under the Banner of Science: Erasmus Darwin and His Age* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987).

[95] *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, ed. by Margaret Drabble, 5th edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.255. Cowper wrote that "no poet since Pope" excelled Darwin "in delicacy and harmony of versification" (*Analytical Review*, March 1793, cited by King-Hele, p.5 of 8).

[96] King-Hele, p.4 of 8.

[97] *Ibid.*, p.2 of 8. In total the Notes ran to approx. 100,000 words, "chiefly essays on selected topics in science ... in geology, astronomy, meteorology, and plant physiology." (*Ibid.*, p.4 of 8).

[98] *The Botanic Garden*, I: vi. ll.11-36. The edition used is the *EPFTD* text.

[99] T. F. Henderson and Rev. Michael Marker, 'James Bisset', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 64 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. 5, p.883.

[100] One reason for the neglect of Bisset's works may be his, to the modern-day reader, unsavoury defence of child labour. See his footnote to l.229 (Bisset, p.33).

James Woodhouse

This chapter will illustrate and examine James Woodhouse's writing about labour. He merits a chapter of his own on the basis of both the amount and the quality of his verse, particularly the twenty-eight thousand line autobiographical epic, *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*. In it, Woodhouse devotes hundreds, even thousands of lines to aestheticising both rural and industrial labour. Apart from, like Bloomfield, dramatically revivifying the Duckian mode at the turn of the century, Woodhouse's political and religious radicalism is clearly relevant to the additional themes of complicity with ideology and politically-levelling theology discussed in previous chapters.

Woodhouse was baptized on 18 April 1735 at Rowley Regis, Staffordshire,[1] where he had been born earlier that year. He was the eldest son of Joseph and Mary Woodhouse, freeholders who worked a small farm that had been in the family for over three hundred years. Taught to read and write at school, his formal education nonetheless ended at the age of just eight.[2] Growing to six feet six inches,[3] he married young, to Hannah (the 'Daphne' of his poems), and began working life as a shoemaker.[4] As Keegan has stated, "Eighteenth-and-nineteenth-century British labouring-class poets hailed from a wide variety of primary occupations. However there is one occupation that appears to dominate: shoemaking."[5] In 1759, Woodhouse addressed an elegy to William Shenstone, owner of The Leasowes estate,[6] two miles from where Woodhouse was working in Rowley Regis. Both Shenstone and his publisher, Robert Dodsley, were impressed, and in 1762 published it.[7] The poem "Ridicule" was also published in 1763. Shenstone effectively began acting as a patron to Woodhouse, and although the former died a year later, Dodsley and his brother took over a subscription, published as *Poems on Sundry Occasions* in 1764. It features only one poem not addressed to a patron – a far cry from the lacerating satire directed at Montagu in *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*.

The project 'enjoyed' mixed reviews,[8] but sold well. In 1766 new patrons (Lyttleton and the Montagus)[9] ensured that a second edition appeared as *Poems on Several Occasions*.[10] The *Critical Review* was in no mood for recanting the views first expressed two years previously, stating,

> We have already expressed our opinion very fully of this poetic phenomenon, and the publication before us affords no reason for altering our sentiments ... We should have been sorry, even for his own sake, if the liberality of the public had erected him into a poet by profession; and we shall not be displeased if we never should have another opportunity of reviewing any of his poetry.[11]

The contents again reveal the compliments to patrons that move Christmas to describe Woodhouse as a "sycophant extraordinaire".[12] Comparing the "Advertisement. To the First Edition" of 1764, with "The Author's Apology" from the 1766 second edition, reveals that the fame Woodhouse enjoyed after the 1764 publication helped him to rise in station from "a journeyman shoemaker" to being the keeper of a small school, thanks to "the great and unexpected generosity of my Patrons".[13] Dodsley's introduction to the 1766 edition is also typical of how labouring-class poets throughout the century were presented as 'authentic' labourers, composing at their work which, readers were assured, was not neglected for the frivolous pastime of poetry.[14]

Shortly after publication of the second edition, Woodhouse began working for the Montagus. In 1767 he became land bailiff to Sandleford, their Berkshire estate. After a parting of the ways in 1778 lasting for about three years – ostensibly because of some less than perfect accounting on Woodhouse's part[15] – he later acted as house steward for Montagu in London and Sandleford and was even given responsibility for overseeing the construction of Montagu House in Portman Square.[16] Although less public, the dynamic of the relationship between Woodhouse and Elizabeth Montagu seems to have resembled that between Ann Yearsley and Hannah More, as did the eventual differences between them, a comparison to be returned to later in the chapter. After reconciliation in 1781 (evidence does not appear to survive of how or why this came about) a final irreparable breach occurred in 1788. Montagu, however, continued to pay Woodhouse an annuity of £15, which he apparently accepted.[17]

A new *Poems on Several Occasions* appeared in 1788. Reintroducing himself to the public after twenty-two years, he accounts for his re-emergence in a prefatory "Address", stating that money put by from previous publications is "now at stake for want of employment; with the additional burden of an unhealthy wife, by whom I have had twenty-seven children; some of the few survivors of which number are yet unprovided for." Beyond the insight given into the alleged fecundity of Woodhouse and his wife, the 1788 "Address" is notable for the first published insinuations of his

feud with Montagu.[18] He wrote *Norbury Park* and *Love Letters to My Wife* in 1789, although neither appeared until 1803-4. In later life Woodhouse, with financial backing from James Dodsley,[19] ran a bookshop at 10, Lower Brook Street, Grosvenor Square, London. Most events in his life until this time are described in *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*, written throughout the 1790s, even though only brief extracts were published in his lifetime.[20] He lived until his mid-eighties:

> According to his grandson Woodhouse gave up the bookselling business 'some time before his death', which 'was hastened by being knocked down by the pole of a carriage whilst crossing Orchard and Oxford Streets' ... He died of the injuries he sustained ... in February 1820 at his home in Euston Square.[21]

He was buried in St. George's Chapel ground, near Marble Arch,[22] and died a prosperous man, bequeathing approximately £5000 to his widow.[23]

Until the work of Christmas and Keegan recently, few critics seemed inclined to vindicate Woodhouse's assertion in 1788 that, "If I can flatter myself with having any ability at all, it lies in literary matters."[24] Although by no means every contemporary review of Woodhouse's work was negative,[25] Keegan quotes a damning review of *Norbury Park* in the *Poetical Register* in 1803.[26] The *Monthly Review* wrote even of the 1816 publication of *Crispinus Scriblerus*:

> The editor ... is justly intitled to our thanks for having published a part only, and not the whole, of his friend's manuscript. The artless Crispin ... may ... have been a very good kind of person: but whosoever wrote his life and lucubrations may be assured that he was never a poet.[27]

In fact the "editor" and "friend" named in the given title of *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus ... A novel in verse ... With annotations and commentaries by a friend, Part 1*, was the poet himself.

Probably the most recorded – and memorable – contemporary rejection of Woodhouse's poetic pretensions came from Samuel Johnson[28] who, his curiosity aroused by reports he had heard, actually met the shoemaker on the former's "first visit to Mrs. Thrale's table in 1764."[29] Woodhouse evidently also recalled the meeting.[30] Johnson's reservations were, of course, registered with reference to the 1764 *Poems on Sundry Occasions*. Woodhouse's couplets understandably enough ape the pastoral mode of his first patron, Shenstone, employing the kind of 'artificial'

diction examined in chapter one, a world away from the specificity of *Crispinus Scriblerus*. In "An Elegy to William Shenstone, Esq; of the Lessowes" (1759), flattering Shenstone by petitioning for renewed access to his landscaped gardens after the rioting of the mob, he implores "Pardon, O SHENSTONE! An intruding strain, / Nor blame the boldness of a village swain".[31] Describing the pastoral scene, he writes:

> Here gloomy grottos spread a solemn shade;
> There bench'd alcoves afford their friendly aid: 70
> Here lucid streams in wild meanders stray,
> And ramble wide, to share the smoothest way;
> Or, nobly bold, with unremitting pride,
> O'er stones and fragments pour the impetuous tide;
> While on the margin, with VERTUMNUS, reigns 75
> The blooming FLORA, chequ'ring all the plains;
> And painted kine the flow'ry herbage graze,
> Whose milky store their bill of fare repays;
> While, warbling round, the plumy chorists throng,
> And glad th'horizon with their rural song. (ll.69-80) 80

This is a (perfectly competent) attempt at neo-classical pastoral, aiming at elegance and mellifluence. There are four elongated 'o' sounds in the first eight lines alone, and alliteration throughout: "gloomy grottos", "solemn shade", "streams" and "stray", "While, warbling". It features repetitive end stopping that fragments the couplets into self-contained units (of twelve lines here, eleven are end stopped) and a vocabulary and use of euphemism precluding all specificity: flowers are "blooming FLORA" and "flow'ry herbage", instead of any particular species; cows are "painted kine"; they feed on "a bill of fare" rather than grass and flowers and produce a "milky store"; birds are "plumy chorists". It is hardly surprising that to get noticed by patrons, and so get published, Woodhouse should attempt poems within existing genres to demonstrate his competence to write verse,[32] and *The Critical Review* recorded in its notice of *Poems on Sundry Occasions* how reminiscent these early verses are of those written by many others, including Shenstone himself.[33] The present study is not an appropriate place for a survey of the merits of Woodhouse's early material, since it engages little with labouring themes and aims at some very different ends to those he later pursued, but by definition much of it lacks the zest, verve and experimentation of the generically unique *Crispinus Scriblerus*.

By the time of his long (over twelve hundred and fifty lines of heroic couplets) "The Lessowes. A Poem", mixing pastoral digressions of the kind seen in loco-

descriptive poems with autobiographical recollections and praise of Shenstone, Woodhouse was beginning to display the desire – that would become characteristic of his verse – to rebel against the tight, self-contained couplet:

> For fortune wreaks on me her utmost spight, 141
> And seeks to rob me of that true delight,
> Which I in constant quest of knowledge find,
> The sweet reviver of a pensive mind.
> But not alike are fortune's favourites found; 145
> For he who plann'd this fair Hesperian round,
> Griev'd that one spark of genius should expire,
> With pleasure strung my weak, discordant lyre;
> Nor deafly heard me learning's want repine,
> But, from this copious literary mine, 150
> To ease my mourning muse's discontent,
> Full many a glowing volume frankly lent;
> Nor spurn'd me, scornful, from his social board,
> With frugal bounty hospitably stor'd;
> Where oft my soul in reverie has hung 155
> On the smooth accents of his tuneful tongue ...[34]

In all, the sentence beginning with "But" in l.145 is not concluded until l.164, a full twenty lines later. Twice between ll.145-64 there are four lines without any punctuation stronger than a comma, until the fourth and final line of the sequence. It is not difficult to see why: Woodhouse is not advancing a public argument in the manner of Pope in his *Moral Essays* or satirical verses, and as celebrated by Hunter in "Couplets and Conversation". Instead, he aestheticises memories of the practical support Shenstone gave him, recollections that cannot be readily sub-divided into self-contained couplets. The urge to poeticise continuous experiences was also the stimulus for long passages of *Crispinus Scriblerus* (elsewhere in the poem there *are* just the kind of 'public' arguments that Hunter celebrates), and they likewise compel Woodhouse to accommodates them with necessarily 'looser', fluid couplets that repeatedly run into one another.

It is only recently that critics have acknowledged the great development evident in Woodhouse's later works;[35] *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* is one of the most significant achievements in English labouring-class poetry. The poem is a survey of Woodhouse's life as viewed through the lens of his fictional alter ego Crispin(us),[36] interspersed with lengthy polemical digressions on politics, religion and morality arising out of these experiences. Crispin, the son of

humble, labouring parents, begins his career as a journeyman shoemaker, and ends his days as a prosperous London bookseller. In between he enjoys fleeting fame as a literary curiosity, and endures two decades of working for Vanessa / Scintilla[37] (based on Montagu) before being dismissed. The poem incorporates a multiplicity of literary styles and modes including those appropriate to epic, georgic and aspects of the occupation-specific, self-defining labouring poems explored in earlier chapters, as well as auto/biography, topography and satire, but remains most satisfactory as an epic (albeit of a necessarily unusual kind). In an age when others are compelled to write 'mock epic', Woodhouse has a topic worthy of the form: the struggle of a decent, industrious individual to lead an honest life and create a meaningful poetic identity out of his available poetic tools. In keeping with its epic scale, the poem adopts a bombastic tone, often akin to that struck by Pope in making the public arguments that Hunter details. The tone is rarely such, however, as to preclude detailed description of everyday labouring life, occupations, living conditions, food and animals (and much else), and rarely has recourse to the kind of periphrastic language seen in formal georgic. The poem arguably represents the most comprehensive seizure of labouring-class poetic identity found in eighteenth-century verse.

Like the protagonists of conventional literary epic, Crispin is a figure of universal importance, his individual struggle representative of the collective fight of the labouring class. He is not, however, an 'everyman'; his 'literariness' marks him out as exceptional, and even as the ultimate paradox of the 'labouring poet'. He is the most remarkable of his tribe; if he cannot succeed, then none can, and he comes to conquer the world of letters on behalf of them all.[38] The great 'epic questions' posed are whether he can be justified to write of his adventures, and articulate and condemn social injustice in 'elevated' prosody (see I: ll.195-303). Just as the protagonists of conventional epic engage in superhuman deeds in battle, so Crispin is a warrior engaged in a struggle against social injustice, theological hypocrisy and the prejudice of those who would deny him a literary voice. The relevance of his pseudonym becomes apparent here – Martinus Scriblerus was the ironic figure created by the Scriblerians as the vehicle for satiric abuse directed at perceived follies in letters and learning; St. Crispin was the patron saint of shoemakers. Hence 'Crispinus Scriblerus' is not just a satiric, but a *counter-satiric* creation ("lucubrations" are endeavours of a literary kind composed at night, as befitting the works of a labourer engaged in his

paid occupation during daylight hours).[39] Whereas satire plays little role in conventional western epic, however, Woodhouse's poem is as indebted to the satire of *The Dunciad* as to the heroic deeds and battles of *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad* or *Paradise Lost*.[40] Much of this satire is directed at the two-faced Vanessa / Scintilla, at her greed, pride and vanity, and at the superficiality of her social life. Just as an epic is conventionally ample in geographical scale, so Woodhouse provides a thorough 'tour' of the limits of Crispin's world with detailed passages in chapter one describing Shropshire, Enville, Stourbridge and Old Swinford, Hagley, Lessowes, Birmingham and Wolverhampton. This provincial scale, that would normally suggest the status of mock-heroic, does not belittle the enterprise; rather it makes the telling point that the labouring-classes do not spend their lives traversing the globe – they fight their battle to survive in the same surroundings all their lives. The catalogue of principal characters found in conventional epic is mimicked with detailed accounts of Crispin's patrons and family, all given classical alter egos to provide suitable 'elevation' of style. Other critics have, alternatively, suggested parallels with *The Prelude*.[41]

Crispinus Scriblerus begins in a conventional enough Augustan poetic medium. Woodhouse adheres to such a mode for the purposes of laying out his overall design (demonstrating his verse-writing credentials, and the fitness for verse of his subject matter). Subsequently, by contrast, he is intermittently obliged to innovate because of a desire to write of subjects for which there was no received poetic diction. The first chapter is composed of extremely regular heroic couplets, only once ventures a triplet (I: ll.301-3), and only three times an alexandrine (ll.72, 957, 1774). Of the first one hundred lines, probably ninety per cent are end stopped. Familiar neo-classical euphemism is well in evidence. The indications are of a desire to translate the specific into trite generalisation. Even Woodhouse's own parents become "comely Dame" (l.17) and "honest yeoman" (l.40); England is "Albion" (l.62). These same opening lines feature "tuneful tribes" (l.6), "never-fading bays" (l.8), an "oaten pipe" (l.9, an allusion to Milton's *Lycidas*),[42] "Heav'n's fair temple" (l.12) and "blighted laurels" (l.72). The lines are regularly divided (by the caesura) into symmetrical halves, in which the two balanced elements are complementary or contrasting (e.g. ll.11, 14, 18, 22, 24, 31, 35). This symmetry is regularly underpinned by flecks of alliteration. The verse is dense with abstractions: Fame, Pride, Lust, Sloth, Piety, Love, Virtue, Vice, Merit, Ambition, Ostentation, Candour, economy, care, toil. Woodhouse even devotes many lines to *avoiding* giving a name to his place

of birth, mother or father (see ll.1-195). The movement is away from particularities of person or place to the received, generalised language of neo-classical poetry. It is against these painstakingly acquired habits that Woodhouse has to increasingly rebel throughout the poem in order to be true to his 'new' subject matter of industrialisation, poverty, oppression, and labouring-class discontent. As chapter one proceeds, Woodhouse is finally driven to greater specificity – naming particular animals, insects, and children's games (such as marbles and blind man's buff). Woodhouse even alludes to having played "... numerous more, fond gratifying games, / Ne'er honour'd, yet, with apt poetic names"[43] (hence making the point himself that he wants to detail specifics for which there are no suitably 'poetic' terms). Similarly, he records his prowess as a long-jumper and a footballer (ll.1763-4), despite the lack of classical precedent for doing so.

By the end of chapter I, as part of a tour of Crispin's environs, Woodhouse surveys the Midlands, including the industrial heartland of Birmingham and Wolverhampton. In doing so he also exploits poetic opportunities, earlier explored by Jago, created by a 'new', necessarily 'de-formalised' industrial vocabulary. The following extract describes a variety of labouring experiences and processes involving mining, and work in furnaces and forges. It is necessary to quote a substantial passage to convey the power, rhythm and momentum of Woodhouse's verse:

> Farther, below each landscape's grassy floor,
> Earth's teeming womb contains uncounted store. 1425
> O'er precincts, large, in stoney strata spread,
> Crude Iron rests within its orey bed;
> Which, rais'd by curious Arts, and wrought by skill,
> Deals countless helps o'er every dale and hill;
> And, Proteus-like, with ductile pow'rs endued, 1430
> Assuming shape, and tint, and attitude,
> Accommodates in figure, size, and face,
> The wants, and whims, of Man's fastidious Race.
> Coal's black bitumen deeper still retires;
> Like sable-clouds concealing latent fires; 1435
> Which, when extracted from the hollow'd rocks,
> To birth, obstetric, brought, in solid blocks,
> It shines, bless'd substitute for solar pow'rs,
> To chear the heart, to cheat dull evening hours,
> And cherish chilly Man, with gladdening glow, 1440
> When Earth lies shrowded in her sheets of snow —
> Or, with its kind communicated heat,
> To dress each dish of multifarious meat;
> And, hardening, softening, fusing, pow'rs impart

To countless substances, in endless Art. 1445
In Parts thro' prospects scattered far, and near,
Pale-glowing gleams, and flickering flames, appear,
Like new volcanoes, 'mid deep darkness nurs'd,
From cooking coals, in ruddy brilliance, burst,
While smokey curls, in thickening columns, rise, 1450
Obscure the landscapes, and involve the skies —
Still, as the sanguine blaze, beneath, ascends,
And deepening blushes with heav'n's vapours blends,
Diffusing, all around, red, lurid, light,
And paint in parts, the negroe-cheeks of Night; 1455
Deep, sullen sounds, thro' all the region roll,
Shocking, with groans, and sighs, each shuddering Soul!
Here clanking engines vomit scalding streams,
And belch vast volumes of attendant steams –
There thundering forges, with pulsations loud 1460
Alternate striking, pierce the pendant cloud;
While to these distant hills, respiring slow,
Furnaces' iron lungs loud-breathing blow,
Breaking abrupt on Superstition's ear,
And shrink the shuddering frame with shivering fear: 1465
Obtruding on the heart, each heaving breath,
Some vengeful fiend, grim delegate of Death! (I: ll.1424-67) [44]

Woodhouse's subject steadily develops into one outside the boundaries of classical diction. He unashamedly adopts a bombastic tone, befitting the scale of his truly heroic topic; this new subject matter is hyperbolic in its massiveness. Throughout, Woodhouse imposes himself on the couplets, rather than the other way around, refusing to be imprisoned or intimidated. Of four verse paragraphs above, only the first features more than one sentence; ll.1436-43, eight lines in total, consist of only one sentence, as do ll.1446-55, ten lines in all. The reason is clear – rather than advancing an argument through a series of self-contained propositions that contribute like building blocks to an overall hypothesis, Woodhouse describes a multi-faceted industrial scene. The many sights, sounds and smells cannot be neatly sub-divided – they all contribute to the overall impact of the scene. To separate the account into discrete units would be to falsify and dilute the synaesthesia of the experience.

The passage is a good example of the mixed modes that recur throughout the poem, and of the transitions from one to another. The opening (ll.1424-33) resembles formal georgic. Familiar Augustan euphemism is present in the first couplet (ll.1424-5). The vocabulary in the first two verse paragraphs is also slightly more 'scientific' than normally seen in the manner of writing with which I am centrally concerned, and

similar to that found in formal georgic: "strata", "ductile", "obstetric". As it proceeds, however, the passage *necessarily* generates a new poetic vocabulary and new kinds of mimetic verbal energy. More than Duck (when writing of agriculture) or Collier, Woodhouse truly extends the range of diction / vocabulary available in eighteenth-century poetry. Whereas some of the terms Duck and Collier use have 'polite' pastoral counterparts, Woodhouse is *forced* to specify, using the only available terms for the phenomena he describes (e. g. "clanking engine"). That he does so within the amber of neo-classical versification, suited to different aims, results in unusual and distinctive incongruity. The reference to the "Proteus-like"[45] iron in l.1430 is significant, and even self-reflexive insofar as the poem continually shifts between two or more modes. The theme of alternating between two or more identities is recurrently conspicuous, as seen in the characterisation of Montagu as Vanessa / Scintilla, and the wonder of those astonished in chapter IV that Crispin should be both labourer *and* poet.

That Woodhouse writes in the Duckian mode can be seen in a number of aspects of the passage, mostly related to his depiction of the synaethesic nature of the scene. His manipulation of sound is excellent, with repeated alliteration and onomatopoeia to evoke the sights, sounds and smells of the furnace. There is scarcely a line that does not fit into the first category, whilst into the second come "groans", "sighs", "clanking", "belch", "thundering", "breathing", "shuddering", "shivering", "striking" and "heaving". There is a sustained emphasis on the *physical properties* of the objects and phenomena described, as when Collier, Leapor, Blamire or Wilson write of food. Woodhouse implies, and keeps, an undertaking to focus on the "shape, and tint, and attitude" (l.1431) and "figure, size, and face" (l.1432) of his subject matter. For instance, the coal is extracted in "solid blocks"; it imparts its "hardening, softening, fusing, pow'rs" in the service of mankind; the visual contrast for the reader-observer is between the "Pale-glowing gleams, and flickering flames ... / Like new volcanoes" and the "deep darkness" surrounding them, a contrast replicated by the "red, lurid, light" set against "the negroe-cheeks of Night". Industry is not just described in these lines, but brought to mimetic life in all its "ruddy brilliance". One is put in mind of Yeats' celebrated oxymoron that "a terrible beauty is born" by Woodhouse's capture of the magnificent *violence* of nascent industry: "Here clanking engines vomit scalding streams, / And belch vast volumes of attendant steams –". His lines suggest that these occurrences fundamentally disrupt the balance of life itself, as

understood for millennia. The rhythm and sheer power of industry imposes itself on the surrounding natural world: the "thundering forges" with their "Alternate striking", "pierce the pendant cloud". The "slow" but natural respiration of the hills is obscured by the "loud breathing" of the furnaces' powerful, but artificial, "iron lungs". In short, Woodhouse extends the experience on offer within English poetry (going into a good deal more detail than Jago, and writing before "Ramble of the Gods through Birmingham" and other industrial poems of the late 1790s and 1800s), colonising his medium with genuinely new content.

Woodhouse first aestheticises rural labour in chapter I, depicting the farm work of tenant cottagers in various parts of the surrounding Midlands area where Crispin grew up (ll.560-673), including at one point a description of an unusual and elaborate exercise in drainage and land reclamation (ll.592-7). Later, he turns to an account of his work at Sandleford, detailing both of his lengthy periods of service. The first (corresponding to his 'real' employment between 1767-78) begins in chapter four after Crispin's temporary fame as a literary curiosity; it ends at the culmination of chapter five.[46] Scintilla then re-emerges in chapter seven, and chapters nine, ten and eleven cover Woodhouse's second period in her service (1781-8), overseeing the building of Montagu House and acting as house steward during the time of the celebrated bluestocking gatherings. This period of employment comes to an end by the climax of chapter fourteen, when Crispin is again cast out. Some of the most memorable lines describing his second period in Montagu's service record his resentment at attending as a servant in the 1780s on the same celebrities who feted him as a fellow guest at soirees in the 1760s (see X: ll.1499 fol.).

Woodhouse's passage in chapter four on his time as land bailiff runs to some six hundred lines, often going into great detail about agricultural processes and tasks, supplemented with individual experiences of performing them. He begins with an account of the size of the task facing him upon arrival at Sandleford (IV: ll.908-42), and the security measures necessary "To keep marauders from forbidden grounds" (l.943 fol.). The passages that follow, in particular, are reminiscent of the kind of material found in formal georgic. Woodhouse describes how starving couch-grass, suitable for accommodating nothing but "rough, and acid, herbage" (l.955) is set on fire to "...reduce / The former mischief to prolific use." (ll.959-60). In its place, "Fed, by the saline grass" (l.961), turnips can grow (l.962), "Which, to fond Herds and Flocks, thro' Winter, yield / Rich, fat'ning food, and meliorate the Field." (ll.963-4).

A passage follows on the benefits of clover, the consumption of which "makes fair sheep with fuller fleeces shine" (l.973).

The lengthy passage on labour in chapter four, however, is experiential rather than prescriptive, often employing the specific vocabulary common to labourers themselves. These characteristics are mingled with conventional elements of neo-classical versification. A section on getting rid of weeds and planting clover in their stead (ll.1051-72), for instance, actually lists the "apt utensils" with which the job is done: "pickaxe, bill, and spade" (l.1062). The succeeding passage, on swamp drainage (ll.1073-82) specifies each plant it is necessary to remove, and describes its properties – "The Cat-tail's halbert"[47] with its "sable brush" (l.1077); "The bayonetted reed, and javelin'd Rush –" (l.1078); "The quiver'd Equisetum" (l.1079); and "The rough-rob'd Moss" (l.1080). Distinctive, unusual and highly particularised processes are described in some detail, such as those connected with the ongoing fight against weeds: a passage begins "From each rebellious, unproductive, lugg, / Of quivering bog, black, spongey peat was dug" (ll.1084-5), before going on to depict "rich cinereous refuse" (l.1088) – i.e. ashes – being spread over "every freshen'd field, or moist morass" (l.1099) in order to regenerate them. Crispin:

> Made Art, and Industry, with Care, combine,
> To sink the fosse, or form the latent mine;
> Conducting springs thro' adits, hid, below,   1095
> To cut off secret aids, and starve the foe; (ll.1093-6)

This unusual scene appears to describe how weeds would be starved by passing water through a horizontal entrance (an "adit" is an opening into a mine). By contrast the desirable grasses that would grow instead, and could be fed on by sheep and cattle, would draw "their humid food from oozey bed" (l.1097). The word "oozey" is typical of the informal, improvised vocabulary with which Woodhouse conveys the physical properties of the substances he describes, similarly with the "spongey" peat in l.1085, the "ropey" root of the Restharrow plant in l.1105, the "fringey" shoot of the Mayweed in l.1106, and the many breeds of "spiney" thistles in l.1107.

This is followed by an extremely specific passage on the weeds to be exterminated – crow-foots and campions (l.1104); restharrows (l.1105); mayweed (l.1106); thistles (l.1107); charlocks and mustard seeds (l.1109); poppies (l.1110); chrysanthemums (l.1111); docks (l.1113); and mulleins (l.1115). The physical

appearance, and characteristics, of these plants are described and even evoked, with attention paid not just to their colour, but their solidity and texture, and even their smell. The campions are "red and white"; the restharrows possess "stinking stem, and ropey root"; the mayweeds "fulsome, fringey, shoot". The "multifarious breeds" of "spiney" thistles are "winging wide their cursed seeds ... O'er districts". The "pompous" poppies are "bright, with scarlet crests". The chrysanthemums, "whose tents large tracts infold", are "Deckt with gay uniforms, of green and gold". The "Stiff" docks are "erect, mere Subalterns in mien, / Whose flag-staffs, long, like ensigns fluttering seen". The white mulleins are "tall, with velvet robes array'd, / Of paler green, but crown'd with gay cockade". In these passages (IV: ll.1083-1122) Woodhouse continues to fall back on existing euphemistic precedent for writing about topics such as fighting weeds. Hence the useful grasses cultivated are "Invited emigrants of noblest Race / To occupy proscrib'd Usurpers' place." (ll.1099-1100). Crispin aims "To prosecute sharp war, in every shape", to " ... let no short-liv'd enemy escape", and to drive "... each weedy camp from upland height" (ll.1101-3). The weeds " ... he assail'd in front, in flank, and rear, / Till scarce a troop, or straggler, dar'd appear" (ll.1119-20). This kind of euphemism, not exactly mock-heroic since there is a 'real' battle of a kind described, is here a means of lending dramatic force and energy and appears only when agricultural topics are addressed. Most associated with the georgic mode, this kind of 'elevated' euphemism results in these passages from Woodhouse's technique of 'mingling': bringing together specificity, synaesthetic description and the kind of improvised and informal vocabulary listed above with the diction of the classical 'kind' identified with detailed description of this subject matter. When writing of industry, or the struggle to achieve recognition as a labouring poet, or of the injustice of the exploitation of the working classes, in the light of any precedent for incorporating it as a means of aggrandising the topic, such euphemism is absent.

Chapter four continues with what was surely a new occupation within labouring verse, gamekeeping: "The woods were watch'd – patrol'd – and bastion'd round, / Till pilfering thief, or poacher, scarce was found" (ll.1125-6). Crispin claims to have greatly increased the output of the estate – "...annual produce rose, on wretched grounds, / From nearly nothing to ten hundred pounds!" (ll.1145-6) – before detailing the harebrained agricultural schemes which he claims were foisted upon him by his employers (see ll.1234-51). This leads into a lengthy and highly particularised

account of being compelled to order seeds from Scotland (ll.1292-1315). Next is an equally detailed passage on the problems that resulted, both in terms of extreme weather conditions and the scavenger birds that plundered the planted seed before it had had time to grow (and of the eventual need to kill them to protect the seed, ll.1344-1469). These lines are succeeded by a long passage even more impressive in its specificity and rich detail (ll.1498-1584) describing seeds imported from Siberia, and the attempts to coax them into life by mixing the soil with "rancid Oil", nitre, salt and malt "To give fresh vigour to the steril soil / And make those barren knowles like banks of Nile." (ll.1516-7). The "morbid field" (l.1513) is "...thickly strew'd with refuse dregs of salt", (l.1514), the awkwardness of pronunciation of "thickly strew'd", a characteristic attempt to suggest aurally the viscosity of the mixture of earth and salt produced. Tartarean oats (l.1518) and Siberian barley (l.1526) are tried with equal lack of success. Then a variety of techniques involving treating the ground with "Exsiccant Soot, procur'd at large expence" (l.1536) and digging "Dry sandy loams from central depths" and laying them over "every ruin'd lugg" (ll.1540-1) are likewise attempted.

In order to help grow potatoes the entire labouring population of the estate is involved in trying to spread a specially created manure:

> Females, in flocks, with children, rambling round,
> O'er steril Commons' long neglected ground, 1545
> And every barren bank, in lonely lane,
> With feet all froze, and hands all pinch'd with pain,
> Collected steril moss, in tiny scraps,
> Dispos'd in distant heaps from loaded laps —
> While mowers, ranging o'er heath, hill, or knowle, 1550
> The spreading fern, from starving pauper, stole —
> Dragg'd leagues, from ev'ry wind, in loitering wains,
> Amidst astonished Nymphs, and simpering Swains:
> At home, heap'd high, in proud prodigious piles,
> O'er which each wondering Traveller stares and smiles.(IV: ll.1544-55)1555

The description extends until IV: ll.1575, describing the spreading of this manure. As with the rural bread, cheese and whig described by Blamire and Wilson, this is the kind of specialised experience rarely on offer even in the georgic: one notes, as well, the allusion to the consequences of performing this labour in l.1547, usually precluded by the laudatory function of georgic. In chapter five, Woodhouse describes the circumstances of his first dismissal by Montagu (ll.1531-90). In chapters nine (ll.786-

1125), ten (ll.1-100, 219-510, 824-1046, 1357-1592) and eleven (ll.29-114) he describes work involving killing game, supervising other staff (particularly ordering and cooking food), and waiting on guests at the bluestocking gatherings. This sheer range of aestheticised labouring experience establishes the poem as quite possibly the most all encompassing in this regard of any single work throughout the century, but many of these later passages describe personal experiences of working for Montagu, and rarely does Woodhouse again depict the highly specialised labour of whole groups in as much intimate detail as in chapter four.

The massive scope of *Crispinus Scriblerus* means, however, that it has other dimensions meriting attention. Unlike the earlier eighteenth-century poets of labour, such as Duck, Collier or Tatersal, Woodhouse writes from within the workplace, but also extensively generalises from outside it. There are lengthy passages on everything from highly detailed reflections on animals,[48] to digressions on politics and labouring-class discontent, to religion, and even the fight to become accepted as a labouring poet. The following passage details the reactions of others to Woodhouse's emergence as a poet, in the 1760s:

> 'Twas wond'rous, then, a Bardling should be found 183
> To twang the Lyre on aught but classic ground –
> Who dar'd presume to print poetic page, 185
> In such a letter'd, such enlighten'd, Age;
> Except some critical, some courtly, Cook,
> Form'd bill of fare, or dish'd the dainty Book.
> Some read with rapture and some drawl'd with doubt,
> 'Twas long since Duck had thresh'd his harvest out – 190
> And, since his day, no Rustic had been seen,
> Who sung so deftly on the daisied green! (IV: ll.183-92)[49]

The allusion to Duck suggests that Woodhouse sees himself in a line of poetic descent, a line that evidently seemed to him (wrongly) to have long died out. Indeed, throughout his career Woodhouse was repeatedly identified, and compared, with Duck.[50] Poetically, Woodhouse's greater success goes some way towards consummating what Duck began, but could not see through himself: the fluent expression both of individual and collective labouring experience reconciled – or mingled – with the poetic idioms of the day. By writing, and eventually publishing *The Thresher's Labour*, Duck created the potential at least to claim a public role as a poetic spokesperson for his fellow labourers (especially in view of the repeated use of

"we" throughout the poem). Woodhouse certainly does not achieve *this* – little of the poem was published in his lifetime, and it was not published in its entirety until seventy-six years after his death. Even this far into the eighteenth century, it was not, seemingly, possible for the labouring-class poet to publish great verse celebrating a labouring background – or at least not if it was as politically radical as Woodhouse's.[51]

What Woodhouse includes in the passage above goes well beyond anything found in the poetry of Duck and his respondents / imitators in its condemnation of the treatment of would-be labourer bards. Woodhouse repeatedly records past indignities in order to charge his so-called 'betters' with culpability, employing bitterness, sarcasm and irony. In IV: ll.353-72, he admonishes "peers" (l.359) and "learned Lords" (l.361) for regarding him as no more than a "versifying Clown" (l.355) and "A rude, unletter'd and unburnish'd, Boor, / With Court-Distinctions at his Cottage door!" (ll.357-8). He also admonishes them for pretending to be "constant Friends" (l.364) whereas really they only come out of curiosity to see a celebrated oddity.

Woodhouse goes even further on occasion, accusing those he attacks of treating him as no more than an animal trained to perform circus tricks:

> As tutor'd Bears are led from place, to place, 451
> Displaying biped gait and burlesque grace;
> Their action clumsey, and their shape uncouth,
> While grunting bagpipe greets the gaping youth;
> And, with most solemn phiz, and upright air, 455
> Make witlings titter, whilst the ignorant stare –
>
> As dancing Dogs make Oafs and Children, swarm;
> Dress – mien – demeanour - all in human form –
> As Monkeys, rear'd erect, on paws, or breech,
> Well mimic Man in all but laugh, and speech – 460
> Or as, from street to street, queer Camel's shown,
> From other beasts, by pipe and tabor, known;
> Tho' seldom eye perceives a bungling brute
> Whose make, and motion, less with music suit;
> So was he sent the twofold City through, 465
> For Cits, like Swains, are pleas'd with something new,
> That each Subscriber's eyes might freely range
> O'er Clown, so clever! Spectacle, so strange! (IV: ll.451-68)[52]

Woodhouse's poetic momentum can be seen in that the above, characteristically, is all one sentence, completely overcoming the challenges posed by rigorous end stopping.

The distribution of pauses does not so much mimic as reproduce those of 'natural' speech, resulting in the most complete mingling of the vocabulary of everyday life and the conventions of neo-classical versification in this study. This ability is crucial to Woodhouse's creation of an everyday narrative voice. His command is such that he is rarely forced into manipulating 'natural' word order to engineer the rhyme at every twentieth syllable, something even the most celebrated practitioners of the couplet are regularly compelled to do. He is propelled by a presiding passion that generates poetic innovation, verbal inventiveness and great poetic energy. The rhymes are seldom repetitive as he launches himself through lengthy passages of hundreds of lines at a time, barely using the same rhyme twice, his ingenuity rarely lapsing despite the pressure to maintain momentum and variation throughout the course of twenty-eight thousand lines. His sheer force of angry resentment recurrently causes him to break the bonds of any poetic formality in order to 'speak freely'. An apt comparison here is with Pope's celebrated 'sporus' passage from *Epistle to Arbuthnot*.[53] Pope often elects to write his satire (as frequently in *The Dunciad*) with a degree of at least superficial detachment in order to facilitate the kind of density of allusion and suggestion seen within the compact, economical self-contained couplet spoken of elsewhere in this study. In the 'sporus' passage he foregoes the freedom to produce such couplets to create instead a passage of genuine sequential energy fuelled by sheer, sustained, vitriol and held together by force of association as the allusion to the "Butterfly" (l.308) leads in turn to Pope's comparison of Sporus with other members of the animal kingdom, including the Bug (l.309), the spaniels (l.313), the Toad (l.319), and the "Amphibious Thing" (l.326); just as the Woodhouse extract (above) generates references to, in turn, Bears, Dogs, Monkeys, and the Camel. The effect of the two passages, and the reasons for their power and success, are not at all dissimilar.

The form in which narrative was most frequently conveyed by the final decade of the century was, of course, the novel; and Woodhouse referred to *Crispinus Scriblerus* as his 'Novel in Verse'.[54] Its inter-generic nature is clearly one of the most aesthetically radical elements of the poem.[55] Woodhouse's achievement is to take material that he knows *requires* the democracy and freedom of the novel and pour it into verse. In doing so he defiantly cocks a snook at the Scriblerians who think labouring-class bards cannot write poetry, forcing the heroic couplet not just to accommodate his material but to bend with great flexibility. Woodhouse redefines our conceptions of the couplet, revolutionising the content it is capable of transmitting –

and the mode of transmission itself. Hence calling the poem his "Novel in Verse" was not idle metaphor. Rather it was a true statement of his intent to merge the possibilities afforded by the two to initiate the kind of aesthetic 'third option' he deemed necessary for the important task of the creation of a labouring poem of epic proportions.

A number of questions emerge about this technical success. Why is Woodhouse able to versify everyday labouring experiences successfully when others struggled? One factor is obviously that he writes, often, about forces for which there was little poetic precedent, or received attitude. The absence of an 'appropriate' poetic diction in which to write about some of his material is merely a symptom of this larger issue. There was no traditional guidance about what or how to feel about such phenomena as industry, the emergence of the labouring poet, or labouring-class discontent, and nor could such topics simply be subsumed into (for instance) the pattern of the seasons. Yet he writes about mighty issues that merited, and even demanded, a powerful response. It may be more apt to say of Woodhouse not that he colonised an old medium with new material, but that he took hold of, and revivified it: hence the significance of his working (and thinking) unit being the verse paragraph rather than the couplet. A preliminary diagnosis of the tremendous poetic energy he generates (or perhaps 'harnesses') would presumably have to note that it was produced as part of a verse response to such factors as a new and rapidly changing industrial and social landscape, fresh political ideas and new religious perspectives (see below). Even so, others were living and working in this same climate and did not – or could not – respond with anything like this vitality. External factors can only explain so much; at some level Woodhouse's individual ability and creativity must be at the forefront of any explanation of the pouring forth of poetic inspiration that led to his greatest composition.

It is certainly not just the form (or aesthetic achievement) of *Crispinus Scriblerus* that is radical, however, as suggested by the content of some of the passages already quoted. The poem's politics inform Woodhouse's radical levelling theology, and vice versa. He introduces explicit political protest / discontent / polemic on a grand (epic) scale into English verse. (Woodhouse's contemporaries John Frederick Bryant, John Learmont and Joseph Mather, amongst others, also infused poetic form with such content, but not on anything like this scale). There is no longer any need to attempt to 'read silences' or interpret subtexts, as critics have done in

work on earlier labouring poets in claiming that their verse contains submerged radicalism. Woodhouse provides hundreds of lines at a time in which he overtly castigates the rich for their greed, their exploitation of the poor and their denial of a literary voice to the labouring populace.

The earliest explicit theory of exploitation in labouring-class poetry (of which I am aware) derives from Bryant's "Morning" (1787).[56] Consisting of three hundred and five lines of unrhymed pentameters, the poem is a hybrid of styles, mixing proto-socialist sentiment with pastoral references to "choiry groves" (l.11) and "limpid streams" (l.12). That the two seem so incongruous merely underlines the absence of any clear poetic vocabulary with which to write about new political developments. At one stage Bryant includes an extended vignette on the exploitation of the labouring poor by their masters, which can only be described as political polemic:

> O black Ingratitude! O shameful Pride!
> Whose cold contempt insults the honest poor, 260
> To whose humility and toil ye owe,
> Next the Divine permission (gracious giv'n
> And often unexpectedly resum'd)
> For all your superfluity and state.
> Their ready hands with patience hold the plough, 265
> And spread the latent harvest o'er your land;
> Their daily labour cultivates the ground,
> With ev'ry plant our happy climate yields;
> While the poor working manufact'rer's art
> Clothes and accommodates the princely peer. 270
> See yonder scaffold-girded building rise
> Beneath the skilful workmen's busy hands:
> Mark too the active labourers, that hard
> Their scanty wages earn, bearing aloft
> The ponderous materials for the pile; 275
> And let the tenant of magnificence
> Respect the hands that rais'd the stately dome.[57]

Here Bryant equates labouring-class agricultural workers with their industrial counterparts and clearly asserts that it is because of their poverty and industry that "the princely peer" and "the tenants of magnificence" can live in luxury. For the first time in labouring-class poetry, the labouring classes are explicitly identified as a group with common material interests undermined by the exploitation of another interest group.[58] The poet writing about urban labour has a different relationship to his 'masters' than his rural counterparts; whereas both farmer and farm-hands want, and

benefit from, a good harvest, a metal worker or builder's labourer (for instance) has no such common cause with his (possibly anonymous) employer. It might even be said that once this class-conscious 'protest' finds its way into verse, the subject matter almost automatically begins to move away from the description of labour itself examined by this study.

Woodhouse, however, combines both description *and* polemic. Despite writing as early as the 1790s, like Bryant, he quite clearly sees rich and poor as interest groups or 'classes' within the (proto) socialist sense of the term:

> Behold! Ye Rich! the wretch'd brood around! 747
> Who dig your dismal mines, and work your ground –
> Ply countless curious Arts, that You may 'scape
> All want, in real, or unreal, shape! ... 750
>
> Princes and Peers, for Horses, or for Hounds,
> Expend, in mansions, twice ten thousand pounds; 790
> While those that furnish all, yield all defence,
> Crowd Kraals that ne'er cost half ten thousand pence! ...
>
> What! Ostentatious Monsters! Shall your Beast
> Better than Brethren sleep! Than Sisters feast!
> Shall sterile Strumpets live more costly Lives
> Than fond, affianced, pure, productive Wives? 800
> Shall clam'rous Broods, for bread, 'midst plenty, cry,
> And skill'd Mechanics, prest with penury, die?
> While You, with Pomp and Luxury, still devour
> What wise Heav'n meant for all Men's dow'r!(III: ll.747-50, 789-92, 797-804)

The rich spend far more on accommodation for their horses and hounds than the poor are able to spend on their dwellings. To add insult to injury, it is the labour of the poverty-stricken that "furnish(es) all", an observation echoing Bryant's. Such passages permeate the poem, material far removed from the verse of labouring poets of Duck's generation, and unthinkable before *c.*1780. As Christmas writes,

> This is an incendiary poetics ... Specific class criteria – imagining the workers as a group whose interests diverge from the interests of the landowners, and imagining a more egalitarian distribution of wealth – are more boldly underlined in Woodhouse's *Crispinus Scriblerus* than in any other plebeian text written in the century.[59]

Many of the most politically radical figures associated with the poetry of labour from about 1770 onwards were particularly religious.[60] It is no coincidence

that a number – such as N. Elliot and John Lucas – were also shoemakers or cobblers,[61] and Keegan has done most to date to examine why so many labouring poets of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries should have pursued this occupation.[62] She shows why shoemakers had particular opportunities to write poetry compared with those in other labouring occupations, how and why many were radical,[63] and notes that numerous shoemaker poets were also religious dissenters.[64] As I have argued, levelling political ideas were the inevitable consequence of the interpretation of Christianity (what I have termed 'New Testament Christianity' or, in Nietzschean parlance, 'slave morality') of many labouring-class poets during the eighteenth century (even when these poets either avoided, or did not explicitly foresee these consequences). 'New Testament Christianity' was increasingly furthered throughout the century and beyond by the rise of certain (non-conformist / dissenting) religious groups, sects, and even individuals.[65] It is noteworthy here that the shoemaker poet Thomas Olivers, for instance, hearing Whitefield preach at Bristol, converted to Methodism at a society in Bradford, Wiltshire. At Wesley's personal request he subsequently became an itinerant preacher, before Wesley eventually made him director of a Methodist press.[66] Other shoemaker poets, including N. Elliot, James Lackington, John Blackwell and Thomas Cooper, were also preachers.[67]

Woodhouse does not describe shoemaking in *Crispinus Scriblerus*, a curious omission given the lengthy accounts of his other various labours. He does not, however, hide his links to the trade, at one point expressing displeasure at being publicly described as a cobbler rather than a cordwainer.[68] Like numerous of his shoemaker-brethren Woodhouse appears to have become a Wesleyan Methodist (there was a substantial expansion of both of Methodism and other dissenting sects in this country between *c.*1740 and *c.*1840).[69] Rupert Davies sets out a number of characteristics that he alleges were "the norm" (in one way or another) in the beliefs of the many, varied, eighteenth-century Methodist sects. On the basis of a number, it is not difficult to see why Methodism attracted those already inclined towards levelling political convictions, and encouraged such convictions within those not already predisposed to them. For instance, Methodism was characterised by "the conviction that doctrine which is not proved in devotion and life and does not issue in practical charity is valueless".[70] Another characteristic is "the desire to make known the Gospel, and above everything else the love and pity of God for *each individual* sinner, on the widest possible scale" (my italics). Another is "a generous concern for

the material as well as the spiritual welfare of the underprivileged." (my italics). Finally, Methodists were concerned with "the development of a Church Order in which the laity stands alongside the ministry, with different but equally essential functions ..."[71] By the end of the century, "The Methodists were mostly from ... the working class",[72] and democratic sympathies manifested themselves in one sect that was an offshoot of Methodism, the Bible Christian Society, in the facilitation of "the full authorization of women itinerant preachers".[73]

Woodhouse names and celebrates both Wesley and George Whitefield in the poem (see XII: l.687). The following passage, in which Woodhouse describes his conception of heaven, amply demonstrates the levelling notions implicit in his brand of Christianity:

> The multitudes that there compose the Crowd 1131
> Are not the Rich – the Pow'rful – Vain – or Proud!
> Not Mobs made up of King, Prince, Peer, and Priest,
> But Millions of the meanest – lowest – least!
> The friendless – poor – forlorn – compose the Throng, 1135
> From every Kindred – Nation – People – Tongue – ...
>
> There all are equal! Not one Soul would claim
> Superior place, or favour – pow'r, or fame – 1150
> Nor would one Christian heart, while kept sincere,
> Expect pre-eminence, for Merits here.
> Merit's no word, with God, in sense, or sound
> In faithful nomenclature never found.
> True Christians know God gave them all they have – 1155
> That faith might justify – and Grace must save. (VIII: ll.1131-6, 1149-56)

The potential political subversiveness is clear, and Woodhouse even uses the word "levelling" to describe his aims (VIII: l.1190). Whereas Whitefield preached a Calvinist doctrine of predestination restricting salvation to the chosen, Wesley preached an 'open' theology, advocating the view that "the simple faith that Christ died for your sins was all that was necessary for salvation, anyone's salvation".[74] A number of critics sound the cautionary note that Wesley himself was a political conservative.[75] The important point, however, is that the doctrine of universal salvation of souls was clearly a levelling idea and a potential means of eroding existing boundaries between the social orders. A number of poets from marginalised groups celebrate it on precisely these grounds: the slave poet Phillis Wheatley, for

instance, in the poem on Whitefield's death that made her famous, praised him because "He prayed that grace in *every* heart might dwell". (my italics).[76]

Woodhouse does not just advance the view, however, that the poor should adopt an attitude of resignation in this life in order to receive reward in the next. Rather, in a logical extension of the doctrine of universal salvation, he repeatedly stresses that existing class differences *in this life* are unjust, and contrary to God's Will. This crucial distinction is first explicitly made in the claim that, "All pow'r's of God! And every soul on Earth / From Him derives an equal right at birth" (VI: ll.420-1). The theme receives further expression in the following:

> "With heavenly Justice will such a scheme accord?
> One starve, a Labourer – while one struts, a Lord? 1225
> One with each luxury, in profusion, fed;
> A Brother cringing for a crust of bread? ...
>
> "God ne'er could sanction such a partial Pact,
> Nor will His Word confirm so foul an Act! 1235
> 'Twas the vile Offspring of the human Mind,
> The base, the monstrous, birth, of curs'd Mankind;
> That One should rule thus insolent, and rash,
> While crowds sustain the labour, and the lash! (IX: ll.1224-7, 1234-9)

There are literally thousands of lines on this theme, far more than can be adequately addressed here (a highly selective list of such passages would have to include VI: ll.415-610, VII: ll.769-86, VIII: ll.1123-1214). If nothing else, the amount of such material in the poem poses, yet again, searching questions about the ability of Marxist (-inspired) theories to conceptualise the role of religion in labouring-class poetic agitation for social and political equality. Christianity appears in the poem not as a conservative creed advocating earthly resignation to one's Divinely-appointed lot, but as a Nietzschean will-to-power of the labouring class. It is a vital point, however, that whilst he was undeniably radical, Woodhouse was no revolutionary. Violent revolution was not compatible with his brand of levelling theology celebrating the meek, mild and virtuous, and seeking social change by stealth and evolution:

> Yet think not, Ye, possest of temporal Pow'r,
> Who with the Beast and Dragon, reign your Hour, 560
> Crispinus aim'd to rouze the abject Breed,
> Provok'd with Insult, and opprest with Need,
> From Duty to withdraw — to storm your Doors —
> Attack your Persons, or purloin your Stores —

But o'er their Lusts, and Passions, to prevail, 565
Performing Compacts, tho' You, Courtiers, fail —
And sooner suffer wrong, from Fraud, or Force,
Than Conscience wound, or quit their Christian Course,[77]
Still tendering all that Law decrees as due,
To righteous Heav'n, and to unrighteous You! 570
Their heavenly Master's footsteps still to mark,
Lit by his Spirit's pure celestial spark;
And in those footsteps diligently tread,
Tho' persecuted like their patient Head,
Rather than, rashly, by resisting Ill, 575
To counteract His holy Word, and Will —
Ev'n stoop to despot Kings' oppressive claim,
Sooner than sully their transcendent Name! (XVII: ll.559-78)

There is a clear parallel with the view of religion sketched in previous chapters. As earlier in the century, a theology that is not just sympathetic to but actually licenses an appeal for greater social and political equality can simultaneously be seen to preclude exceeding certain boundaries in one's pursuit of such aims. The difference with fifty years previously is that this boundary has shifted significantly. Whereas 'New Testament Christianity' was once seen as incompatible with overt agitation for social change, it now legitimises such agitation; however, it is now seen as incompatible with actual revolution (or can be used, if Žižek is to be believed, to *persuade oneself* that this is now the boundary beyond which one should not / cannot go).

It is Nietzsche, of course, who characterises 'New Testament Christianity' as a reactive phenomenon prompted by resentment, providing the weak with a means of striking back at the strong and powerful. Bearing this in mind, it is worth recording that Woodhouse does not posit his arguments with the intention merely of championing the meek and poor. He establishes his conception of religion – as argued in chapters two and three, a crucial ideological field of contest in human history – with the intention of using it to castigate his enemies, and particularly Montagu. Whilst he clearly baulked at advocating violent revolution, at times his use of his theology as a stick with which to beat those who do not share in it is unpleasant, exhibiting the very opposite of charity, compassion and tolerance. Referring to Elizabeth Montagu, Woodhouse writes,

Unbless'd with wealth, when young, her Friends thought fit 1425
To praise her beauty, and applaud her Wit —
Exhibited abroad a hopeful bait
To trail a Squire, and hook a clear Estate.

When, searching round the woodland, hill, and plain,
They beat, and quest, and hunt — but not in vain — 1430
She, practising the tricks her Parents taught,
The prey was started, soon, and Reynard caught —
For, tho' the Fox was old, the Chick was young,
And, tho' he'd pillaged folds, robb'd henroosts, long,
Yet, wearied, now, with taking things by stealth, 1435
He wish'd an Heir to give his gather'd Wealth.
Her aggrandizement was her Friends' first aim;
Securing Riches — and some nobler Name,
And, both made sure by craft and civil Laws,
To govern Fashion, and to gain applause — 1440
But all the specious Plot was nearly spoil'd
For Deity bestow'd but one, weak, Child;
Which, tho' a Son, to make their hope secure
Soon, with each wish, it perished premature!
Thus Providence with prescient counsel scann'd, 1445
And counterplotted all their Cunning plann'd;
For, putting forth that providential pow'r,
Which form'd, and fed the bud, and embryo flow'r,
To make still more His Will, and Wisdom, known,
Cut off the idol bloom before 'twas blown. 1450
The mourning Mother had but little car'd
If Heav'n had snatch'd the Sire, the Offspring spared,
For Wealth was pounded by the Marriage pact,
Herself at large with ample pow'rs to act.
Should Charity herself decide the Case, 1455
Where Interest occupies the upper place,
And Ostentation triumphs over all,
The Duties are but weak — the Love but small. (VII: ll.1425-58)

Throughout, Woodhouse presents Montagu in a wholly negative light, caricaturing her as vain, greedy, mean and penny-pinching and even, during his second spell of employment with her, compelling him to be complicit in her schemes to purchase smuggled coffee.[78] The picture he presents frequently diverges, at the least, from known fact. There is no doubt that Montagu was domineering, used to getting her own way, and not to be crossed.[79] It was true that during the years Elizabeth Robinson was growing up her family had seen better days, but not exactly that they were "Unbless'd with wealth" (l.1425).[80] It is correct that Montagu was a lifelong opponent of women marrying for love.[81] Woodhouse does more than merely take a little licence with the facts by suggesting, however, that her misfortunes were the result of some form of Providential vengeance. The son referred to in ll.1442-4, John, known to his parents as 'Punch', was born in London on 11 May 1743. Despite a lengthy recovery from childbirth, Montagu was "much pleased with her apparently sturdy child. Her letters

about him are among the most intimate and personal that she wrote." However, "...the young boy died unexpectedly in September 1744. Elizabeth was devastated." After his death, Montagu "and her husband were frequently apart: they remained friendly but there were no more children."[82] It is no wonder that an evangelical Methodism that encouraged Woodhouse to see the death of his employer's child as a Divine foiling of all her plots was a cause of his final break with Montagu in 1788.[83]

Even if they did not all take the argument quite as far as Woodhouse, by the century's end other labouring poets were also using 'New Testament Christianity' as justification for open withdrawal of complicity with patrons, the rich and powerful, and their ideologies. The manner in which they do so also goes well beyond the implied belief in a levelling theology found in the works of labouring poets in the first half of the century – such as Duck and Collier – who poeticise tales of the weak and poor receiving God's grace. Although she does not poeticise labour in the manner in which I have been interested throughout the study, a brief contrast with the work of the Bristol milkwoman Ann Yearsley will prove fruitful,[84] lest the attitudes suggested by Woodhouse's writing on the subject should seem more iconoclastic than they in fact were.

Yearsley's blank verse *Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* (1788) tells the story of Luco, an African slave taken from his home, and his beloved Incilanda.[85] Like Harriet Beecher Stowe's later portrayal of the execution of Uncle Tom, Yearsley re-tells the death of Christ in her account of Luco's murder, the latter's wish for "water, water!" patently an allusion to Christ's request on the cross. Christmas argues:

> ... *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade* is the one poem in which Yearsley extends the concept of "Custom" in a critical poetic discourse aimed at exposing the hypocrisy of upper-class involvement in the slave trade and the unequal distribution of power within her society that enforces it.[86]

This claim is borne out by a passage such as the following:

> ...Alas! my friend,
> Strong rapture dies within the soul, while Pow'r
> Drags on his bleeding victims. Custom, Law,
> Ye blessings, and ye curses of mankind,
> What evils do ye cause? We feel enslav'd, 20
> Yet move in your direction. Custom, thou
> Wilt preach up filial piety; thy sons
> Will groan, and stare with impudence at Heav'n,

As if they did abjure the act, where Sin
Sits full on Inhumanity; the church 25
They fill with mouthing, vap'rous sighs and tears,
Which, like the guileful crocodile's, oft fall,
Nor fall, but at the cost of human bliss.

Custom, thou hast undone us! Led us far
From God-like probity, from truth, and heaven. (ll.16-30) 30

Certainly Yearsley condemns the "hypocrisy" to which Christmas refers, that allows slave traders to give the appearance of Christianity whilst treating fellow human beings worse than animals, against all New Testament teaching. She does more, however, here and elsewhere arguing for the New Testament Christianity sketched previously. Yearsley's is, ironically enough, the Christianity of the same weak and oppressed whom she conspicuously declines to champion in "Clifton Hill".[87] Like Woodhouse, she uses this conception of religion to castigate her opponents, and to urge more 'Christian-like' behaviour. Despite their personal antipathy after 1786, it has been argued that Hannah More continued to represent everything Yearsley wanted to be.[88] More's brand of Christianity, though, seen in *Village Politics* (1793) and the *Cheap Repository Tracts* (1795),[89] preaches containment and stresses the Christian need to bear troubles in this life to receive one's reward in the next. Hence Yearsley advances a contrasting vision of Christianity, striking a markedly different note to More *et al.* If Yearsley's is a creed that worships Christ the *Servant* King, it is a politically subversive prospect far removed from More's theology. In this cause, Yearsley pleads "Spare me, thou God / Of all-indulgent Mercy" (ll.40-1), and having earlier praised "Heav'n-born Liberty" (l.15) urges a "Curse on the toils spread by a Christian hand / To rob the Indian of his freedom!" (ll.63-4).

Finally the theme receives extended expression:

Now speak, ye Christians (who for gain enslave
A soul like Luco's, tearing her from joy
In life's short vale; and if there be a hell, 305
As ye believe, to that ye thrust her down,
A blind, involuntary victim), where
Is your true essence of religion? where
Your proofs of righteousness, when ye conceal
The knowledge of the Deity from those 310
Who would adore him fervently? Your God
Ye rob of worshippers, his altars keep
Unhail'd, while driving from the sacred font

The eager slave, lest he should hope in Jesus.

Is this your piety? Are these your laws, 315
Whereby the glory of the Godhead spreads
O'er barbarous climes? Ye hypocrites, disown
The Christian name, nor shame its cause: yet where
Shall souls like yours find welcome? (ll.303-319)

The "true essence of religion", its "cause" that they shame, is the propagation of earthly (and unearthly) equality. Yearsley contests the concept of "piety" – the same piety that the poor are expected to show by accepting their subjection – that allows 'Christians' to claim it at the same time as slave-trading. More than this, Yearsley implies that 'true' piety *precludes* maltreatment of the weak and powerless, continuing:

... Gracious God!
Why thus in mercy let thy whirlwinds sleep
O'er a vile race of Christians, who profane
Thy glorious attributes? Sweep them from earth,
Or check their cruel pow'r: the savage tribes
Are angels when compared to brutes like these.
Advance, ye Christians, and oppose my strain:
Who dares condemn it? Prove from laws divine,
From deep philosophy, or social love,
That ye derive your privilege .... (ll.347-56)

Having dared all comers to contradict her, Yearsley launches into a lengthy passage about the God of Mercy, Justice and Law – an interpretation of Christianity with profound political implications not just for slave trading, but between the social orders in England too. As Waldron demonstrates, Yearsley was "certainly firmly set against the idea of a vindictive God and to some extent anthropomorphism in general",[90] an assertion supported with a close reading of Yearsley's "On Jephthah's Vow taken in a Literal Sense", in which she denounces "the Old Testament notion of a just and savage God with whom human beings have to bargain and who exacts the full price."[91]

Such a reading of Yearsley's religious position is reinforced by *Stanzas of Woe* (1790), and especially ll.59-66:

Art thou of Pagan faith? — High in the dome
Of sanguine Mars be hung thy whip divine, 60
Or to some wither'd Saint at ancient Rome

This trophy of thy *holy* rage consign.

Art thou the follower of Jesus? — Know
Thy meek Redeemer would not scourge my sons:
From true Religion tortures never flow 65
Then tell me from what source thy action runs?[92]

Here, she uses her belief in the "true essence of religion" to castigate Levi Eames, former mayor of Bristol, for the behaviour of his servant that resulted in the horsewhipping of two of Yearsley's children, and ultimately in the miscarriage of her unborn child. Eames cannot, she concludes, be in possession of knowledge of the "true Religion". Yearsley uses religion as Woodhouse does, even if she stops short of some of his wilder extremes, to provide a means of denouncing privileged antagonists exempt from the "true" or essential revelation of Christ. She argues not only that the meek *do* partake in this revelation, but that those who do not fit such a description cannot; hence her question – "Art thou of Pagan faith?" He is outside the Elect of which she is a part.

An appreciation of the use and function of New Testament Christianity in labouring poetry at the end of the century also creates other opportunities. One is for a fuller understanding of the (self) presentation of labouring poets as 'natural geniuses'. As Goodridge summarises, "the prevailing model of 'natural genius' seemed to deny ... [labouring-class poets]... both agency and achievement".[93] These are the terms in which such marketing of these poets have usually been discussed. As Christmas states, however, "What has gone largely unexamined ... is the plebeian poets' counter-manipulation of the cultural tropes surrounding natural genius to serve their own interests."[94] Once labouring poets invoke religion to support their right to greater political and social equality, and their right to write verse, they actually 'reclaim' 'natural genius' as a positive (self) descriptor. The obvious benefit of being a 'natural' genius was that the term 'natural' implied a gift / talent given by a God of mercy and democracy whose worship entailed a doctrine that held potential for greater social and political equality for the labouring classes.

Woodhouse unambiguously stakes a claim to be thought of as a 'natural genius'. Yearsley's two poems on the subject seem not only inconsistent, but contradictory. In "To Mr ****, an Unlettered Poet, on Genius Unimproved", Yearsley advocates the supremacy of 'natural genius' over classical learning:

Ne'er hail the fabled Nine, or snatch rapt Thought
From the Castalian spring; 'tis not for *thee*, 20
From embers, where the Pagan's light expires,
To catch a flame divine. From one bright spark
Of never-erring Faith, more rapture beams
Than wild Mythology could ever boast.
Pursue the Eastern Magi through their groves, 25
Where Zoroaster holds the mystic clue,
Which leads to great Ormazes; there thou'lt find
His God thy own; or bid thy Fancy chase
Restless Pythag'ras thro' his varied forms,
And she shall see him sitting on a heap 30
Of poor Absurdity; where cheerful Faith
Shall never rest, nor great Omniscience claim.
What are the Muses, or Apollo's strains,
But harmony of soul? Like thee, estrang'd
From Science, and old Wisdom's classic lore, 35
I've patient trod the wild entangled path
Of unimprov'd Idea. Dauntless Thought
I eager seiz'd, no formal Rule e'er aw'd;
No Precedent controul'd; no Custom fix'd
My independent spirit: on the wing 40
She still shall guideless soar, nor shall the Fool,
Wounding her pow'rs, e'er bring her to the ground.[95]

The poet's position is clear: classical learning is not for the 'natural genius'; she also explicitly identifies herself – "Like thee" – with the addressee.[96] Both Christmas and Waldron[97] emphasise the Romantic implications of the poem with its privileging of inspiration and intuition over formal education. However, a crucial point, in the present context, is surely that the emphasis of the first verse paragraph above is that *Christian faith* is the source of poetic inspiration; the (unstated) implication of the third paragraph is that Yearsley is thus religiously inspired. If autodidacts could not compete on level terms with their educated counterparts in classical learning, one solution was to shift the criteria one had to meet in order to be considered a poet: New Testament Christianity offered an opportunity to lay claim to a right to be so considered that more materially-privileged poets would struggle to match.

Mindful of the fact that in an age in which this was not a widespread interpretation of natural genius, when allowing oneself to be so presented to the public also meant almost inviting the derision and condescension of the critics,[98] Yearsley attacks the problem from a different perspective in "Addressed to Ignorance, Occasioned by a Gentleman's desiring the Author never to assume a Knowledge of the Ancients". Here, she defiantly boasts her classical learning in contradiction to the

position adopted in "To Mr. ****, an Unlettered Poet, on Genius Unimproved". Waldron suggests that the former poem demonstrates that the latter is ironic, since "Addressed to Ignorance" comes much closer to Yearsley's characteristic satirical, prickly tone, an impression strengthened if one accepts Waldron's reading that Yearsley's poetry and letters elsewhere generally suggest she expended no little effort in trying to dispel notions of herself as plebeian.

"Addressed to Ignorance", a verse epistle, is written in a traditional, though elaborate meter of trochaic lines of either eleven or twelve syllables, alternating with eights or nines – the elaboration, like the learning, designed to refute the suggestion that Yearsley was not competent to write classical verse. That she should be censured in this way, and that she should be keen to fiercely counter such censure, only reminds us that we are decidedly in the pre-*Lyrical Ballads* era here. Yearsley tells Ignorance that "Lactilla and thou must be friends" (l.8) and laments, with equal irony, that she is forbidden to "feed on the scraps of the Sage" (l.14) before listing everything that "Fancy" shows her. What follows is presumably intended as a virtuoso display of classical learning, as she alludes to thirty-three different classical figures or places within the space of forty-one lines.[99] Via allusions to Voltaire and Wat Tyler, it ends with the feisty rejoinder:

> Here's Trojan, Athenian, Greek, Frenchman and I,
> Heav'n knows what I was long ago; 70
> No matter, thus shielded, this age I defy,
> And the next cannot wound me, I know.[100]

Not only is this much more like Yearsley's frequently confrontational tone (especially in her post-More career), it also gives the lie to More's claims of Yearsley's limited reading (unless she acquired a great deal in a very short time).[101] Anyone could acquire a fair knowledge of classical literature quickly – the important issue is surely not this, but whether and how such learning can be turned to poetic account. Hence, the pointlessness of patrons apologising for their protégées' incompetence to write verse in the alleged absence of such learning is only emphasised. Alternatively, perhaps "To Mr. ****" is not ironic as such, but an attempt to represent both sides of the question, befitting a poet who defiantly refused to be imprisoned within any single poetic identity. If the two seem contradictory, it is tempting to see the poems as

Yearsley experimenting with, 'trying out' alternative counter-arguments to the assumptions that would deny her the status of poet.

Woodhouse displays no such possible ambiguity:

> Knowledge, and Learning, may supply, in part,
> Their needful helps in true poetic Art —
> Like crutches, may assist mechanic skill 305
> To hobble round the base of Ida's hill;
> But by their artful aids can ne'er attain;
> To climb one pace above the bordering plain —
> May, like strong stirrups, in their poney race,
> Help them to mount, or, mounted, keep their place, 310
> But ne'er make Pegasus a paltry Hack,
> Or seat them safely on his bounding back ...
>
> Blockheads may boast dry Science, or dull Arts,
> But these confer not Feeling — Wit — or Parts — 330
> Ev'n Common Sense may with pure Knowledge plod,
> But Genius is the special Gift of God!
>
> Man's Mind inform'd by facts from holy Writ,
> Finds God, alone, can give inventive Wit —
> Not only works on human Heart, and Will, 335
> But still bestows all mere mechanic Skill.
> When, in the Desart, Deity appear'd,
> And order'd Hebrew tabernacle rear'd,
> He pointed out the Artists then requir'd.
> Which He, Himself, with needful pow'rs inspir'd. 340
> (IV: ll.303-12, 329-40)

He lists examples of such God-given geniuses as Homer (l.316) and Milton (l.326). His appropriation of New Testament Christianity enables him to redefine 'natural genius', and turn it to his own account. What this underlines is that we will not – cannot – fully appreciate the complexities of the attitude of labouring poets to 'natural genius' until we adopt a more sophisticated approach towards the function of Christianity in their lives and art.

It is plain that Woodhouse's rebellion against Montagu did not, within Žižek's terminology, equate to 'choosing the impossible'.[102] Not only did he go back to working for her after the first breach between the two, but his – unpublished – poetic 'rebellion' took place only after an irreconcilable second breach. The fact that he continued to receive an annuity from Montagu also hardly strengthens his claims to be thought of as a defiant rebel. Yet despite this *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus*

Scriblerus demonstrates beyond doubt that by the end of the century, complicity with class based ideologies could be, and was, withdrawn, and that this withdrawal could be articulated in verse. This development was encouraged by an explicitly levelling theology (also seen in the works of Yearsley and others) sponsored by the rise of various dissenting groups and sects.

Not only this, but the poem is amongst the most experimental and accomplished labouring-class poetic productions of the century. Despite the surge of critical interest in labouring poetry over the past decades, Woodhouse has been unaccountably little studied and the 1896 complete edition of his works is not widely available.[103] There is a new scholarly edition of selections from *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*,[104] but republication of the whole is overdue. In an age in which scholars keenly debate whether the 'significance' of texts should be judged by aesthetic merit, political and social significance, or some combination of both, Woodhouse's mammoth work merits greater attention than it has received on *both* counts. Woodhouse's social and political significance is great; the scale of his aesthetic achievement and the place he should occupy in the pantheon of eighteenth-century labouring poets is, if anything, even higher.

[1] William J. Christmas, 'James Woodhouse', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, vol. 60 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.192.

[2] *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, ed. by Rev. R. I. Woodhouse, 2 vols. (London: Leadenhall Press Ltd., 1896), vol. I, p.1.

[3] *Ibid.*, p.2.

[4] Christmas, (2004), p.192. The original source for all this information, however, is *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse.*

[5] Bridget Keegan, 'Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century', *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*, 42 (2001), 195-217 (p.195).

[6] Shenstone (1714-63) was a poet, essayist, and landscape gardener, educated at Solihull and Pembroke College, Oxford. His transformation of The Leasowes, Halesowen, originally a grazing farm, began in 1743. Shenstone turned it into a *fèrme ornée*, an early example of a natural landscape garden, complete with cascades, pools, vistas, urns, and a grove to Virgil encircled with a winding walk. Woodhouse's 'An Elegy to William Shenstone, Esq.' pleaded that he still be allowed to walk in the garden despite the fact that '...the liberty Mr. Shenstone's good-nature granted, was soon turned into licentiousness; the people destroying the shrubs, picking the flowers, breaking down the hedges, and doing him other damage...' (Woodhouse, 'Advertisement. To the First Edition', *Poems on Sundry Occasions* (1764), in *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. II: 1740-1780*, ed. by Bridget Keegan, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), pp.146-7). Woodhouse again describes these events in *Crispinus Scriblerus* I: ll.935-1085. See also Keegan (2003), p.141, and Rayner Unwin, *The Rural Muse: Studies in the Peasant Poetry of England* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1954), p.75. Shenstone acted as a patron to Woodhouse after 1759, although was probably not as involved as others like Lyttleton, (Viscount) Dudley Ward, Graves, Dodsley and the Montagus. A new scholarly edition is forthcoming: William Shenstone, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Sandro Jung (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2005).

[7] Keegan also remarks on the role played by Joseph Spence, Oxford Professor of Poetry and indefatigable discoverer of 'natural' geniuses, who played a pivotal role in the rise of Stephen Duck. Keegan suggests that it was from the collaboration of Spence, Dodsley and Lyttleton "that Woodhouse's poetical career was born": see 2003, p.xxi.

[8] See Keegan (2003), p.142; and *Critical Review*, 17 (1764), 392-3.

[9] See Annette Wheeler Cafarelli, 'The Romantic 'Peasant' Poets and their Patrons', *Wordsworth Circle*, 26 (1995), 77-87 (p.79). Lords Montagu and Lyttleton were godfathers to Woodhouse's eldest son George Edward (*The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, p.2).

[10] This edition contains lists of "Benefactors" and subscribers, both including an impressive number of dignitaries. Amongst the 111 names on the former list are "Edmund Burke Esq;", "Mrs. Carter" (Elizabeth Carter, presumably), Dudley Ward, several Dodsleys, "David Hume Esq;", "Doctor Hawkesworth", several Lyttletons, Edward Montagu, Viscount Palmerston, "Rev. Mr. Spence Prebendary of Durham", and "Mrs. Thrale". The lists reinforce the view that patronage in the mid-eighteenth century was the province of the upper, rather than middle orders. The list of benefactors contains, in total, eighteen Honourables or Right Honourables, five further Ladies, one further Earl, one further Duchess and two Right Reverend Bishops. The list of actual subscribers contains 280 names including a liberal sprinkling of further Honourables, Right Honourables, Captains, Majors and Colonels. Other notable names include Isaac Hawkins Browne (instrumental in Leapor's publication), Thomas Bowles, John Duncombe and Mrs. (presumably, Charlotte) Lennox.

[11] *Critical Review*, 21 (1766), 474.

[12] William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses; Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry 1730-1830* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2001), p.192. Poem titles include "An Elegy to William Shenstone, Esq; of the Lessowes"; "Elegy II. Written to William

Shenstone, Esq; of the Lessowes"; "To William Shenstone, Esq; on his Indisposition in the Spring, 1762"; "Benevolence, an Ode. Inscribed to my Friends"; "The Lessowes. A Poem"; "Wrote at the Lessowes, after Mr. Shenstone's Death"; "To the Right Honourable Lord Lyttleton"; "To the Right Honourable Lord Lyttleton. An Epistle"; "Verses. Addressed to ----- On Receiving Some valuable Books"; "Gratitude. A Poem"; and "To the Right Honourable the Countess of ----- On the Death of a Daughter". See Keegan (2003), pp.147-211.

[13] See Keegan (2003), pp.145-6.

[14] See Woodhouse, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1766), p.xiv.

[15] Woodhouse gives his account of this sorry episode in *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* (hereafter *TLaLoCS*), V: ll.1555-90, *English Poetry Full-Text Database* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1992-5, hereafter *EPFTD*).

[16] See *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*, vol. I, p.2. The widowed Montagu (her husband Edward died in 1775) contracted with James 'Athenian' Stuart that he would build the house in 1777. Stuart did not complete on schedule and, despite Montagu's wish to move in during the spring of 1779, she could not do so until late 1781.

[17] Christmas (2001), p.185.

[18] See James Woodhouse, "Address", *Poems on Several Occasions* (London, 1788), also in Keegan (2003), pp.211-14.

[19] Christmas (2004), p.192. Maxted suggests that Woodhouse may also have been connected with Piercy and Woodhouse who published "satirical print" *c.*1796. See Ian Maxted, *The London Book Trades 1775-1800: A Preliminary Checklist of Members* (Surrey: Dawson, 1977), p.253.

[20] The whole was not published until 1896 in *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse*. It has only recently (re)emerged that extended passages were published in 1814 and 1816 respectively. See Christmas' endnote (2001, p.325). The 1814 version contains part of what would become, in 1896, chapter one of the poem. There appears to have been little awareness of the 1814 and 1816 selections until recently. Lonsdale's note, for instance, suggests that he was unaware of their existence: see *The New Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.856.

[21] Christmas (2004), p.192.

[22] *Ibid.*, p.193.

[23] Christmas, (2001), p.187. See also Christmas (2004), p.193.

[24] James Woodhouse, "Address", *Poems on Several Occasions*, Keegan (2003), pp.211-14.

[25] For a more positive review, see *The British Critic*, 22 (1803), *ibid.*, pp.191-2.

[26] See *Poetical Register*, 3 (1803), 448 (cited by *ibid.*, p.143).

[27] *Monthly Review*, 80 (1816), 216 (cited by *ibid.*, p.144).

[28] Boswell records that Johnson said of Woodhouse: "'They had better ...furnish the man with good implements for his trade, than raise subscriptions for his poems. He may make an excellent shoemaker, but he can never make a good poet. A school-boy's exercise may be a pretty thing for a school-boy; but it is no treat for a man.' " See Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. by George Birkbeck Hill, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), vol. 2, p.127 (also cited by Christmas (2001), pp. 17, 158).

[29] See Christmas (2001), p.17.

[30] See Cafarelli, p.78. Cafarelli's sources are three-fold: William Mudford, "Sorting my Letters and Papers", *Blackwood's*, 26 (1829), 753-55; *The Life and Poetical Works of James Woodhouse* (1896); and James L. Clifford, *Hester Lynch Piozzi* (1941; 1987), pp.55-6.

[31] James Woodhouse, "An Elegy to William Shenstone, Esq; of the Lessowes", ll.1-2, Keegan (2003), pp.147-51 (p.147). Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text.

[32] His early pastoral poems to Shenstone also argue that Woodhouse appreciates nature with the same poet's sensibility as Shenstone himself. See Keegan, 'Lambs to the Slaughter: Leisure and Laboring-Class Poetry', *Romanticism on the Net*, 27 (August 2002), http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2002/v/n27/006562ar.html, p.4 of 15. Keegan cites ll.119-20 of "An Elegy to William Shenstone, Esq; of the Lessowes" to reinforce her case: "That ease, which banishes the frown austere, / And ranks the peasant equal with the peer."

[33] See *Critical Review*, 17 (1764), 392-3.

[34] James Woodhouse, "The Lessowes. A Poem", ll.141-56, Keegan (2003), pp.157-89 (p.161).

[35] See Unwin, p.75, for his view that " ... *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*, did nothing to enhance or detract from the inoffensive monotony of Woodhouse's achievements." Keegan, more recently, recognises the transition between Woodhouse's earlier and later work, which gradually shifts "from an almost slavish devotion to his patrons to a more self-assured and resistant labouring-class voice." (Keegan (2003), p.141).

[36] Woodhouse alternates between the two names – Crispin / us – throughout the poem.

[37] See IV: ll.90-94. 'Vanessa' comes from the Latin 'vanitas' meaning falsity / falsehood or deception; or from 'vanus', meaning something vacant, idle, or vain; a person who is 'vanus' is also ostentatious, boastful and / or unreliable. 'Scintilla', also from Latin, signifies a glimmer, bright sparkling point, gleam, or flash. In English the word also suggests 'a fragment', e.g. something / one incomplete.

[38] The third epigraph on the poem's title page reads "*SUTOR ULTRA CREPIDAM*", i.e. "Let the cobbler judge beyond his last". It has been suggested that this indicates Woodhouse's intention to speak both to and on behalf of a wider labouring population: see Keegan, (2003), p.415. Christmas translates "Sutor Ultra Crepidam" as "A shoemaker beyond making shoes." (2001, p.197). I am grateful to Graham Anderson, Professor of Classics at the University of Kent, for informing me that Pliny the Elder is the source for "ne sutor ultra crepidam" – "let not the cobbler judge beyond his last" – in *Natural History* 35.10.36 and *Valerius Maximus* 8.12 Ext.3. I am equally grateful for his view that, whilst examined in isolation, the sense of "Sutor Ultra Crepidam" might suggest that Woodhouse / Crispin refers only to himself, it is far from unlikely that the intention is a wider encouragement to cobblers – and the labouring classes – to "judge beyond *their* last" also.

[39] An account of the 'Scriblerus Club' and of the satirical function of 'Martinus Scriblerus' is provided by Fairer in *English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century 1700-1789* (Harlow and London: Longman, 2003), pp.15-16. The classic study of the writers the Scriblerians set out to parody and attack is Pat Rogers' *Grub Street: Studies in a Subculture* (London: Methuen, 1972).

[40] Woodhouse's intentions to satirise his enemies are underlined by the second of the poem's four epigraphs: "Peter's the People's Bard, but I'll be more; / Unpension'd Poet-Laureat, of the Poor." Apart from again emphasising the intention to speak on behalf of the labouring poor, this refers to:
" 'Peter Pindar', the pen name of John Wolcot (1738-1819), the most popular satirist of the early nineteenth century." (Keegan, p.415). For a selection of Wolcot's verses see Lonsdale (1984), pp.737-48. In the 1814 edition of *Crispinus Scriblerus*, this epigraph appears to have read 'Peter's the People's *Poet*' (my italics). Woodhouse may have been involved in the publication of satire in later life (see Maxted, p.253).

[41] See Keegan (2003), p.141; and Cafarelli, p.79.

[42] In relation to I: l.9, "Or poor Crispinus', oaten pipe, alone", cp. Milton's *Lycidas*, ll. 33, 88 in *The Penguin Book of English Pastoral Verse*, ed. by John Barrell and John Bull (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), pp.186-7.

[43] James Woodhouse, *TlaLoCS*, I: ll.1756-7, *EPFTD*. Subsequent references are to this edition (a facsimile of the full 1896 text) and given in parentheses in the text.

[44] The first twenty-two lines of this extract are also published as (i) "Birmingham and Wolverhampton", in Lonsdale (1984), pp.799-800.

[45] In Greek mythology Proteus – the 'Old Man of the Sea' – was the son of Poseidon and Tethys. Gifted with the ability to foretell the future, he also had the ability to change into multiple different forms at will. This recurrent interest in the Protean is confirmed by the fourth and final epigraph on the poem's title page: "Begone, ye blockheads! *Heraclitus* cries, / And leave my labours to the truly wise." (my italics). "Heraclitus" was apparently spelt 'Heraditus' in the 1814 edition, before being corrected for the 1896 full publication: see Keegan (2003), p.415. Heraclitus was known as 'The Rudder' because of his insistence that the world is in a constant state of flux, and remembered for the claim that "One can never step into the same river twice". His student Cratylus later amended the aphorism to "One cannot step into the same river even once".

[46] Montagu is first introduced early in chapter four, as "Patroness", one of those who fills the breach after Shenstone's death. It is not explicit later in chapter four that Crispin is employed by Scintilla, but the following descriptions of labour, and of his subsequent discontents, correspond to what we know about the period in which Woodhouse acted as land bailiff. IV: ll.892-902 seem rather dramatic in declaring that, in removing to Berkshire, he had "From fond Acquaintance, and Connections, flown, / To people, lands, and languages near unknown!" but are presumably intended to mimic the epic scale according to which the hero traverses a vast area. In any case, "languages" in the last line quoted, l.899, was probably an editorial mistake in the 1896 edition, since it creates eleven syllables in the line (one of many minor editorial oversights). The account that follows in V: ll.903-23 is very similar to Woodhouse's record of what he found at Sandleford on taking up his position, as seen in letters held at the Huntingdon library, California (and quoted by Christmas (2001), p.184). Confirmation that Scintilla is Crispin's employer during this time would seem to come in V: l.1578 describing his dismissal, where Crispin refers to his employer as his "Patroness", an alternative term for Montagu / Scintilla throughout.

[47] A 'halberd' is an ancient weapon consisting of a long pole ending with an axe and sharp spear; hence "Cat-tail's halbert" refers to the sharp tips of the Cat-tail plant.

[48] Woodhouse writes sympathetically about animals in the vein of poets of labour discussed in previous chapters. See his observations on the worm (V: ll.631-40), reptiles (V: ll.641-52), the beetle (V: ll.653-62), the snail (V: ll.663-70), the ladybird (V: ll.671-82), the bee (V: ll.683-8), the dormouse (V: ll.689-94), the squirrel (V: ll.695-700), and the spider (V: ll.885-98).

[49] Also published as (ii) "The Tribulations of an Uneducated Poet in the 1760s", ll.1-10, Lonsdale (1984), p.800.

[50] See Keegan (2003), p.141, and *Critical Review*, 17 (1764), 392-3. As late as 1803, when *Norbury Park* was published, the *Annual Review*, confusing Woodhouse with John Bennet ("the Woodstock shoemaker"), again related him to Duck: see *Annual Review*, 2 (1803), 558-9.

[51] The issue of whether Woodhouse *could* have published the full poem while still alive, had he wanted to, remains interesting. Christmas writes, "Woodhouse never intended to publish the full text of *Crispinus Scriblerus* in his lifetime" (Christmas (2001), p.200), adding not only that he *did* not publish, but "perhaps could not" (p.203). Yet Woodhouse was financially comfortable in his final years. Although the question seems irresolvable, it is tempting to wonder whether Woodhouse opted for self-censorship, especially in the light of Žižek's theories concerning the tendency to act as if a choice is forced even when it is not (as discussed in chapter two).

[52] Also published as (ii) "The Tribulations of an Uneducated Poet in the 1760s", ll.57-74, Lonsdale (1984), p.801. Woodhouse maintains his condemnation of the way labouring poets are treated throughout the poem (see, for example, V: ll.1243-1300; XV: ll.175-90).

[53] Alexander Pope, *Epistle to Arbuthnot*, ll.305-66, *The Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. by John Butt (London and New York: Routledge, 1963), pp.607-9.

[54] Woodhouse actually subtitled the poem "A Novel, in Verse, Written in the Last Century", the first of four epigraphs to appear on the title page.

[55] See Christmas (2001), p.200, and the precedent provided by Anna Seward's *Louisa, a Poetical Novel* (1784). Of course, this does not alter the fact that Woodhouse's poem was generically unique in *labouring* verse when composed.

[56] Bryant was born in London but spent most of his life in Bristol. He initially made clay pipes for a living, but in difficult times worked as an "itinerant laborer" (Christmas (2001), p.224). He travelled the country alone selling pipes, singing and entertaining when he could not otherwise afford to pay for his needs. Lacking money for passage across the Severn he met a man "who carried him in his boat for the price of a song" (*ibid.*) This man was Archibald MacDonald, Solicitor General from 1784-8 and Attorney-General from 1788-93 (see *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. III: 1780-1800*, ed. by Tim Burke, gen. ed. John Goodridge (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p.117). MacDonald and his associates eventually advertised a subscription for a volume of Bryant's poems that appeared in 1787 as *Verses*. Bryant died four years later without achieving the relatively steady (if hard won) success enjoyed by Bristol's other leading plebeian poet, Ann Yearsley. Nonetheless the volume did well enough to merit a second edition and Bryant's death occasioned an obituary in *The Times* (26 March 1791, cited by Burke, p.118). He has not attracted much critical attention but Unwin and Christmas consider him in their studies.

[57] John Frederick Bryant, "Morning", ll.259-77, *Verses by John Frederick Bryant, late tobacco-pipe maker at Bristol. Together with his life, written by himself* (London, 1787), pp.53-4, *EPFTD*.

[58] Burke (p.118) appears to dispute this reading.

[59] Christmas (2001), p.203.

[60] One readily thinks of N. Elliot, John Lucas, Thomas Spence, John Freeth, Ann Yearsley and, in the nineteenth century, Ebenezer Elliott and numerous figures in the Chartist movement.

[61] Other cobbler poets of the late eighteenth century included John Bennet, Thomas Olivers, James Lackington, William Gifford, John Lucas, Gavin Wilson, Robert Ashton, Thomas Holcroft, John Walker, John Forster and Robert Bloomfield. Their nineteenth century counterparts included Robert Askham, John Blackwell, David Service, Charlotte Richardson, William Smith ('The Haddington Cobbler'), Joseph Blacket, Allen Davenport, Charles Crocker, Robert Charles Fair, Thomas Cooper, John Bedford Leno and Edwin Waugh. Introductory essays on many of them can be found in the *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets* anthologies, and their forthcoming *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets* counterparts.

[62] See Keegan, "Cobbling Verse: Shoemaker Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century".

[63] See *ibid.*, pp.196-203.

[64] See *ibid.*, p.207.

[65] One is put in mind of the influence of Joanna Southcott, a non-conformist contemporary of both Woodhouse and Yearsley whose writing, inspired by enthusiasm and ardent Methodism, functioned to encourage female creativity. See Joanna Southcott, *The Strange Effects of Faith; with Remarkable Prophecies (Made in 1792, &c) of Things which are to come; also Some Account of my Life* (Exeter: T. Brice, 1803). I am drawing here also on Susan Matthews, 'Joanna Southcott's Spectacles: Prophecy,

Narrative and the Material' (conference paper delivered at 'Eighteenth-Century Narratives: An Innovative Symposium', University of Exeter, 19-21 July 2004).

[66] See Keegan (2003), p.297.

[67] Keegan, "Cobbling Verse", p.203.

[68] See IV: ll.513-16. Crispin's objection to being described as a cobbler instead of a cordwainer, apart from the technical distinction that a cordwainer made the shoes that a cobbler repaired, was that a cobbler is another term for a botcher. To 'cobble' is to mend / repair roughly or clumsily, and hence a pejorative. IV: ll. 515-16 contain an allusion to the collective noun: a *drunkship* of cobblers. In colloquial parlance a 'cobbler' was a drink made of wine, sugar, lemon and pounded ice, drunk through a straw. 'Cobbler's punch' was a warm drink of ale with added spirit, sugar and spice.

[69] The exact nature of Methodist beliefs varied from sect to sect. Several reliable historical and theological accounts are available. Rupert E. Davies' *Methodism* (Harmondworth: Penguin, 1963) is a classic study; David Hempton's *Methodism and Politics in British Society 1750-1850* (London: Hutchinson, 1984) is a more recent account. The growth of the Methodist church can be gauged by the fact that whereas it numbered 72,000 at Wesley's death in 1791, by 1820 its numbers had swelled to 200,000 (Davies, p.139). James Bisset recounts the strength of dissenting sects in Birmingham at the turn of the nineteenth century:

> 'Th'INHABITANTS ... take old and young,
> 'Might then amount to EIGHTY THOUSAND strong.
> 'Of CHURCHES there are Two, of CHAPELS Four,
> And of DISSENTING MEETINGS near a score.'

(Bisset, "Ramble of the Gods Through Birmingham", *A Poetic Survey Round Birmingham; With a Brief Description of the Different Curiosities and Manufactories of the Place: Intended as a Guide to Strangers* (Birmingham, 1800), ll.63-6, *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (The Gale Group), p.24).

[70] Both quotations are from Davies, p.11.

[71] All quotations are from *ibid.*, p.12.

[72] *Ibid.*, p.92.

[73] *Ibid.*, p.138.

[74] Christmas (2001), p.204.

[75] See, for instance, Christmas (2001), pp.205-6. As he counter argues, though, "the class dynamics of Wesleyan Methodism – its movement to raise laboring-class literacy, to develop a broad-based social consciousness, and to support an individual's right to better oneself – suggest a progressive function." Keegan notes that "Nearly all of Methodism's critics in its early years pointed to its levelling theology ... The dangers of Methodism, particularly in its sponsorship of large gatherings of the labouring poor, intended to sway them in enthusiasm, was seen as creating opportunities for mass action that would eventually be linked to events such as the Gordon Riots in 1780." She sounds a similar note of caution about Wesley's own politics, quoting E. P. Thompson's view that they were "odious", before citing Thompson nonetheless recording that "Methodism was indirectly responsible for a growth in the self-confidence and capacity for organisation of working people." (Keegan (2003), p.xxv). Hempton (pp.20-54) gives an account of both Wesley's own conservatism, and the radicalism of Methodists such as Bradburn, Coke, Pawson and Kilham (pp.55-84) in the 1790s.

[76] Phillis Wheatley, "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield", l.20, *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. by Nina Baym and others, gen. ed. Nina Baym, 6th edn., vol. A (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2003), p.814.

[77] In the 1896 edition 'Christian' is mis-spelled 'Christain'.

[78] As discussed by Christmas (2001), p.205 (see *TLaLoCS* XII: ll.1312-1459).

[79] See Barbara Brandon Schnorrenberg, 'Elizabeth Montagu', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, 64 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), vol. 38, 720-25 (p.723).

[80] See *ibid.*, pp.720-1, for an account of Montagu's girlhood, and p.721 for her marriage to Edward Montagu in 1742. The families of both of Montagu's parents were wealthy and well connected, even if they could not afford to live in London all year round. The couple, however, inherited a large Kent estate in the 1730s from Montagu's mother's family.

[81] See *ibid.*, pp.721, 725.

[82] *Ibid.*, p.721.

[83] Christmas (2001), p.185. See also Katherine G. Hornbeak, "New Light on Mrs. Montagu" in *The Age of Johnson: Essays Presented to Chauncy Brewster Tinker*, ed. by F. W. Hilles (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), 349-61.

[84] Yearsley, particularly in relation to her public act of rebellion against her patron Hannah More, has been well served by recent scholarship. See, variously, Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in English 1739-96* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp.16-21, Moira Ferguson, 'Resistance and Power in the Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley', in *Eighteenth-Century Theory and Interpretation*, 27 (1986), and *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), pp.45-90, Christmas (2001), pp.235-66, Mary Waldron, *Lactilla, Milkwoman of Clifton: The Life and Writings of Ann Yearsley, 1753-1806* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1996), and Burke's introduction to *Ann Yearsley, Selected Poems*, ed. by Tim Burke (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2003), pp.v-xii.

[85] Abducted by the Christian slave trader Gorgon, who uses his Christianity to legitimise and justify his actions, Luco retaliates against the whip by striking Gorgon on his forehead with a hoe, for which he is tortured and executed. See Ann Yearsley, *A Poem on the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade*, ll.265-80, *First Feminists: British Women Writers 1578-1799* ed. by Moira Ferguson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), pp.392-3. Subsequent references are to this edition and given in parentheses in the text. The poem can also be found in Burke, *Ann Yearsley, Selected Poems*, pp.28-39.

[86] Christmas (2001), p.257.

[87] Instead, Yearsley lavishes many lines on various animals, and particularly on the mad, nobly born German emigrant Louisa. See Ann Yearsley, "Clifton Hill", *Eighteenth-Century Poetry, an Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp.443-8. On Yearsley's avoidance of sympathy with the labouring poor in the poem, see Waldron, pp.108, 114.

[88] See Waldron, p.116. The counter argument is put forward by Landry and Ferguson (and to some extent Christmas).

[89] A number of poems from the broadsheets in *The Cheap Repository Tracts* have been anthologised, including "The Riot; or, Half a Loaf is Better than No Bread. In a Dialogue between Jack Anvil and Tom Hoad" (Lonsdale (1984), pp.808-10), and "Patient Joe, or the Newcastle Collier", and passages from "The Gin Shop; or, A Peep into Prison" (*Eighteenth-Century Women Poets, an Oxford Anthology*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) pp.331-5).

[90] Waldron, p.129.

[91] *Ibid.*, p.162.

[92] Ann Yearsley, *Stanzas of Woe*, ll.59-66, *EPFTD.*

[93] Goodridge, 'General Editor's Introduction', *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets, vol. I: 1700-1740*, ed. by William Christmas (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), p.xiv. See Waldron, pp.33-4 and Christmas (2001), pp.25-8, for further discussions of the topic, also treated by Landry, Ferguson and Klaus.

[94] Christmas (2001), pp.27-8.

[95] "To Mr. ****, an Unlettered Poet, On Genius Unimproved", ll.19-42, Fairer and Gerrard, pp.450-1.

[96] The addressee has not been identified, although critical speculation has suggested Yearsley was thinking of her Bristol contemporary John Frederick Bryant (Fairer and Gerrard, p.450).

[97] See Christmas (2001), p.253, and Waldron, p.152.

[98] Various critics have emphasised this point, and attacked the presentation of labouring poets as 'natural geniuses' by patrons as a means of subjecting the former to a considerably lesser status than their non-labouring counterparts. Dustin Griffin, alternatively, defends patronage and its practices, claiming that without it many labouring voices would not have been heard at all. See *Literary Patronage, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.289.

[99] These allusions are to: Pythagoras, Homer, Ilium, Nestor, Achilles, Ulysses, Menelaus, Paris, the river Salmacis, Zeno, Tibullus, Socrates, Diogenes, Plato, Lycurgus, Tyburn, Longinus, Helicon, Virgil, Hesiod, Ovid, Horace, Penelope, Helen, Sparta, Democritus, Solon, Pliny, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Egysthus, Ajax and Troy.

[100] Ann Yearsley, "Addressed to Ignorance", ll.69-72, *EPFTD.*

[101] Both poems were published in 1787's *Poems on Various Subjects.*

[102] Although she is not within the poetic tradition examined by this study, and her (complex) case cannot be considered here thoroughly, a more viable claim might be made for Yearsley. Unlike Woodhouse, Yearsley *herself* initiated the events that led to the public squabble with More when the latter placed the money earned from her subscription in trust, implying that Yearsley was not responsible enough to manage it. Furthermore, the latter not only initiated this public disagreement, but arguably triumphed, obtaining all this money and then continuing to successfully write and publish.

[103] There are no lending copies available in Great Britain. Three copies are available on a reference only basis. Clearly copies exist in the United States: Christmas references the 1896 edition in his endnotes (p.325). The only (brief) extracts of the poem anthologised since 1896, of which I am aware, are those in Lonsdale – see pp.799-802 – and in Keegan (2003), pp.214-34, who anthologises virtually all of Woodhouse's first collection,, and passages (amounting to about seven hundred lines) from the 1814 selection from *TLaLoCS* (i.e. about half of chapter one). The only copy of the 1814 edition of *TLaLoCS* in Great Britain is available for consultation at the British Library.

[104] See James Woodhouse, *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus: A Selection*, ed. by Steve Van-Hagen (Cheltenham: The Cyder Press, 2005).

Conclusion

Far from attempting to be 'the final word' on the issues examined, this study was instead intended to open up various questions. Just as 1730 was a necessarily arbitrary 'starting point', so the turn of the nineteenth century is, in some ways, an equally arbitrary 'end point'. Labouring verse flourished as never before in the nineteenth century and one can continue to trace Duck's poetic descendants, both in the continuing echoes of the Duckian mode in their writing, and in their overall aims. Whilst the self-defining work of the poets of labour of the first half of the eighteenth century gave way to an increasing tendency to poeticise political polemic, the urge to dignify labouring experience itself by "making special" did not recede, and has never done so, as a glance back to Goodridge's reference to the poetry of Fred Voss in my Introduction testifies.[1]

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the two most important and prominent poets of labour (of many) amidst this flourishing were arguably John Clare and Ebenezer Elliott. By this time Duck's star had waned in the eyes of the literary public, and he appears to have been considered unfashionable.[2] In his place the poets commonly termed 'Romantics' were re-popularising the idea of rural 'natural genius', the model of which was widely held to be Burns; accordingly he was very much the example that would-be rustic bards aspired to. Yet there is an indirect debt (at least) to the Duckian tradition evident in the works of both Clare and Elliott. The nature of this indirect debt is very different for these two men: Clare is predominantly a Romantic who sometimes writes with a freedom and sensibility not available to Duck, yet who intermittently, as in *The Shepherd's Calendar*,[3] produces work broadly Duckian in its aims. Elliott,[4] by contrast, and like many labouring-class poets, continues to write in neo-classical heroic couplets well into the mid-nineteenth century, yet does so as a public champion of the poor, celebrating political ideals as unavailable to Duck as Clare's Romanticism. In this Elliott is able to play a public role denied to Duck by his subsequent classicisation as a poet, and enforced social elevation as a man. Elliott's industrial verse, and his public role, were made possible by a line of descent beginning with Duck and also, particularly, encompassing the career of the proto-socialist self-proclaimed "Unpensioned Poet Laureate of the Poor", James Woodhouse (the title he lays claim to at the beginning of *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus*). For the finest poet of labour that England has yet produced

one must turn to Clare; for arguably the first successful public poet of labour speaking not just *of* those of his own 'class' background but also *for* them and *to* them, in this country, one must turn to Elliott. Hence both men in different ways satisfy quests begun with the public emergence of Stephen Duck in 1730. Both Clare and Elliott were religious. Whilst Clare's flirtation with radical religion was fairly brief,[5] Elliott, like many other Chartists, openly advocated a levelling theology that sponsored his political beliefs.

Doubtless investigations into the works of many other labouring poets of the nineteenth century will provide the "connective tissue" of which Christmas speaks when discussing links between the generations of Duck and of Bloomfield and Clare.[6] To what extent were Duck's nineteenth-century 'heirs' able to achieve the viable labouring identities in verse that proved problematic prior to 1750? Many other questions, beyond the scope of the present study, remain; not least the relationship between the Duckian tradition and the poetry of mainstream Romantic figures such as Wordsworth. To what extent was his "common language of men" informed, either directly or indirectly by the tradition traced by this study, and what is the nature of the debt owed to the latter by the former? There has been relatively little work done on the relationship between labouring verse before and after 1750, and even less on that between poetry *about* labour by labouring-class *and* non-labouring class poets. The material here is only a beginning.

In discussing the pre-1750 poetry here, the focus was primarily on one particular 'kind' of poem, on the basis that the tradition sketched concerns itself with poetic representations of labour *itself*, and that this particular 'kind' features the most extensive poetic descriptions in this period. There is also the matter, though, of verse by the figures discussed in chapters two and three, and other labouring poets, not explicitly concerned with labour. How many of the characteristics of the Duckian poetry of labour manifest themselves in labouring-class verse not specifically concerned with labour, and to what effect? How do the democratising tendencies of their verses interact with the more 'formal' poetic 'kinds' they also attempt, such as the pastoral or elegy? Woodhouse's attempt at epic suggests that such an enquiry may be worthwhile. The 'self-definition' poem is not the only generically distinct 'kind' to spring up in labouring-class verse during the eighteenth century. Further critical attention to the 'Wish poem' and 'Reception poem', as defined by Christmas and Haslett respectively, is surely necessary. Such an investigation could yield valuable

insights into how labouring poets aestheticised aspects of their lives beyond the details of their actual labouring experiences.

Then there are the figures discussed here who have nonetheless received scant critical attention elsewhere, to an extent that this study can only make the slightest amends. The two figures discussed who are unquestionably most aesthetically 'successful' are Leapor and Woodhouse, the latter a logical culmination for the present study in both his aesthetic success and in his explicit articulation of religious tendencies apparent throughout the labouring verse of the century. Whilst it would be quite misleading to describe Leapor as having received "scant critical attention" over the last two decades, it is still, bewilderingly, the case that no-one has to date written the full-length work surely demanded demonstrating her innovative and imaginative appropriation and re-writing of virtually every major poetic 'kind' she attempted.[7] Woodhouse has been inexplicably neglected, especially where his greatest poetic achievement *The Life and Lucubrations of Crispinus Scriblerus* is concerned. Susanna Blamire also, outside of her native Cumberland, continues to be undervalued, surely disadvantaged by the high proportion of dialect in her works – one of a number of factors that makes much of it eminently worthy of study in the first place. Whilst numerous women poets of the century have been rediscovered over recent decades, Blamire is held back as a sometime poet of labour of non-labouring status. To the critics described by Goodridge in my Introduction, this presumably relegates her to the position occupied by a Dyer or Thomson, denigrated as mere disinterested observers.

Theoretically too, this study arguably poses more questions than it answers. If it is anachronistic to place so much emphasis on 'class' when theorising the work of these poets, then a focus on religion, a central concern to a number of them, and to other labouring poets like Yearsley who do not noticeably provide poetic descriptions of labour itself, has surely been lacking to date. The work done in this area in this study is no more than introductory. The same must certainly be said for the readings of labouring verse in the light of Žižek's work on individual collusion with ideology. In both cases the possibilities for extending this work into the more overtly class-conscious nineteenth century are inviting. To what extent did the New Testament Christianity (or 'slave morality') examined here both sponsor and restrain class-based agitation and rebellion in a later age when the language of class revolt was spoken on a widespread basis? To what extent, if any, did its preclusion of actual (physical,

violent) rebellion increasingly create a tension with other motivations and justifications of labouring action in the nineteenth century? What role did New Testament Christianity play in the formation of the modern (party political) labour movement?

It is an exciting time in the study of the eighteenth-century poetry of labour. The poets concerned currently enjoy a profile arguably never higher since their own day. Recent republication of Mary Leapor's complete works, and the publication of comprehensive three volume anthologies of the works of both eighteenth and nineteenth-century labouring-class poets[8] attest to this, as does the continuing anthologisation of these figures alongside their canonical counterparts.[9] If this momentum can be sustained these writers will finally achieve the recognition they rightfully craved as *poets* and not just as exceptional representatives of 'the labouring classes'.

[1] See Fred Voss, *Goodstone* (Palm Springs: Event Horizon Press, 1991).

[2] See William J. Christmas, *The Lab'ring Muses; Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry 1730-1830* (Cranbury, London and Ontario: Associated University Presses, 2001), p.268.

[3] See John Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*, ed. by Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[4] See Ebenezer Elliott, *The Poetical Works of Ebeneezer Elliott*, ed. by Edwin Elliott, 2 vols., facsimile (New York: Georg Olms, 1975).

[5] Jonathan Bate, *John Clare: A Biography* (London, Basingstoke and Oxford: Picador, 2003), p.58.

[6] Christmas, p.268.

[7] Richard Greene's critical biography *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1993) is the closest attempt yet at realising this desirable aim. Whilst accomplished, its concentration on biography leaves only limited room for the criticism of Leapor's poetry, whilst the latter is clearly strong enough to sustain monograph-length investigation.

[8] See *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, gen. ed. John Goodridge, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003), and *Nineteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets*, gen. ed. John Goodridge, 3 vols. (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006).

[9] *Eighteenth-Century Poetry, an Annotated Anthology*, ed. by David Fairer and Christine Gerrard, 2nd edn. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003) continues this process, as did the prior edition (1999).

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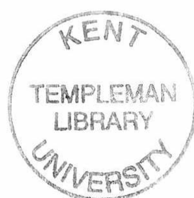
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