

LABOURING THINGS

LABOURING THINGS: WORK AND THE MATERIAL WORLD IN MARY
LEAPOR'S POETRY

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A Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Degree Doctorate of Philosophy

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McMaster University DOCTORATE OF PHILOSOPHY (2018) Hamilton, Ontario
(English)

TITLE: Labouring Things: Work and the Material World in Mary Leapor's Poetry

AUTHOR: Krista Paquin, B.A., M.A. SUPERVISOR: Dr. Eugenia Zuroski. NUMBER

OF PAGES: vii, 250.

LAY ABSTRACT

This dissertation focuses on the life and works of Mary Leapor (1722-1746) and builds upon recent interest in the cultural work of particular literary forms by examining the emergence of the labouring-class writer and the rise of a new poetic mode, the labour poem. Existing scholarship has begun to explore the many ways these texts represent class-based and gendered oppression, hardship, and work, and how these writers were able to combine several literary traditions to speak out against adverse conditions. By emphasising the material history of inanimate objects and nonhuman animals found within labouring-class writing, my project seeks to demonstrate how Leapor and other labouring-class writers used their poetry about the labours they performed in order to speak to something more than labour, such as what it means to be a subject in a world that is circumscribed by things like status, class and gender.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the life and works of eighteenth-century labouring-class poet Mary Leapor. Leapor's ability to use everyday objects to write poetry that speaks to important social and cultural transformations of the period is one of the most remarkable and interesting aspects of her poetry, and it sets her apart from other labouring-class writers. Therefore, while this dissertation situates Leapor as a female laborer who writes poetry about the labour she performs, it is more interested in *how she uses* her poetry about the labour she performs—and particularly how she offers her own version of “thing theory”—in order to speak to a number of problems of which labour is just one. By

spotlighting the complex role of objects in Leapor's poetry, this dissertation shows how she uses those objects to articulate new conceptions of the labouring body's relationship to authorship and authority, claim authorship as a form of useful labour, and legitimize her own gendered and class-inflected authority as a subject in literary and intellectual discourse. While acknowledging the context of material history, I focus on the ways Leapor uses particular things to rethink the possibilities of labouring-class life, identity, literary expression, and what it might have meant for her to imagine a new kind of human subjectivity that is itself inseparable from the concept of labour. Moreover, Leapor's work shows that she identifies labouring individuals as part of a community whose experience is heavily organized socially around labour but argues that their lived experience has provided them with a particular identity and perspective. Ultimately, this dissertation works to decenter our own moment in the history of ideas by showing how Leapor was theorizing about forms of situated knowledge over two hundred years before it entered academic discourse in the 20th century through feminist theories of embodied ways of knowing. Leapor's poetry is not just an object that should be studied through a theoretical lens; it should be understood as a theory of situated knowledge transmitting ideas from its own materially embedded position. Leapor's poetry lives on as a labouring thing—changing, growing, and theorizing as living humans do—inviting its readers to contemplate the complex components of being an embodied thinker.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would never have been able to finish my dissertation without the guidance of my committee members, help from friends, and support from my family.

Without coffee and conversations, this dissertation would not have been possible. It is impossible to know for certain how many gallons of coffee were consumed in the making of this dissertation, just as it is impossible to distinguish all the different voices that have been poured into it. But what is for certain, is those two things—coffee and conversation—have created here a signature blend of words guaranteed to stimulate intellectual thought and debate. That being said, the first person I would like to thank is my sister, Melissa Flore, for not only being my biggest fan, but also for providing me with my entire coffee supply for the last four years, which, without, this dissertation may never have existed.

My sincerest gratitude extends to my supervisor, Dr. Gena Zuroski, as well as Dr. Peter Walmsley, for their hard work and knowledge they brought to my dissertation as well as their valuable guidance and encouragement. I would like to thank Dr. Zuroski for all of the long conversations in her office, for letting me ask her the hard questions, and for her extraordinary ability to synthesize an onslaught of my scattered and disconnected thoughts into coherence and a logic that I then could understand. I am forever grateful to her for lending her brilliant mind to my project and helping me bring it into existence. I would like also to thank Dr. Walmsley for his continued support, wise counsel, and sympathetic ear. Similarly, I would like to thank Dr. Anne Savage for her commitment to my dissertation, her helpful advice, and for making her office a place of refuge and solace. Her friendly conversation and furry friends, namely Flynn, was a source of great support throughout this process.

I would also like to thank friends and family for their willingness to listen to me talk about my ideas and writing. I would like to thank Mary-Ann Jazvac, for her generous support and her eagerness to learn about Leapor and her work alongside me. I am most grateful to her for all of the middle-of-the-night sandwiches and discussions about animals, things, and poetic identity, just so that I could feel more comfortable and confident with my work, despite her very apparent late-night fatigue. A special thank you to Jeremy Haynes as well for his check-ins to make sure I was still living, his unwavering encouragement and reassurance. Finally, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my mom, who is the most honest and hard-working woman I know. It is because of her that I have the work ethic necessary to produce a dissertation such as this one.

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Introduction: Mary Leapor and the Role of Objects in Eighteenth-Century Labouring-Class Poetry

Methought there lay before my Eyes
A Nail of more than common Size;
'Twas one that nails' our Garden Door,
And oft my Petticoat has tore:
When sudden (it is true, my Friend)
It rear'd itself, and stood an end,
And tho' no Mouth I cou'd descry,
It talk'd as fast as you or I:
And thus began—As I am told
' You Poets seldom deal in Gold;
' That's not the Price of empty Songs,
' But to Sir *Thrifty Gripe* belongs;
' Bright Silver is Sir *Wary's* Claim,
' And Copper for the lab'ring Dame;
' If so (that each may have their due)
' We rusty Nails' belong to you;
(Leapor, "The Ten-Penny Nail" 15-30)

In Mary Leapor's poem "The Ten-Penny Nail," a talking nail appears in labouring-class poet Mira's dream in the form of a muse, relating its "strange adventures" in order to inspire Mira to bring a great poem into being. Curiously, as can be seen in the passage above, the first subject the nail broaches after being endowed with a voice is to situate itself within a specific group or category of people and things. The nail classifies four different social categories, gold—the wealthy, silver—the middling sorts, copper—the labouring and lower classes, and rusted iron—"you poets." The nail's distinction between these social groups is determined by financial wealth because it symbolically links each group with precious metals of successively decreasing values. In the eighteenth century, money, or physical capital, was not standardized like it is today, and, so, if one were to barter and trade, or "deal in gold" effectively, one needed to possess great knowledge of the relative values of coins as well as other local currency. In the poem, the

nail explains that “Gold” belongs to the class of the landed gentry and elite, where people like “Sir Thrifty Gripe” guard and hoard their fortunes in an effort to maintain their elevated position in the world. “Bright silver” properly belongs to a growing middle class of merchants and traders who often dealt with silver. The amount of available silver in the kingdom matched the new social visibility of the middling classes, and as “Sir Wary’s” name implies, they were a cautious yet superfluous class of consumers. Next, the nail claims that “Copper” is a marker of the “labouring dame.” Copper’s hardened quality, tarnished hue, and abundant and accessible supply is an analogy for the hard and labourious life of a labourer. The fourth category, which it names after itself, is iron, “rusty nails,” which properly belongs to the category of “you poets.” Iron and poets seem to stand outside of the other social and economic categories described by the nail. The “rusty nail” claims to belong to the class of poets who reside on a lower level than the “lab’ring dame.” The nail does not so much claim to be the property of its author as it announces that it and the poet, having similar functions and values, belong to the same social and cultural categories. By equating the poet with an object of the labour economy that passes through many hands and holds various labourious positions, the poem suggests that a poet labours much in the same way as does a labouring object, an agricultural worker, or a domestic servant, and therefore the occupation of poet properly belongs within a labour economy.

Leapor’s philosophical preoccupation with a nail that she then describes in a kind of economic poetics of labour and social ideology creates an affinity between the poet, literary labour, poetry and a labouring economy. Moreover, by linking monetary value, or

financial wealth, with the products of “rhyming sinners,” Leapor is effectively putting poetry directly in an economic arena and provides readers with a commentary on the relationship between poetry and the economy, or of words and money.¹ However, if we read Leapor’s poem without the knowledge that she was a labouring-class poet, would the passage above still read as classist ideology? Perhaps, as this was an unstable period of major social transformation and cultural reorganization. However, this raises an even more important question that is less about why Leapor is writing about the idea of society being divided into categories based on wealth and more about what is Leapor’s frame of reference for even thinking that a society can be symbolically divided by precious metals in the first place?

Given scholars’ interest in the eighteenth-century birth of consumer culture and the rise of the middle class, the preferred theoretical approach to eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry and material objects has been traditionally Marxist. These approaches to literature focus largely on literary representations of class conflict as well as the reinforcement of class ideology.² My reading of the passage above fits comfortably within this model of criticism, as it reveals a labouring-class woman thinking and writing about the relationship between labour, wealth, and social classes. But a purely Marxist

¹ The shifting cultural nature of writing and authorship contributed to a sense of society as increasingly divided and perplexed, because lower classes could now write their way out of economic oppression and marginalized status, ultimately altering both the literary market and the structures of society.

² Recent scholarly work by writers such as Markman Ellis, Deidre Lynch, Nicholas Hudson, and Christopher Flint are among many scholars who contributed to Blackwell’s edited collection “The Secret Life of Things” with Marxist approaches to objects in eighteenth-century literature. For example, Flint argues that writers who turned to speaking objects in eighteenth-century fiction did so as a way to stage their concern over “the unpredictable circulation of books in the public domain” (171), to “literalize the disjunction between writer and written matter that was intensified by eighteenth-century bookselling practices” (165); furthermore, by “attaching the idea of narration to physical objects, which in circulation lose their prime function and identity, object narratives refute optimistic assessments of print as a mechanism for promoting public order or a sign of the nation’s concerted will” (179).

framework cannot easily provide answers to questions like who is the nail referring to when it claims to belong to the class of “you poets”? Since we are reading a poem by a labouring-class woman, do we understand these poets as a group specifically comprised of lower-class writers whose “empty songs” are considered worthless poems by the literary elite? Or, is the nail talking about a universal category of poets that includes writers of all kinds, regardless of where they are economically situated? Moreover, what are we to make of a nail taking on the role of muse? or the fact that a rusted piece of iron is given power and narrative authority? Why does Leapor reconceptualize the conventional poet/muse relationship by replacing traditionally female forms of divine inspiration with a masculinized “rusty nail,” and what does this achieve? Marxist methodology does not generally provoke such trains of thought, but these are important questions contemporary scholars of eighteenth-century literature and culture are starting to ask and pursue. Recently, Mark Blackwell (*The Secret Life of Things*) and Jonathan Lamb (*The Things Things Say*) have focused on the role of objects in eighteenth-century literature by asking what happens when property declares independence from its owners and begins to move and speak of and for itself. According to Aileen Douglas, in eighteenth-century thought, “the very notion that objects have adventures and that society is integrated through the transmission of objects from hand to hand, is itself a novel way of thinking” (Douglas 151). These scholars are now reconsidering the significance objects and nonhuman animals in literary texts have as reflections of the array of social and cultural transformations taking place throughout the eighteenth-century, such as print culture, the rise of the woman writer, the emergence of a middle class, and the shift from

an agrarian economy to an industrial one. My dissertation joins this ongoing conversation by asking what it means that Leapor's writing raises objects to subjecthood, endowing them with voice, agency, and authority. By asking what Leapor's speaking objects can teach us about eighteenth-century labouring-class culture, about the material constituents of that culture, and about the impact of material changes on labourers' lives, we can gain a better understanding of labouring-class identity and subjectivity. In doing so, we will also be able to see how the nail's narrative and its allusion to a distinct set of social categories actually reflects the transformation of the labouring-class woman writer into a labouring poet subject. In this way, a nail "of no more than common size" teaches us that we need to consider the possibility of a labourer's identity and subjectivity, and, by extension, the nail asks us to reimagine what we believe labouring-class poetry to be.

Mary Leapor (1722-1746), a domestic servant with a very brief life, did not live long enough to see her poems make it into print, nor revel in the success or fame that unquestionably was headed her way. Her posthumous collections gained a favorable reputation shortly after her death; her work even garnered attention from Samuel Richardson and Christopher Smart (Keegan 52), but soon the essence of Leapor and her works slipped into the shadows, mostly only reappearing rarely in anthologies. However, the emergence of feminist scholarship in the 1970's and 1980's helped pave the way for writers like Leapor to be re-examined. In the 1980's, Roger Lonsdale's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: An Oxford Anthology* (1989) challenged traditional conceptions of the canon of the period by bringing forward the works of many poets who "had been ignored for reasons of gender and class" (xxix). Since the last decade of the twentieth

century, modern scholarship devoted to Leapor continues to grow steadily in scope and quality, with scholars such as Donna Landry (*The Muses of Resistance* 1990) and William Christmas (*The Lab'ring Muses* 2001) pioneering the way for radical redefinitions of Leapor and labouring-class writing in general.

Since the reexamination of the eighteenth-century literary canon in the 1980's, historically neglected authors have been uncovered and reintroduced into contemporary literary consciousness. These previously ignored writers were from economically marginalized backgrounds and most did not receive lasting literary fame or recognition, and therefore most did not secure a place within the eighteenth-century canon. Readers of labouring-class poetry in the eighteenth-century tended to be more focused on the figure behind the poetry rather than the skill of the writer. As a result, these literary consumers defined identities for labouring-class poets within the expectations of class, instead of allowing these poets to construct their identities and authority. Furthermore, their exclusion from the canon can be ascribed to many economic and cultural factors such as the professionalization of authorship and the shift from writing as a leisure activity, to a method of employment (Siskin 4). Nevertheless, contemporary literary studies have now recognized eighteenth-century labouring-class poets as a tradition in writing that was an integral part of the eighteenth-century literary scene.

Although contemporary scholars have established a canon for these recently-termed labouring-class poets, it remains a formidable task to explain what, in both social and literary terms, this canon consists of. Over time, scholars have given labouring-poets many different, overlapping titles, ranging from plebian to uneducated, self-taught,

peasant poet, proletariat and working class. In this dissertation, the term labouring-class will be employed to account for a wide range of people who occupied economically marginalized positions and who had to work for survival, such as domestic servants, agricultural workers, bricklayers, shoemakers, etc. While scholars today can view three distinct classes within eighteenth-century society, the economic boundary of the middle-class is harder to decipher. As a social category, the middle classes were a broad band of the population occupying a position in the social hierarchy below the aristocracy, but above a labourer. Such diversity makes truly defining the middle-class impossible; however, this class will be identified here as emerging middle classes, or middling classes. In terms of literature, the conventions of labouring-class poetry vary between studies; most scholars agree that this group of poets was working with many different literary traditions but were altering these traditions to suit their own purposes. This category of poetry includes everything from high Augustan form, pastorals, satires and dramas, to modes not yet deciphered by contemporary scholars. The two popular forms found throughout labouring-class poetry are the pastoral and georgic modes. The pastoral was recast by labouring poets beginning in the 1730's, from images of peaceful rustic landscapes to scenes of hard labour and backbreaking work. Still, most labouring-poets tended to follow the georgic form because its malleability as a mode, rather than a genre, offered opportunities for poetic experiment and playfulness (Fairer 79). The georgic mode also includes themes of work and trade, but also explored topics such as human ingenuity, social structures and national concerns (80).

Of the hundreds of labouring-class poets reintroduced by the efforts of scholars painstakingly prodding stacks of texts in places like the British Library, Leapor has become one of the most renowned and studied amongst them. Richard Greene and Anne Messenger anticipated that Leapor would receive a warm welcome in literary criticism, stating they undertook the task of writing a sustained biography of Leapor and anthologizing her work because they believed she “was one of the most capable poets of the mid-eighteenth century” (Greene xxxiv). Donna Landry was one of the first scholars to approach Leapor’s poetry with feminist and Marxist theory, emphasizing radical elements in Leapor’s thought. Landry was also one of the first to unveil and expose some of Leapor’s more sexy poetry. Since Landry’s study, many scholars have placed Leapor’s works within broader discussions of classist and women’s writing and literary identity and patronage. There is now a large sample of scholarship available regarding how Leapor’s experiences as a woman and as a labourer shaped her writing. However, a large portion of this scholarship is limited to Marxist explorations of class and gender. And to historicize literature in a way that contains these poets to a single, homogenized model perpetuates classist ideologies and occludes the internal complexities and contradictions of labouring-class poetry.

While this dissertation is indebted to previous scholarship that employs Marxist and feminist methodologies, recent critics of eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry have cautioned against the blindness that these methodologies may cause with respect to interpretive limitations. Historicizing and containing these poets to their social stratification perpetuates classist ideologies and deprives readers of the chance to enrich

their understanding of the artistic, aesthetic and philosophic skillsets found in labouring-class poetry. William Christmas and John Goodridge have become staples in revisionary readings of the history of eighteenth-century labouring-class poetry. Influenced by the philosophy of Raymond Williams (his *The Country and The City* approach underpins the ways in which critics discuss many non-canonical writers), these scholars develop the tradition of cultural materialism in their studies. Christmas employs this theory on the grounds that “cultural materialism provides alternative ways for conceiving of literary value, and a hermeneutic for measuring traditionally marginalized texts” (Christmas 46). Similarly, Goodridge calls for a full formalist analysis of labouring-class writing. He recognizes that “caution need to be exercised in extrapolating social history from literature, especially from that most mystifying of literary forms, poetry” (Goodridge 91). By avoiding a purely historical approach, these scholars, among many others, believe that labouring-class writers will be given due credit for the literariness of their productions.

My dissertation takes as its theoretical starting point the works of scholars like Christmas, Milne, and Fairer whose scholarship makes important contributions to a better understanding of the significance of labour and the agency of the labourer by following both Marxian and cultural-materialist approaches; these critics are more concerned with the complex ways economic conditions shaped labouring-class poets imaginations and how marginalized writers like Leapor and their works were often highly skilled and aesthetically self-aware. These were a group of poets who saw themselves speaking to each other as well as to mainstream literary, cultural and socioeconomic issues. However, by spotlighting the complex role of objects in Leapor’s poetry, my dissertation explores

how the objects or animals she writes about articulate new conceptions of the labouring body's relationship to authorship and authority, allowing Leapor to claim authorship as a form of useful labour, and to legitimize her own gendered and class-inflected authority as a subject in literary and intellectual discourse.

Existing scholarship has begun to explore the many ways these texts represent class-based and gendered oppression, hardship, and work, and how these writers were able to combine several literary traditions to speak out against adverse conditions. However, limited attention has been paid to the labouring-classes and how objects help shape their experiences, mediate identities, and determine behaviours and social relations. Recently, scholars have turned to Bill Brown's "thing theory" to help define the relationship between literature and material culture, specifically eighteenth-century attitudes toward the new object world. According to Brown, inanimate objects help to form and transform human beings; they convey how the material environment shapes humans through the production of both economic value and symbolic value (Brown 3). My dissertation joins this discussion by asking how studying the history of the material culture in eighteenth-century labouring-class writing sheds light upon intertwined categories of human labours including manual labour and literary cultural production.

Until now, critical studies about objects in the poetry or material conditions of the labouring class focus on the particular mechanics of manual labour objects domestic servants or agricultural workers used to perform their labours, and also how these objects were used to document specific material struggles of this class. An interdisciplinary approach with a focus on the centrality of cultural representation as a basis for

understanding Leapor's poetry guides my dissertation away from biographically inflected readings of Leapor's poetry toward an analysis that is concerned with treating her works as poetry worthy of sustained aesthetic and theoretical criticism, an approach that will ultimately highlight the existence of a complex labouring-class culture in the eighteenth century. Rather than simply treat material history as a context that explains Leapor's ideas and motivations, I pay close attention to the ways Leapor uses particular things to rethink the possibilities of labouring-class life, identity, and literary expression.

My first chapter is dedicated to exploring the culture of the objects that Leapor writes about and how they empower her to understand and articulate new conceptions of her labouring body's relationship to authorship and authority. Here, I explore the ways in which Leapor creates symbolic dialogues between objects of the labour economy and the labour of the poet. And, I pay particular attention to the ways in which speaking objects like a nail, quill, and pocketbook facilitated Leapor's claim for authorship as a form of useful labour and helped her to legitimize her own gendered and class-inflected authority as a subject in literary and intellectual discourse. In the first part of the chapter, I provide a new methodology for thinking about subject-object relations and their role in Leapor's poetry in order to illustrate how she uses her writing about everyday objects to assert agency and poetic authority. I show that by putting Leapor's poems which feature speaking objects in conversation with two contemporary critical frameworks, thing poems and it-narratives as laid out by Barbara Benedict and Mark Blackwell, uncovers Leapor's invention of a new unique literary category, one that I call it-poems. It-poems are a form of poetry which diverges from the conventions of labouring-class poetry by employing

inanimate objects or nonhuman animals to behave as narrative protagonists. Leapor's poetry seems to anticipate the "formulaic sameness of most it-narratives" (Blackwell, *Extraordinary* 188) as she shares with the genre the "surprising aspect [of an author's] violation of the common-sense assumption that inanimate objects and nonhuman animals have no point of view and no subjective depth" (240). It-poems also share in all the characteristics of Benedict's thing poem, but they extend beyond its poetic boundaries because inanimate objects do not simply occupy the verse, they control the verse. This feature invites us to read Leapor's object poems in the context of prose it-narratives. While it-poems do have the it-narrative's key element (stories told from the perspective of an inanimate object), and although they do share in the subgenre's cultural power, it-poems are not just about documenting the struggles of what it is like to be an inanimate object. Rather, I argue these poems are about Leapor appropriating those materials to think critically about her labouring body's relationship with subjectivity and literature. Specifically, I examine how Leapor's object poems, "The Ten Penny Nail" and "The Inspir'd Quill," intersect with thing poems and it-narratives, and how this theoretical overlap reveals the ways in which Leapor's objects become allegorical tools for thinking critically about her labour's relationship to authorship and authority. Leapor's it-poems fit somewhere between the generic fields of thing poems and it-narratives; they not only bring subjective depth to Benedict's and Blackwell's critical frameworks, but also, they provide us with an eighteenth-century labouring poet's own version of "thing theory" through which we can explore what it might have meant for her to imagine a new kind of human subjectivity that is itself inseparable from the concept of labour.

The second part of this chapter begins by examining Leapor's two pocketbook poems, "The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy" and "The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa," in the framework of it-poems to better understand how a pocketbook allows Leapor to establish a sense of class identity based upon a set of distinct cultural and intellectual assumptions and practices embodied by the pocketbook. Here, I attend to what it means that a pocketbook claims its own status as a thing that has been cast-off and used for non-fashionable purposes in a similar way to how a text might claim its own status as a thing that has been discarded and used for non-literary purposes, and how this might reflect the ways in which a labouring poet, who lives by the laws of labour and is marked by her socioeconomic environment, undergoes her own sense of literary and cultural dislocation. Furthermore, this chapter addresses how Leapor's it-poems bring into question the nature of the gift economy and how an object like a pocketbook or writing desk can collapse the distinction between ownership and friendship, mentorship and patronage, and compensated and uncompensated human labours.

Chapter 2 explores the erotics of everyday objects and the sapphic poetics of Leapor's writing. Expanding upon the reading of Leapor's pocketbook poems from chapter 1, this chapter further explores the development of Leapor's and Susanna Jennens's (Leapor's one-time employer) relationship through the material and literary mediation of a pocketbook. The central theme of the pocketbook poems is the material process of writing, but in these poems the writing process is sexualized, and female literary labour is eroticized. I show that by delving into the erotic materiality of the pocketbook, we not only gain a greater appreciation of the complex web of women's

relationships that underlie the production of writing (relationships in which power and desire move in multiple and sometimes unexpected directions), but also, understand how Leapor and an upper-class woman transform a pocketbook into a space that allows them to rethink the logic of literary paternity and to bring female pleasure to the forefront of literary creation. The exchange of an object, embodied with a blend of two socially and culturally distinct female voices, that crosses geographical and ideological borders, is asking the question of what *is* labour and where does it come from? Here, I show how Leapor's pocketbook poems both propose and explore the question of whether two women from two different classes can participate in the same activity and whether that can be considered labour for both of them. And if so, what kind of labour is it?

This chapter also calls attention to what I call the masturbatory sapphic poetics of Leapor's writing. I argue that Leapor's poetry, particularly her "A Hymn to the Morning," is an erotic poem about poem-writing and about Leapor's personal recognition of her literary limitations, which she comes to identify through a kind of sapphic dialogue between herself and her poetic persona, Mira. This internal erotic conflict materializes in the poem as we begin to see how Leapor positions herself as immersed in the pleasures of her own text. By incorporating classical canonicity, the history of sexuality, and the erotics of everyday things, this chapter demonstrates how self-pleasuring via masturbatory sapphic poetics exposes Leapor as having a much vaster body of labour that she devotes herself to, and this is labour that serves entirely different interests and purposes and affords different pleasures. Moreover, such a methodology shows how Leapor's poem writing demonstrates a resistance to authoritative social and cultural

norms and displays her unwillingness to along with the narrative that the labouring life affords no pleasure to the labourer.

Chapter 3 focuses on Leapor's poetry that features speaking animals and explores the ways in which the fable form facilitates her ability to moralize in a number of spheres and conveys her ability to confer aesthetic status on and therefore cultural significance to livestock animals. By the of middle the eighteenth century, the fable form in English literature had lost most of its formal and ideological vigour that it had when writers like Chaucer wrote "The Nun's Priest Tale" (1390) and Dryden wrote his collection of fables (1700). The fable's loss of status as a serious form of writing became the perfect form for a writer like Leapor to find licence to discuss high matters such as taste and judgement, a field otherwise reserved for figures with cultural authority. More importantly, these fables evidence a labouring poet's ability to reflect on and write about her world, to demonstrate her critical perspective, and to engage with important philosophical debates of her period.

The first half of this chapter focuses on how Leapor retrieves the figure of the fabled hen, and, by extension, women, and generates an alternative image, one of a prodigious and ever-watchful hen capable of reason and of making logical inferences. Here, I am predominantly concerned with the way Leapor puts the material body back into the equation of what taste is as both a mental property and measure of cultural authority when she creates one poem that illustrates a hen thinking about her own food, and another that shows a hen thinking about her status as food. In "The Delicate Hen," a hen uses her body to stage a hunger strike because she lacks authority over her diet. In "The Fox and the Hen," a hen uses her body to exercise taste in way that legitimizes her

cultural authority and authorizes the “prate[s] and cackle[s]” of all hens in literary discourse. In having her hen do so, Leapor brings to the foreground gendered ideas about the value of female thoughts and uses the fable form to introduce her own field of feminine epistemological discourse, and thereby legitimizing a claim for taste-based knowledge. These two poems serve to highlight how the food Leapor writes about is encoded with vast amounts of economic, social, and cultural information. And by positioning these food objects within a web of representational possibilities, Leapor’s animal poetry demonstrates how important representations of food can be to representations of the labouring-female subject’s tasteful self in eighteenth-century poetry. Moreover, I argue that Leapor saw the farm and the pleasures of keeping and eating animals as a cultural field for the practice of higher thinking and philosophical enquiry.

The second part of chapter 3 is devoted to an exploration of the economic, cultural, and aesthetic value of the animals represented in Leapor’s fables and provides some examples of the kinds of things other than labour that make up a labouring-class subjectivity and what a labouring-class culture might consist of. First, I show how her animal poetry interrogates the ideological work of taste while making a philosophical case for modern labour value. Leapor’s “The Sow and the Peacock” moves away from a discussion about literature’s role in the reproduction of dominant culture’s taste and quality and demonstrates her consciousness and conceptualization of taste as it gives position, influence and political power. The overall aim of this chapter is to show how farm animals help Leapor to identify labouring individuals as part of a community whose

experience is heavily organized socially around labour and to argue that her lived experience has provided her with a particular identity and certain perspectives of the world. I have provided a selection of Leapor's poetry in an appendix at the end of this dissertation. The poem's I have selected to reprint here are her poems that I discuss at length throughout the chapters.

Overall, my dissertation argues that the material conditions of labouring-class life, like the ones that define Leapor's life and career, were the conditions under which a certain understanding of subjectivity and its relation to objects developed. But Brown's "thing theory" helps us see how theoretical models are part of material life, just as material things are a form of everyday theory. Therefore, this dissertation is not solely concerned with situating Leapor as a female labourer who wrote poetry about the labour she performs, although her poetry is about that as well. Rather, I am interested in showing how Leapor uses her poetry about the labour she performs—and particularly how she offers her own version of "thing theory"—in order to speak to a number of problems of which labour is just one.

Chapter 1: The It-Poets

In contrast to our general understanding of labouring-class poetry as writing that expresses the prosaic demands of agricultural and rural labouring life through representations of the tired and worn bodies of manual labourers, it is my contention that that a large portion of Leapor's works are more concerned with the poet as a labouring body and with the recognition of authorship as not just a form of labour but as a form of useful labour. Leapor's poetry persistently emphasizes the manual task of one who writes and locates the labour of the one who writes within many of the period's important discourses such as industry and use-value, taste and social class, and even epistemological debates. Leapor situates herself and her writing within these critical fields of thought by using everyday objects to think through and understand the world around her, and as a medium to express her thoughts and ideas within that world. As this chapter will show, Leapor uses objects like a nail, a quill, and a writing desk to express and embody significant social and cultural values and she manages to do so through various representations of human labour, both mental and physical. Leapor's ability to use everyday objects to write poetry that speaks to a number of important social and cultural transformations of the period is one of the most remarkable and interesting aspects of her poetry, and it is precisely this characteristic that sets her apart from her contemporary labouring-class poets. In several of the poems I will be discussing here, Leapor employs an inanimate object to behave as a narrative protagonist in order to make biting critical comments upon society, and to not only represent the labouring body but to legitimize the labouring body within differing sociocultural spheres as well, exhibiting a very different

technique from other labouring-class poets at the time. Two of these poems are *The Ten Penny Nail* (1748) and *The Inspir'd Quill* (1748). In the former, a nail narrates its adventures as it traverses through the labour economy, and in the latter, a soul encompasses a quill and recounts its many lives, transmigrating into humans and animals before it finally inhabits the inanimate object.

Labouring Things

In *"The Ten-Peny Nail,"* a nail narrates its "strange adventures" as it is passed from owner to owner and forced in and out of utility at no will of its own. The several different "posts" and positions it has experienced throughout its life means it has occupied many different social and cultural spaces where it has accumulated vast knowledge and information about what happens in, around, and between people and their things in their respective spaces. Through the nail's narrative, Leapor generates an analogy for the various positions and use values of labourers within the current labouring-class economy, demonstrating that she had come to a certain awareness or understanding of class-consciousness. The nail's first position, where it "haply stuck" in the "spacious door" of a great estate home, reflects the "lazy life" of the landed gentry and elite. Only the wealthy could afford to "hammer in" over "seven hundred" nails' into a single door purely for decorative purposes. The nail's next post was to "toil from sun to sun" in "Simon's plough," and it provides a commentary on the labourious and hard conditions of the agricultural life and labouring body. As a labourer within the agricultural economy, the nail must physically toil alongside the plough, presumably hauling materials back and forth through terrible and rough terrain all day long. As the nail explains, its master

worked it and the plough so hard with “no relieve” that he “broke [the] plough.” Next, the nail moves into an upper or middle-class home where its new function is to affix a mirror to a wall in “Celia’s chamber.” Like the way chambermaids or servants were largely disregarded as peripheral objects in the room while attending to a woman like Celia, the nail, as a wall anchor for “a mirror with curious frame,” is relatively unnoticed and it can observe the conversations and circumstances of the women who use the mirror. The nail’s tone turns satirical here as it describes the way “the lovely Nymphs [would] repair” to the mirror to “spread [their] shining hair,” to “ty[e] ribbands green,” and to “smile” at their reflections. The nail is commenting on female vanity; these women are concerned only with their beauty and the mirror’s ability to validate their beauty. But there are extreme consequences for the female vice of vanity, which, the nail claims, usually comes in the form of jealousy. The nail explains that one day its “mistress drew to nigh” and another woman, or “ill-genius” who was “standing by/ drove [it] directly into her eye.” From here the nail moves into the lower-class home of “Sir Gripus” to “secure” a “stately oaken door” with the purpose “to keep his daughter from a beau.” Here, the nail comments on patriarchy and the oppressive nature of the institution of marriage. After this position, the nail then occupies a “dang’rous post” in “a vault” in the ale-house of a brew master. The nail comments on the nature of the ale trade and its related social problem of drunkenness. The nail’s job to “guard the choice inspiring beer” is just as dangerous and perilous as the brew master’s or ale-house owner’s job of making, storing, and protecting beer the “from thirsty Bacchanalian Rage” of customers. Although ale and beer were “essential foodstuffs” and consumed as “a basic liquid refreshment by persons of all ages

and all classes” (Bennett 133), it was a significant social problem, especially for those who thought “drinking is the cure of trouble” (Leapor 88). According to Judith Bennett, the inebriating effects of alcohol like ale and beer not only caused disorderly households and noisy public streets (behaviours that public figures sought to control), but also was a narcotic that “anesthetise men against the strains of contemporary life” (Bennett 132). The nail then moves through several other positions with a “band of rude mechanics” before it finally ends up in a labouring-class female poet’s hand where it warns her about the dangers that await “Rhyming Sinners” like herself who dare to “walk abroad,” flaunting verses and “[resolving] to hide no Pelf.” Writing out in the open, Mira is subject to the action that may come against her in “dangerous times.” Mira’s open display of literary ambition is seen as an act of transgression, because a female labourer should be performing more productive, gender-and-class specific labour. Mira must do proper work — domestic duties like “spinning” and mending clothes — and she must know her proper place: “wisely” being a good daughter and remain contained within the household. The nail’s story culminates with the image of Mira’s pens and verses gathered together and locked away, shut away from the world. This last image in the poem highlights both the limitations of the labouring poet’s material conditions and the intellectual limitations imposed upon her by social and cultural systems.

By the mid-eighteenth century, there are many texts by labouring-class poets who have adopted mainstream literary conventions in order to express their perspectives on a range of cultural and historical issues representing differing concerns and attitudes about the experience of labour work, as well as use those very conventions to speak out against

the exploitation of their socioeconomic conditions.³ Both Landry and Christmas have found that poets like Leapor, Duck, Mary Collier, Ann Yearsley, and Henry Jones were not “duped” by the class-based ideologies they were up against; instead, these scholars argue that labouring-class poetry represents examples of ideological critique. Christmas claims that these authors “found ways to articulate their desires and interests publicly within the context of specific social problems they faced” (Christmas 24). While in *The Muses of Resistance*, Landry illuminates how female labouring-poets skilfully situated their poetry “within available genres and conventions while transforming the materials in the interests of a proto-feminist and labouring-class critique” (Landry 75-6). Numerous scholars have noted that labouring-class poets presented a threat to the social order, as it would become clear that they were just as or more capable as those from the higher classes in both writing and other modes of employment.

The nail in Leapor’s poem stands in for critics like Samuel Johnson who reminds his readers of *The Idler* that they ought to remain productive in the trades to which they were bred. Labouring-class poets were attracted to the new method of writing as employment, and especially motivated by the successes of people like Duck and Dodsley, they began to put down the tools of their trade for paper and pen instead. Nevertheless, in doing so, many labourers’ literary ambitions were met with considerable animosity not

³ Using Duck as an example for this claim, Christmas proposes that masked in “The Thresher’s Labour” is Duck’s criticism of the exploitation of manual labours. Christmas directs attention toward the section where the traditional harvest dinner takes place (25), illustrating that Duck uses this scene to reflect on the “worker’s reward and omnipresent, cyclical nature of the work itself” (124). However, such an economic relationship upholds and maintains a hierarchical system which seeks to keep Duck in his respective place as a productive, working cog in society (124). Duck has to ‘mask’ his criticism, because his resistance requires subtlety and must be articulated within what might be acceptably published, usually through systems of patronage

just from mainstream writers and critics but, as we will soon see, from things like nails', quills, pigs and hens as well. In his analysis of Leapor's "The Ten-Penny Nail," Christmas notes that "in diminishing the speaker of this narrative as a ten-penny nail, Leapor provides a fissure through which we can read her critique of the ethos of its monologue" (167). In his reading, Christmas finds that the "satire of this poem turns on the fact that an inanimate object is responsible for communicating views which the poet satirizes" (168). Christmas gives precedence to Leapor's ability to find ways to subversively critique dominant social ideologies in her poem and highlights her prodigious satirical skills; yet, he also recognizes that a nail has "responsibility"—it has a role to play in the narrative, and this reveals a complexity of the poem that has yet to be explored.

Leapor's mental engagement with a nail materializes in the form of a poem about the material conditions of the labouring classes, and it is a much different form of discourse than Adam Smith's later use of a nail to think about economic models of productivity. In his study of eighteenth-century woodworking tools, James Gaynor suggests nails' were always an essential part of Britain's economy, but especially so between 1765 and 1783, a period when, Gaynor argues, Britain was the largest manufacturer of nails' in the global economy. Smith offers further evidence of the nail's impact on the economic imaginary in his 1776 text "The Wealth of Nations" wherein he puts forth a theory of the division of labour. According to Smith, the division of labour is the organization of work that enables workers to increase their skills, dexterity, and judgement (Smith 5-9), and he uses the example of the manufacture of nails' to state that

a common smith, who, though accustomed to handle the hammer, has never been used to make nails', if, upon some particular occasion, he is obliged to attempt it, will scarce, I am assured, be able to make above two or three hundred nails' in a day, and those too, very bad ones. A smith who has been accustomed to make nails', but whose sole principle business has not been that of a nailer, can seldom, with his utmost diligence, make more than eight hundred or a thousand nails' in a day. I have seen several boys, under twenty years of age, who had never exerted themselves, could make, each of them, upwards of two thousand three hundred nails' in a day. The different operations in which the making of a [nail] is subdivided [— to blow the bellows, stir or mend the fire, heat the iron and forge every part of the nail—] are all of them much more simple, and the dexterity of the person, of whose life it has been the sole business to perform them, is usually much greater. The rapidity with which some of the operations of [nail] manufacturers are performed, exceeds what the human hand could, by those who had never seen them, be supposed capable of acquiring. (144-49)

The nail belongs to an economy premised on a very fixed notion of what labour is and who is doing it. Here, Smith points out that labour is hitting a nail with a hammer, and this task is generally carried out by a particular body, one that is male and from the labouring class. Smith uses a nail and its production to further his view of the division of labour and to provide evidence to support his claim that this economic model increases the productivity of labour. Smith believes the division of work and the specialization of skill (those who produce nails' and those who use nails') not only improves dexterity of workmen but also it enables workers to produce more nails' by avoiding the loss of time spent moving from one task to the next, thereby increasing the efficiency and productivity of not only nails' but of the British economy as well. When Smith thinks about a nail he thinks about it in Marxist terms; he thinks about its processes of production, the time and human labour involved in these processes, and what can be done to improve overall productivity of the nail. But Smith also makes a point of stating that making nails' is a "simple" craft that requires very little mental and physical "exert[ion];" it is not a task for the "common smith" but one more suitable to unskilled labourers, or "boys, under twenty

years of age.” Smith’s suggestion that workers should acquire and refine single skillsets, as opposed to practicing many, reproduces a larger cultural bias about the intellectual capabilities of individual workers based on the work they perform for money.⁴ The upper-and-middle classes sought to distance themselves from hardships of productive labour as a conclusive sign of social status. To demonstrate non-productivity, members of the leisure class waste conspicuously both time and goods; for, only the financially comfortable classes had the time, leisure and cultural scope thought necessary for intellectual innovation and literary creation. Leapor’s poem on a nail seems to anticipate Smith’s views of workers as mere objects incapable of engaging higher forms of knowledge and predicts the systematization of gendered forms of labour and knowledge production.⁵ Leapor addresses these issues in her poem by showing her readers that she is thinking about the ways in which society refuses to acknowledge that she as a labouring-class woman possesses the intellectual faculties necessary for writing and authorship, while simultaneously emphasizing the manual task of one who writes and locates the labour of the one who writes within the period’s discourses of industry and use-value.

Given that the manufacturing of nails’ grew to be a lucrative industry in the latter half of the century, it is now clear that Leapor and her companion, Amanda, who first

⁴ Adam Smith later takes up this point, arguing that as a result of the repetitive nature of a labourer’s task, he “generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become. The torpor of his mind renders him not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgement concerning many even of the ordinary duties of private life” (Smith 298).

⁵ Western knowledge followed a dualistic ontology that privileged men and associated qualities, and “utilized a logic of domination which resulted in the assumption that men were superior to women, and that knowledge and mind were superior to experience.”

suggested to Leapor the riddle of where the first nail was struck, were participating in important economic debates of the period when they were thinking about the origins of the nail's function. Both Leapor's poem and Smith's excerpt demonstrate their use of an ordinary, everyday object to contemplate and think about the economy, labour and use value. However, one key difference between these two authors' writings on a nail is that in addition to economic factors, Leapor also ponders the different kinds of purposes or functions a nail has depending on its material conditions, the kinds of social conversations and circumstances it is privy to, and how its meaning and value changes in varying economies. Leapor and Smith were writing twenty years apart and inhabited very different worlds, socially and economically, so their intellectual engagements with a nail and ideas about labour and the economy would inevitably be quite different. Indeed, the ease at which Leapor raises the nail into subjecthood demands a reading that extends beyond an emphasis on labour and the economy to one that includes commentary of social relationships that a person of her class would expect to experience in everyday life.

An object such as the nail aids Leapor in exposing the injustices inherent in the class-based arguments she faced about her work and allows her to speak to the labouring classes as well as to the mainstream voices of polite literature. The nail's adventures and commentary throughout different spaces and economies creates a panorama of society that allows Leapor to critique society on all levels, and this is a literary technique her poem shares with the it-narrative.⁶ In her overview of the it-narrative, Liz Bellamy

⁶ Blackwell, Bellemy, Lupton, and Keenleyside have put together a four volume collection of it-narratives by writers in the eighteenth-century entitled *British It-Narratives* (2012). Some examples of it-narratives that can be found in this collection include Jonestone's "Chrysal" (1760), John Hawksview's "The Adventures of a Flea" (1785), or "The Adventures of a Corkscrew" (1761) by an anonymous writer.

defines the components of the prose subgenre as circulation, the absence of volition, and the confrontation with a series of seemingly unrelated characters, events, and settings. She emphasises the defining feature of the it-narrative as the way in which it accumulates stories in a “kind of panoramic miscellany” (121). Although the nail can easily transgress class and social boundaries, it cannot do so by its own volition. As the nail chronicles its life of industry and use-value, it also laments its treatment by its various masters: it has been used, discarded, eaten by acid, abused, and refurbished. Its chief complaint, however, is that its function and value is consistently determined by external forces. The nail has no agency; it is continually “drawn headlong from the rest,” “dragg’d amain,” or Hurl’d on a Dunghill with Disdain.” The nail is aware of its status as a nail, and its narrative is a recognition of the economic and social significance of toil as it carries out formulaic versions of human labour.⁷ Like the object narrators of it-narratives, Leapor’s nail “enjoy[s] a consciousness — and thus perspective — of [its] own,” but at the same time it lacks independent agency and is subject to the mechanisms of exchange, much in the same way that the labouring subject is required to objectify and commodify her labour and ideas (Blackwell, *Secret Life of Things* 10).

The eighteenth-century reception of it-narratives was generally seen as a “period of rife with shameless imitation, and failed experimentation” (187). Mark Blackwell states that there were “frequent complaints that it-narratives [were] trite, commonplace,

⁷ It is worth mentioning here that the inclusion of the nail’s creation story in its narrative is significant when read in a biblical context. According to the Bible, Adam and Eve gave labour its first function. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve had to work and labour with their bodies to sustain their bodies. Leapor retrieves the primordial function of labour from human history and gives it a new function in her poem. By invoking Adam’s shovel—it does not know when or how it was made, but it does know it was “not made/ so early as Adams spade”—Leapor links the creation of the nail and its narratives of toil and labour to the story where human labour first began, and in the process, she elevates the idea of work to a universal position.

stale, [and] unoriginal” (193), and were usually viewed as “writers reducing themselves and their work to mere things” in order to pass idle time and to take advantage of the newly established print culture. Interestingly, it-narratives also generated fear among established literary authorities, and writers like Pope and Swift ridiculed unskilled writers in the realm of poetry. Because it-narratives were viewed as literary works written by needy writers who wrote for hire, they produced anxiety since it was now possible to write one’s way into literary authority. The shifting cultural nature of writing and authorship contributed to a sense of society as increasingly divided, because lower classes could now write their way out of economic oppression and marginalized status, ultimately altering both the literary market and the structures of society. Mainstream authors aspired to regulate writing and authorship in order to protect their own income derived from writing. Christmas argues that writers like Johnson and Pope exhibit such a protectionist stance because they are “seeking to disarm any potential competitors for patronage or sales,” and they do so by way of deploying class-based assumptions about “proper” work in order to maintain existing power relations (Christmas 22). Like the superficial value of “rusty nails,” it-narratives were seen by critics as worthless hackneyed and reiterative forms that were cheaply produced and quickly written by bad writers trying to get their work onto the market. But what Leapor’s poem shows is that there is a lot of value in a rusted nail, particularly to a labouring-poet who is attuned to the inherent value and ideas that emanate from within it; it is, after all, her muse.

Leapor’s poem does not show her simply thinking about the different ways a nail can be used and in what kinds of environments this use occurs; she also considers the

different ways other people might think about a nail if they were to encounter one and in what ways they might treat it. For example, in the poem we see how a nail is expendable to someone like Celia who “hurl[s] it on a dunghill with disdain” after it is “dr[iven] through her eye.” But we also see how a nail is indispensable to someone like “Old Simon,” especially when his plough breaks down seemingly in the middle of nowhere. Or, like how “Sir Gripus” overvalues a rusty nail. After he “tramp[le]d over a pin” while walking, Sir Gripus is appalled that a perfectly good nail had been thrown away, and mutters to himself that the wasteful person who threw it away “well deserve[s] a jail” though, ironically, he returns to his home and uses the nail to imprison his own daughter in order to “keep her from a beau.” The nail’s value fluctuates depending upon who is using it, what they are using it for, and where it is being used, and more so reflects Bourdieusian class-based attitudes towards luxury and necessity. In his best-known book “Distinction,” Pierre Bourdieu generates theoretical frameworks and methods that we can use to help us better understand the dynamics of power in society. With a particular emphasis on taste and social positions, Bourdieu argues that the lower classes exhibit cultural attitudes and tastes for necessity, and that this is a direct result of their material conditions. According to Bourdieu, the upper-and-middle classes have a taste for luxury; they will always choose expensive things and are wasteful with things that would seem to be necessities like food, clothing, and nails’. The lower classes, on the other hand, have a taste for utility or necessity; they will always choose practical things, and will find innovative ways to reuse things to extend their life and value. As an upper or middle-class woman, Celia has no use for a nail that caused her harm; she chooses to throw it away

despite its good working condition. But characters like “old Simon” and “Sir Gripus” perform what Bourdieu later calls “the choice of necessary” (Bourdieu 372). Simon solves his predicament with his broken plough both by his familiarity of working with nails’ and by observing his immediate environment for possible solutions: “old *Simon* broke his Plough;/ Who seeing none but us at hand,/And knowing us a trusty Band.” Equally important to discern, however, is that Leapor’s nail is not conveying to readers its own attitudes, values, or tastes. Rather, it is telling us about the ways people inhabiting different social spaces interacted with a nail, and how sometimes these people’s lives drastically changed because of their encounter.

In the poem, a nail embodies industrial relations and serves as an allegorical object that stands in for the unjust use-value and treatment of a labourer; this shows other marginalized readers how they are objects in a system in which they lack authority over their values and functions, allowing them a chance to better understand their place in their respective communities. But more importantly, the social situations that Leapor imagines around the nail (especially the scene of the rebellious female labourer writing even though she knows “these are dang’rous times”) shows her like-minded readers not only how to recognize themselves as a meaningful part of a larger system but also how to be subjects thinking about themselves objectively. In fact, the poem shows us Leapor thinking about herself as a labouring poet subject who is consistently ideologically forced to “nail up pens and paper,” abandon her literary work, and hide away her more capable self. But it is this knowledge that allows her to reorganize cultural understandings of the labour of writing and to bring into view the poet as a labouring body. Whereas a nail

belongs to an economy premised on a very fixed notion of what labour is, for Leapor, a nail is creative inspiration premised on literary labour; she reimagines the nail as a muse and this helps her to think about her position in society and come to a certain awareness of the class- and gender-based ideologies that confronted a female labouring poet.

Thinking about the primary function of a nail, Leapor is able to imagine and comprehend the sociocultural demands of the time that want to keep her fixed in a definite social role, pinned to a given position in the world, and to secure her mind within the limits of the social order so that her thoughts do not “wonder abroad” and access higher levels of knowledge, potentially disrupting the existing social order.

“The Inspir’d Quill” is another poem in which Leapor employs a storytelling inanimate object. In this poem, Leapor shies away from the “repertory of styles and topics bequeathed to her” by her literary forefathers as she turns to an object narrator who is a supernatural agent, a human soul condemned to occupy its object as a form of karmic or divine punishment (Kairoff 157). The quill dictates its adventures to its author, describing the various states through which its soul has passed. Its spirit starts off in the body of a “wealthy Squire,” who squandered and lost his prosperous life. It then passes into the “Carcase of a Beau,” who spends his life carefree, singing, dancing and pining after women until running out of money and youth, eventually destroying his life. The spirit then migrates into a “Lap-dog,” which is killed when a “Foot-boy” throws it into a river for sport. Once again the spirit “gains a human face” and “step’[s] into a Lawyers Case” whose money hungry maxim produces a life of swindling and cheating clients. The spirit then is “Degraded to a simple Crow,” who is shot dead by a “spiteful Hind.” The soul

then “grew out of Pluto’s favour” and is confined for eternity “within the compass of a quill.” When the quill finds itself in the hands of a labouring-class female its response is “fear[s she] will quickly break [its] back.” The cultural conception of a quill at this time was that it was an object generally reserved for the male writer or the well-born woman who engages in practical and epistolary forms of writing. According to R. A. Houston, “writing was a delicate task requiring the use of fragile quill pens and expensive materials unsuited to the coarse hands of the lower classes” (Houston 68). That a labouring-class woman does own a set of “crow-pens” and has the skills and dexterity to produce pieces of writing is a testament to the evolution of women’s writing underway in the eighteenth-century.

The life of the quill covers histories over many years and features the ability to “frequently and dramatically shifts roles, inhabiting many social levels” (Blackwell 45), and provide critical commentary along the way. Here, Leapor draws on classical models and images to produce a series of stories, in which a soul narrates, and introduces her readers to the moral reflections offered by the transmigration of souls. Explicit commentary on society’s vices and follies is given by a quill, and it focuses particularly on the stereotypical view of wealth and poverty. Each human body the quill inhabits discloses a negative commentary on middle and upper-class society. For example, the lives of the squire and lawyer show how greed, ill morals and excessive access to money can destroy a person’s worth. The characteristic of being obsessed with money is something that is frequently assigned to middling class persons, especially merchants, to illustrate their material vulgarity in comparison to the more privileged classes. The Beau,

for instance, has no morals and lives a carefree life, but he depends on material possessions to define his identity. The poem makes reference to this notion of false identity based on a Beau's clothing in the opening of its tale:

The Lady's Darling to be sure:
Tho' he in sparkling Laces glow
The Pattern of a perfect Beau;
When he puts off the human Shape,
May strut a Monkey or an Ape. (16-20)

This comparison suggests that clothes forge the pattern or human figure of the Beau, but without glittery clothing the figure of a beau dissolves away, leaving a shape that simply mimics that of an intelligent man. The quill later returns to this concept when material possessions and the mind are set against each other:

With slender Purse and shallow Brains,
My Wig behind was smartly ty'd,
My silver Box with Snuff supply'd:
On Books I seldom loved to pore,
But sung and danc'd and aptly swore. (48-52)

Here, the Beau has some money, but no brains. His wig and snuff box make him look young and fashionable and attracts the attention of several ladies. Although the wig is "smartly ty'd," he does not necessarily have the intellect to match the appearance. The assertion that he rarely reads, preferring to sing and dance instead, implies that he is concealing his illiteracy behind the disguise of a smart-looking wig. The material possessions cloak the identity that lies beneath cloth and skin: his soul. A life dependent on fashionable trends eventually leads to his demise, revealing the ability of material possessions to simulate a false persona to conceal a person's true moral worth contained

within the soul. It is because of these qualities that the soul is punished, sentenced eternally to occupy a quill.

In contrast, when the quill is sentenced to live out a life sentence as a lapdog and crow their destiny is shaped not by their own immoral choices but by those of servants, who end its life both times. The footboy who drowns the lapdog in the river reveals class conflict between servants and masters, a subject later taken up by Coventry in his *The Histories of Pompey the Little* (1751), where he exposes the cruelty of mankind to the animal world. In Coventry's narrative, Pompey, a lapdog, even though much loved by its mistress, is mistreated by others; in particular, its life is put in danger by its mistress's footboy. Some critics claim Pompey's narrative is intended to expand knowledge of animal subjectivity and to create sympathy for animals in reader's imaginations (Menely 11); other scholars argue that the literary use of the speaking animal functions to limit animals' roles and meanings to those controlled by humans (Milne 205). Anne Milne interprets the servant's violence against Pompey as an illustration of the antagonism between servants and pets. She believes the dog's "body and existence become the site of class war in which the subjecthood of the dog is not an issue" (202). The relationship between women and their lapdogs extends beyond fashionable accessory to a kind of "somatic ornamentation" (Braunsneider 40). The lapdog whose lady decks it out in ribbons and jewels becomes an extension of its owner, "reflecting her relationship to self in ways inanimate commodities cannot" (40). At a time when animal abuse was common, the way a servant could act out against his master was "on or through the body of the master's favorite pet" (Milne 202). The study of animals in the eighteenth-century has

recently been aligned more closely with the exploitation of labouring classes in the eighteenth century. In one of Landry's more recent articles, she considers the emergent field of animal studies and its connection with labouring-class studies by comparing labouring-class poets with animals, as they both experience the "subaltern difficulty of self-representation and the hazards from being represented from without" (Landry, "Brute Force" 15).

By assigning the quill a human soul, Leapor's poem takes up the eighteenth-century philosophical question of whether the mind/soul is self-moving and shows her experimenting with ascribing thought to matter. These philosophical questions about whether something nonhuman could have a form of consciousness of its own were pursued by prominent thinkers including Locke, Hume and Descartes, who suggested that matter might be able to think. While all three writers agreed on the immaterial essence of the soul or spirit, they differed on the question of the soul's ability to transmigrate into any material substance with impressions of memory intact. Leapor's exploration of the philosophical question of the transmigrating soul aligns more closely with Descartes than with Locke and Hume, who excluded the possibility of the soul's transmigration. In his *Meditations*, Descartes argued that the soul both pre-existed and survived the body, going through a continual process of reincarnation or transmigration. The theory of transmigration holds that the soul does not cease to exist when the physical body dies but takes on a new form in consequence of the person's feats comprising thoughts, words and actions. Descartes also posited that matter can possess memory of past reincarnations, and this is reflected in Leapor's poem by the quill's ability to recount its many lives.

Similar to the soul in Leapor's poem who transforms and moves easily between human and animal until it is finally sentenced to remain in the feather of a crow, later it-narratives also offer tales told by supernatural observers. These later prose it-narratives "frequently invok[ed] an Eastern philosophical doctrine to make sense of their animated materiality" (Englert 222), such as John Hawkesworth's version of the transmigrations of the soul of a flea in his "Remarks on Dreaming: Various Transmigrations related by a Flea" in *Adventurer* 5 (1752), and the anonymously authored *The Adventures of a Corkscrew* (1775). Like the quill, the flea of Hawkesworth's tale easily migrates between humans and animals, ostensibly dictating its adventures to the story's author. It begins in the body of a gentleman's son, and then passes into a mongrel puppy, then to a bullfinch, a cockchafer, a beetle, a worm, a cock and a pig. Similarly, in *The Adventures of a Corkscrew*, a spirit which is confined within a household utensil "as a punishment for the unbounded scenes of debauchery and wickedness [it] committed while on earth" (4), dictates its pedigree to its author. What these later it-narratives validate is Leapor's innovative use of a literary device that did not become codified as a literary trope until later, and in a different genre of literature. The method of seizing on the fiction of a supernatural observer with access to many lives is more aligned with the characteristics of the fictional novel's "exuberant multiplicity" which was not established until the latter half of the century (Spacks 54).

Critics have shown that it-narratives and object fictions were important for the development of the novel, as they demonstrate how conceptual boundaries separating humans and objects chronicle the externalities and determine identity, similar to how

novels recount the development of characters with inner lives (Brown 91). The literary form of the novel appeared in the eighteenth, beginning with Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), and became a popular form with Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740). The novel differs from previous work in that it is characterized by realism, a portrayal of all aspects of human experience. The novel emphasized a narrative form that could present an ordered and meaningful picture of the social system and contains elements of ideological critique (Flint 133). Therefore, if the novels' early exploration of self-consciousness ministered the explosion of self-conscious narrators of it-narratives, where objects become it-narrators who "enjoy a consciousness — and thus perspective — of their own" (Blackwell, *Secret* 10), then it must have also influenced Leapor's version of the it-poem, where objects become it-poets who command literary authority of its own fiction. Leapor's poems seem to anticipate the "formulaic sameness of most it-narratives" (Blackwell 188) as she shares with the genre the "surprising aspect [of an author's] violation of the common-sense assumption that inanimate objects and nonhuman animals have no point of view and no subjective depth" (Blackwell, "Extraordinary" 240).

On the other hand, both of Leapor's poems on a nail and quill "address the present instant [and are] produced for the moment" (Benedict 198) and demonstrates a technique that is different from the it-narrative. Barbara Benedict has recently coined a term for texts in which objects become the subjects of the work in which they appear; she calls this literary category "thing-poems." In her study "Encounters with the Object: Advertisements, Time, and Literary Discourse in the Early Eighteenth-Century Thing-Poem," Benedict highlights the ways in which objects invaded not only texts, but all types

of images. Benedict argues that the eighteenth-century fascination and investment in objects can be seen with the advent of advertising in the late seventeenth-century. However, Benedict's most interesting claim is how fashionable objects increasingly overwhelmed and invaded a poet's realm of topic, so much that the object became the subject (194). She argues "things" gained new cultural power in many different forms of print, and their power is especially visible in what she terms "thing-poems." Thing-poems are concerned with how objects, as manufactured commodities, are not portrayed merely as metaphors in a text, but as subjects and agents, or are presented as the justification for writing (199). Moreover, thing-poems constitute the power to challenge humans by merging and transforming traditional genres "to make the present moment of the encounter with the thing the poetic encounter" (205). Benedict argues that the eighteenth century was a period where "subjectivity might collapse into objectivity" because of the rising commodity culture resulting from trade and mercantilism (194).⁸ Leapor's poem on a quill fits well into Benedict's version of a thing-poem because, not only does her quill become a new occasion for writing verse (note Leapor makes reference in her title that the poem was "occasion'd by a set of crow-pens"), but also the poem is contextualized to imply the pen's social and cultural meaning, conveying how the pen challenges the author's subjectivity by blurring the boundaries "between thought and thing, self and stuff" (194). Benedict argues that thing-poems record the clash between things' and the poet's registers of existence.

⁸ Alexander Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* and Jonathan Swift's *The Lady's Dressing Room* are good examples that help to illustrate the social power of objects in their respective communities.

Benedict, drawing from some of Swift's poems, such as "Verses Wrote in a Lady's Ivory Table-Book (1698), argues that forms of posie should be considered early versions of thing poems. Posies, Benedict explains, are poems written to celebrate objects given or received; "poetic inscription[s] on a gift that links object, subject, and relationship" usually intended between two people (Benedict 200). She points out how Swift gives an ivory table-book its own voice in such a way that it replaces its owner's body and even speaks satirically of her person. Although the object embodies its owners rather negative characteristics, it is immune to and "stands above" such "human frailties" (202). If Swift's poem is an early version of a thing poem, then perhaps we can think of Leapor's it poems as late versions of the thing poem whereby objects are given their own voices, but instead of registering the present moment, these objects are given their own histories and cultural contexts. The difference, then, between early and later versions of the thing poem is that in the latter, objects are presented as having subjective depth whereas in the former, objects "hold no memory, allegiance, no partiality" (202). In this way, Leapor's poems that showcase objects as having psychological depth and interiority tells us that there is something more novelistic about later thing poems, and that they could, perhaps, benefit from being read like a novel, or at least a version of one.

It-Poems: Performing a Labouring Authority

Although "The Ten Penny Nail" and "The Inspir'd Quill" differ in both narrative content and object, the frameworks are the same in that both poems displace the human agent in an effort to reorganize cultural understandings of the labour of writing and to bring into view the poet as a labouring body. The use of first-person object narrators

allows Leapor's poems to perform a figurative battle for their audience. In both poems, a rhetorically staged competition for authority between the speaking objects and the poet unfolds. The objects demand to have their stories told by the poet. In fact, the nail even interrupts the poet, insisting "You write my Life — and be it shown/ What strange Adventures I have known." Similarly, the quill instructs the poet to "make [its] woes appear" and commands her to write his story: "For me who now to you indite, / Whose Talent chiefly is to write." By employing a self-conscious narrator who subverts the authority of the text, the object narrator effectively demotes the poet to scribe. The poet is now simply a surrogate, a mere instrument tasked with documenting the tales of objects into first-person narrative accounts (Benedict, "Spirit of Things" 36). Assuming authority over the written text allows the nail and quill to sound smarter, wiser and more in control than the poet or even her audience, and soon the objects become conscious of the fact that their author is a poet and not an established prose writer, resulting in them no longer having faith in her to transcribe their narratives. The objects ridicule their poet for thinking she could produce a composition worthy of their adventures, evidenced when the quill whispers behind its 'Misstriss's' back, "For oh, I guess—nay more I know it,/ That my new Mistress is a Poet." By the end of each respective poem, both the nail and quill have resolved that their author is incapable of writing their adventures, for she is a mere "scribbler." The nail and quill's authority as writers is bolstered by their harsh commentary on their author as a struggling poet. The quill complains "How should I bear from time to time/ To scrawl unprofitable Rhyme?," stating that, "Heroicks [it] shall write

but ill.” Both objects reproduce dominant social values and attitudes that were intended to keep female labourers and tools for writing in their appointed places in the social order.

Leapor’s unique poetic vision clearly positions her among the category of self-conscious “innovative writers seeking freedom from the constraints of settled conventions” (Blackwell, “Extraordinary” 231), as her poems are very much a form of self-conscious fiction, a characteristic conventionally recognised in the origins of the early novel. Reading Leapor’s poems in the context of prose it-narratives allows us first to more fully appreciate the complexity of Leapor’s writing as she uses the objects to perform a figurative battle for the reader’s attention; and second, uncover a new literary category that I call it-poems. In the it-poems, both the nail and quill are portrayed as animated by immaterial forces who demand their voices be materialized and do so by usurping the poet’s agency as writer, showcasing themselves as literary authors handling their own pages. Such self-consciousness about authorship is reinforced when the quill and nail use their pedigree to authenticate themselves as narrators. By asserting their dominance of the narrative, each object reveals itself as the actual producer of the fiction; they claim to be the ones responsible for bringing the poem into being. In this sense, Leapor appears to relinquish all control and essentially eradicates her own authorship. By doing so, the poems demonstrate such “discursive tricks used to create texts that appear cognizant of how they are made” (Lupton 404). In this way, Leapor represents herself as simply a surrogate, one who documents the tale of the soul/spirit onto paper and assimilates its material substance into a first person narrative account (Benedict, “Spirit of Things” 36). Leapor’s literary authority is downgraded to the function of a scribe,

implying that she is merely a possession, a medium, to formalize the object's narrative as a written composition. That Leapor's poet dissolves into the identity of scribe is not just a "generic token of authorial attainment, but a claim to a shared occupation with those who write" (Ionescu 22): the reduction of poet to scribe becomes an apt representation of the poet as a labouring body. Leapor's symbolic demonstration accomplishes many things. First, to prove the labours of writing are equal to domestic labours and should be recognized as a useful and productive trade for labourers; second, to display a level of complexity involved in the creation of poetry, which illuminates intellectual labour as a form of work; and third, to signify a new ideal of meaningful work.

One important aspect of it-poems is the object narrator's ability to call on the attention of its readers and direct its complaints to their imaginative sympathy by posing rhetorical questions regarding their fate. Take, for example, when the quill states

For Oh, I guess—nay more I know it,
That my new Mistress is a Poet;
Then how shall I who still inherit,
A Tincture of the Lawyer's Spirit;
How shall I bear from time to time
To scrawl unprofitable Rhyme?
To live for Years and ne'er behold
The presence of enchanting Gold,
Yet scribble on—Besides, alack,
I fear she'll quickly break my Back. (114-123)

Here, the quill invites its reader to mock and chastise the poem's author. It demands that readers privilege the quill's aspirations over the poet's. Similarly, the nail scorns its author for even attempting to be its scribe, ordering her to "fasten up [her] rhymes," or for its new post it will "nail up [her] pens and paper" (114-119). Both the nail and quill reveal

their frustration with their scribe's inability to meet their expectations for reiterating and telling the world of their adventures.

The adventures of the quill and nail identify them with the socioeconomic position of their author; their tales reflect the perceptions and ideologies of the lower and working classes. These objects are physically confined in "hated cells," as is Leapor, who is confined in the metaphorical jail cell that is her socioeconomic position. Like the soul that is eternally confined within the compass of a quill as a form of divine punishment, so too might Leapor's soul, who is by nature a poet, be carrying out a divine sentence to be confined within the body of a kitchen maid. Leapor and the it-poets each hope to escape confinement through narrative production and to find freedom through the printed form of circulating composition (Flint 169). Although the it-poets refuse to be compared to their author by commandeering the composition of the text, they have much more in common with her than perhaps they would like to admit. Both Leapor and the it-poets find common ground in their efforts to make themselves something other than voiceless and marginalized labourers. The objects that the it-poets represent, a crow-pen and a nail, are objects most commonly associated to with the lower and labouring classes. The crow-pen is a less expensive version of a quill; it is a lower quality feather than that of a goose or swan. The nail, although made of "more than common size" is likened to "one that nails' [the] Garden door." Both the nail and quill are manufactured products designed specifically for labour and human use, and Leapor, like the nail, gains consciousness as a member of the working class, as she too is born into a role designed for such labour and human use.

The chief concern of the it-poet narrators is to have their stories be heard, as they yearn for recognition and appreciation. The quill, although punished for foolish behaviour while inhabiting earthly bodies, wants to “comfort [its] afflicted mind” by letting the world know its “Fate is hard.” Likewise, the nail wants recognition in the world for its efforts at being a commodity among the work force. It continually bemoans its treatment, never receiving gratitude for its duty by its masters, and is upset by its easily disposable quality. They believe that if they can have their voices materialized in a formal composition, it will gain them recognition in the world. Leapor similarly seeks recognition in the world as a writer, not a domestic servant. However, her understanding that she is at a social disadvantage is expressed in doubts that she will be able to please the sophisticated, well-educated readers that dominated the literary scene at the time, for she, like the nail, is only one lower-class female poet going against “whole legions of the foe,” the canonical and established writers of the time. Throughout the narration of the it-poets, one can recognize Leapor’s own fears that her work will never be received well or bring her lasting literary fame. Like the nail that is continually dismissed and discarded for failing at its post due to powers beyond its control, Leapor is also discarded by her employers for failing at her position as kitchen maid, a direct result of her spending her time writing rather than working—as Greene and Messenger point out, “Leapor clearly faced some conflict between the demands of her employers and her own desire to write” (Greene and Messenger xxii). Her employers fail to see her writing as productive and she is fired from her job; she is as easily replaceable as is a nail. However, if a nail can be

retooled to fasten a poem together, then a labouring-class woman's manual labour can be repurposed as literary labour.

The appearance of speaking objects in Leapor's poetry projects her authorial concerns about her work circulating in the public sphere. She represents herself as lacking independent authorial agency, conferring agency on the objects instead. The principal accusation of the it-poems is how can a poet, who deals in rhymes, possibly write narrative adventures? This is exactly the question the quill and nail ask of their amanuensis. Such acts of literary judgement on behalf of the object narrators develops into a literary performance that ultimately calls attention to the printed form of the poem as an object in itself. By the poem's end readers must be aware that the poem they are reading is in fact a narrative adventure written in verse form—a piece of literature the objects themselves are incapable of imagining. The narrative adventure written in verse proclaims that Leapor has, after all, created something original and of value to put out into the marketplace. Leapor's pride as a poet and her desire for fame are refracted through the nail and quill; she uses them to stake out her literary authority. Rather than the it-poets retaining the authority they claim over the text the printed form of the poems make visible that these objects function solely for Leapor's own purposes to dramatize her role as an artist. This brings to the foreground Leapor's authorial abilities as poet and author. Through the printed form of the poem, Leapor reclaims her voice in two ways: she repossesses her literary agency ostensibly usurped by the it-poets and claims a literary voice in the public realm. Facing the quill and nail's allegation that she is incapable of documenting their adventures, Leapor is exonerated by the existence of the poem in print

form; the it-poet's ironic accusation directs the reader's attention to precisely the application it denies. The poems' proposition that something nonhuman can acquire its own form of consciousness is a rhetorical posture that allows Leapor to manipulate the representation of her own agency, allowing her to claim authorship as a form of useful labour, and to legitimize her own gendered and class-inflected authority as a subject in literary and intellectual discourse.

That Leapor's poetry is itself interested in subjectivity is a politically important claim that intervenes in a classist way of reading literature from this period. Since Ian Watt's *The Rise of the Novel*, scholars have viewed the rise of the eighteenth-century novel as the invention of the modern individual. According to this model, novels, from Richardson's *Pamela* to Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, offered worlds of interiority and psychological complexity to their readers. Nonetheless, as Nancy Armstrong has pointed out, these novels were written by middle-class writers for a middle-class readership, perpetuating the idea that subjectivity was only interesting to and intellectually possible for middle-class people. Recently, scholars including Kristina Lupton and Julie Park and have begun to shift the way novels are analysed from focusing on the invention of subjectivity, interiority and the individual to thinking about how subjectivities are inflected by the material culture of the text. Eighteenth-century novels are no longer seen as solely about the subject in the novel, but also as about objects, including the material object of the text and book itself. Leapor's poetry benefits from a similar critical movement, because her poems are using objects to think about a historically specific subjectivity that is circumscribed by things like class and gender. Her poems are not just

specifically about the labour she performs or about documenting the material struggles of her class: they are about appropriating those materials to think about subjectivity and literature. If recent work on the novel shows that the subject is always dependent on material conditions and objects, this then leads to questions about whether or not it-narratives and poetry, which draw on material culture and objects, have always also been about subjectivity, not just documenting the struggles of what it is like to be a nail or quill.

There are three other it-poems in Leapor's anthology, and two of these are narrated through the perspective of a pocketbook. These two poems are written by Leapor and are entitled "The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy" and "The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa," and seem to be occasioned from Leapor receiving a pocketbook as a gift from a woman of high social stature. In these poem's a fashionable pocketbook comes into being at the moment when its owner gives it away to another woman, and finds itself a "slave" to Mira, a woman socially inferior to the pocketbook's original owner. It is appalled to find itself living in rural conditions and serving a "mistress that it hates." Leapor's poems use the social descent of a fashionable pocketbook to dramatize her inner turmoil regarding her ambitions as a laboring-class writer. As the pocket-book speaks its disdain for such an unworthy owner, we can hear Leapor's authorial voice struggling with the related issues of a labourers identity and upward social mobility achieved through writing, as she confers authorial agency on the pocketbook instead of claiming it for herself. The third poem "Parthenissa's Answer to the Pocketbook's Soliloquy" is not written by Leapor but by the pocketbook's previous owner, Susanna Jennens. Jennens's

tries to show Leapor that she has independent authorial agency showing her enthusiasm for Leapor's talent and her belief in her potential as a writer. She takes on the persona of Parthenissa in order to criticize and belittle the pocketbook, and to completely reverse the hierarchal roles of Mira and the pocketbook by establishing Mira's superiority over the object. These poems show how pocketbook was an important tool for recording literary intercourse and that they had a significant role to play in structuring the interactions of literary communities and friendships. More significantly, these poems not only reveal the role of material things in a range of literary practices, but also show how intimate relationships and social networks were being performed in and through material things.

Like Leapor's nail and quill, the talking pocketbook in these poems campaigns against Mira. In Leapor's poems, we are introduced to a fashionable pocketbook during a moment when it realizes that its owner has given it away to another woman. In its soliloquy, the pocketbook uses a kind of courtship language to talk about itself as a thwarted lover who has been "cast [from its mistress'] arms." It becomes clear that the pocketbook is having trouble understanding its new position within a labouring economy, urging "some friend in pity" to tear off its "shining" robe and replace it with a fabric of "dirty Blue," a self-conscious choice to match its "Fate," for it will never be the same—its pages will now be inked by Leapor rather than Jennens. In the second pocketbook poem, the pocketbook continues its lament about being "discarded" from its lovers "train," but this time it speaks directly to its previous owner. But unlike the nail and quill who interact with and demand that Mira write their lives, the pocketbook goes behind Mira's back, and disparagingly attacks both her socioeconomic status and her

inexperience as a writer. Common to it-poets, all three objects recognize they are subject to forces beyond their control and lament their inability to choose their owners, uses, and topographical locations. In these poems, a pocketbook loses its status and value as it switches hands, but the interesting thing about the pocketbook is that we are introduced to it at its moment of transition from its first owner to its second.

In Leapor's two poems, she portrays Mira as an inexperienced writer who is an amateur when it comes to properly handling the pen, and this exposes Leapor's tensions and anxieties with her own writing. The pocketbook laments Mira's writing style, complaining that her lead "hurts my Page," and begs its previous owner to "Preserve me in this dangr'ous Time:/ From Metre keep me free." Leapor understands that she is at a social disadvantage with writing for the literary market and here, once again, she confers authorial agency on an object instead of claiming it for herself. By doing this, Leapor expresses doubts that her writing style can please the sophisticated, well-educated readers that dominate the current literary scene. Mira's sense of inferiority is ascertained by the pocketbook's lament in which it attacks and criticizes Mira's skill as a writer based on her socioeconomic and material conditions. The pocketbook tells us it looked forward to a future with its new owner as it "blest the happy change." But then, it suddenly is cast from its owner, given away against its will, and finds itself a "slave" to Mira, a woman socially inferior to the pocketbook's original owner. It is appalled to find itself living in rural conditions and serving a "mistress that it hates" and cries out

Some friend in pity tear away
This robe of shining hue;
and like my fate, be my array,
A gown of dirty blue

Preserve me in this dang'rous Time:
From metre keep me free.
Should Mira stain my snowy Page:
Do thou compose her Head.
Let thy cold Opium spoil her Rage,
And turn her Pen to lead. (25-36)

The pocketbook is threatened by the possibility of Mira's verses invading its pages, which were intended, according to the book's design, for a certain form of prose by a very particular kind of fashionable woman. It fears that its association with a woman like Mira will be its ruin. For if Mira defiles it with her "dirty blue" ink, she will not only "stain" its appearance but also taint its social reputation: its "robe of shining hue" will be reduced to an ordinary "gown." The pocketbook's fears and anxieties about Mira writing inside of it reflects similar fears being felt by mainstream writers who found themselves within a changing and increasingly unstable literary economy. Mira threatens to change the pocketbook's relation to its design and character, much in the same way that Mira threatens to alter English literature distinguished by neoclassical conventions.

The pocketbook is distressed about Mira sullying its pages because her verses have the potential to disrupt and reorder its fixed cultural patterns of consumption and use. Mainstream writers like Pope and Swift were concerned about the appearance of texts written by low-born hacks on the literary market and went to great lengths to halt lower-class writers from entering their literary world. In his second number of *The Idler*, *Samuel Johnson* solicits potential correspondents to contribute to his periodical work; however, there is a catch. Not just anyone can return Johnson's call, only a small percentage of the population, those who "already [have] devoted themselves to literature," need reply. As a writer and publisher in the mid-eighteenth century, Johnson

was acutely aware of the rapidly growing number of writers from all socioeconomic backgrounds. He argues here that the blurring of social and literary boundaries will not only diminish literary value, it will also have negative effects on the structure of society and the economy. In his appeal, Johnson explicitly tells his readership that those persons who occupy positions within the lower social orders should ignore his call for literary correspondence:

At the time when the rage of writing has seized the old and young, when the cook warbles her lyrics in the kitchen, and the thrasher vociferates his heroicks in the barn; when our traders deal out knowledge in bulky volumes, and our girls forsake their samplers to teach kingdoms wisdom; it may seem very unnecessary to draw any more from their proper occupations, by affording new opportunities of literary fame [...] I should be indeed unwilling to find that, for the sake of corresponding with the Idler, the smith's iron had cooled on the anvil, or the spinster's distaff stood unemployed⁹.

Johnson does not want to be the one responsible for “affording new opportunities” for another thresher to pick up the pen instead of the flail, or for a domestic servant to lay down her spinning rod to turn over verses; the progression of this passage highlights his anxiety about the lost labour and the social upheaval that writing could cause. The beginning of the passage shows the domestic servant and the farm labourer within their respective spaces, but by the end of the passage, the male and female bodies disappear from view and idle tools are left in their place. Johnson attaches the word “unemployed” to the labourer's tools, emphasizing the idea that the intended roles for members of the lower social orders are being neglected and abandoned. Furthermore, Johnson observes how occupational trades are in disarray, as he is concerned with the trader who exchanges his trade for authorship, revealing Johnson's anxieties about those who abandon the crafts

⁹ Numerous scholars have noted the ambiguity of Johnson's writing and his character. He was an influential figure in all social and cultural circles, making him a very interesting figure for literary studies. Johnson's tensions with ideas of labour and authorship gave him just as much anxiety as it did labouring-class writers.

they were born into for the newly emerging trade of authorship. Traders transform into writers and are turning out “bulky volumes.” Johnson describes these works as a weight, with no reference to content or ideas, implying the texts are long, boring and have no value other than their size. Additionally, Johnson worries about women who have turned from teaching other women needlework and embroidery to teaching them writing. This change is of particular concern to Johnson because to “teach kingdoms wisdom” reflects the political power of writing, which can move established forms of power and those they control from one way of thinking to another, ultimately becoming a major sociopolitical threat. Johnson’s anxieties about authorship and social position saturate his passage and illuminate how traditionally different categories of work, writing and social rank were becoming intrinsically linked with each other. In a similar way, the pocketbook attempts to stop Mira from writing her “stains” of “dirty blue” inside it.

At Leapor’s cottage, the pocketbook is an outsider; it does not belong to the environment it finds itself within. It is self-consciously a fancy item with a beautiful cover and brings with it associations of status and lifestyle unrelated to its new use within a labouring economy. Whereas objects like the nail and quill are designed for very particular labours the pocketbook has a more fluid identity. The nail belongs to an economy premised on a very fixed notion of what labour is and who is doing it, but the quill is a little different in that the labour is in one sense about dipping the quill in ink and writing with it, and in another it is about authorship and intellectual labour which incites the very act of writing on which authorship is predicated. Although the quill does not comfortably fit into a category of a particular class or body doing the labour, it was

created and manufactured for a very specific function, and like the nail, it dictates what it should be used for and how. But when we get to Leapor's pocketbook poems class gets negotiated in a much different way; this is because the pocketbook represents a very particular and gendered type of property that is designed to serve human labours in a much different manner.

The pocketbook prays to "some poet's God" to save it in its moment of peril, asking for it to transform Mira's ink into "lead", a softer, more erasable substance that can easily rub out any trace of Mira and her authorship. But, in line with it-poems, this is a discursive trick that allows Leapor to provide her readers with the illusion that the text we are reading could very well be Mira's "stains." The pocketbook's prideful tirade is translated through an interior monologue in which it expresses its thoughts and feelings about its current predicament and the potential dangers it will face in the hands of its new owner. The pocketbook's complaint is comical because it is presented as a subject who is complaining about being denied the rights of a subject, much in the same way Leapor realizes that she herself has agency and subjective interiority, but also recognizes that she lives in a culture that denies labourers agency and subjectivity. These poems also show us how Leapor used the persona of a pocketbook to establish a sense of class identity based upon a set of distinct cultural and intellectual assumptions and practices, and how, in doing so, she reveals some of her anxieties and tensions about her labouring body's relationship to authorship and authority.

In order to understand the particular "suddenness with which [the pocketbook] seems to assert [its] presence and power" over Leapor, it is important to recognize the

culturally constructed view of the pocketbook (Brown 4). The mid-1740s, the time when Leapor is writing these poems, is an important point in the cultural history of the pocketbook because this was a time when the pocketbook itself was in a process of shifting from the diary proper to fashionable accessory with the added benefit of space for writing a form of autobiography. The cultural transformation of the pocketbook turned it into a kind of “hybrid genre” (Campbell 61). In *Historical Style*, Timothy Campbell explains that by the mid-century, the pocketbook was in some ways viewed as being continuous with an “older tradition of diaries and almanacs, but their formulaic admixture of fashion and dated cultural ephemera of the moment was new, arising in the 1750’s in Britain and coming into heightened prominence, alongside the circulating library and the novel, in the 1770’s” (Campbell 64). In the second half of the eighteenth century, the pocketbook was a fashionable object desired by women consumers for its attractive plates, designer materials, and white pages. Most were heavily embroidered and highly prized; however, not everyone owned one. By the late 1750’s the pocketbook’s transition from diary to fashionable accessory was solidified; as Jennie Batchelor points out, “it was not until the latter half of the eighteenth century that the genre’s role as a potential disseminator of fashion emerged” (Batchelor 3). Batchelor argues that the production of pocketbooks after the mid-century targeted educated, leisured, upper-class women (9). These pocketbooks were “designed to act as a permanent testimony to a [fashionable] woman’s social, moral and economic character” (6). The inside of pocketbooks post 1750 were affixed with fashion plates that described the latest female fashions in both textual and visual representations but also included blank pages for recording her daily

(trans)actions. Batchelor believes that the designs of the pocketbook conflate women with their bodies, causing women to imagine the female body as an ornamental and ephemeral object. Furthermore, she views the pocketbook as a type of conduct book in that they were produced for the manufacturing of acceptable behaviours of aristocratic women. By enforcing the desirability of fashionable attire, the pocketbook endorsed attention to apparel as a prerequisite of a desirable woman.

The culturally constructed view of the pocketbook and its manufacture targeted women and took on more gendered meanings throughout the century, particularly that of the female body. Campbell argues that the representation of female bodies holds the same complex and ambiguous status as the diary. The diary is a private space, but it is small enough to be carried about the body and still be kept secret, offering a woman a degree of privacy and a space to protect her thoughts. The pocketbook with its culturally coded exterior and its deeply personal inner, the female body, like the diary, challenges the public/private boundaries and has ambiguous status—women were made to make their bodies both visible and invisible (167). Leapor's imaginings of what a pocketbook would say about her if it could speak seems to foreshadow the cultural transformation of the pocketbook itself. For by 1754, pocketbooks were literarily speaking to women, telling them how to live and act in the social and cultural worlds of the wealthy and fashionable elite.

All things considered, a pocketbook does not necessarily require its user to have a certain skillset to write because it is capable of endowing its user with certain desirable qualities; rather than signifying skill and learnedness, the pocketbook claims to represent

their users' inner life by reflecting their status, fashion, and wealth instead. In Leapor poems, the pocketbook was created to endow a "gentle dame" with certain desirable qualities, demonstrating how desire, particularly female desire, can be manufactured. Both the pocketbook and women are objectified in a system that is invested in making sure that they dress, act, perform and compete in the public arena. However, the pocketbook was not just about fashion, it did have practical usage within the upper and middle classes relating to accounting, daily transactions, and household notes, a kind of self-management tool for the upper-class woman. Yet, this kind of writing merely enforced domestic ideologies, as Batchelor has noted, the pocketbook stood "as a permanent testimony to [a woman's] social, moral and economic character" (Batchelor 99). Fashionable pocketbooks for women represent the patriarchy and oppression, Leapor challenges and rewrites this metaphor by claiming the pocketbook as an important site for female agency and literary production.

The three pocketbook poems found in Leapor's collection have recently received attention by scholars including Bill Overton and William Christmas. Both Overton's study of *The Eighteenth-Century British Verse Epistle* and Christmas's article "Lyric Modes: The Soliloquy Poems of Mary Leapor and Ann Yearsley" discuss Leapor's pocketbook poems in terms of her anxieties and fears about her writing, paying particular attention to how Leapor employs an inanimate object as the speaker of her poem so that her voice would not be confused or aligned with the speaking thing. It becomes clear, however, that Leapor is trying to "say something about herself in the poem by not, in fact, saying anything herself within it" (Christmas 37). According to Christmas, it is by Leapor

animating the thing itself and by giving it a voice that she finds “a ventriloquizing vehicle for her own” (37). Speaking through the persona of the pocketbook, self-conscious Leapor is three times removed from authorship, and as such is at a safe enough distance to reveal her innermost thoughts and feelings in verse. The third poem on a pocketbook in Leapor’s collection by Jennens is written in the form of an it-poem. Jennens shows enthusiasm for Leapor’s talent and her belief in her potential as a writer when she refers to Mira as “the successor of Pope.” Claiming that Pope will live on through a labouring-class woman is a bold statement, even for a gentlewoman like Jennens. Christmas interprets Jennens’s ambitious statement as a play on the pocketbook’s pride and ambition, and he views her proclamation that “the Muses “Reclaim’d [Pope’s] fleeting tuneful Breath, / And kindly fix’d it” in Leapor “as a dramatization of her friend’s inner turmoil regarding her ambitions as a labouring-class writer” (39). Christmas argues that when the pocketbook speaks its disdain for having such an unworthy owner, “we can hear Leapor’s authorial voice struggling with the related issues of authorship and authority (39). But it is also important to recognize how Jennens’s statement undermines the notion of “natural genius” and instead gives recognition to Leapor’s literary labours. Labouring-class writers had to adhere to the ideological constructions of the natural genius; they became publicly available models of uneducated prodigies and as such their talents were portrayed as accidental rather than the product of hard work (Fairer 67). Labeling labouring-class writers “natural geniuses” was a popular trope used by patrons in their prefatory letters to sell their protegee in a way the reading public could understand. Being labeled natural genius at this time was to further silence marginalized voices by erasing

not only their authorship but their literary labour as well. However, in Jennens's pocketbook poem, when Parthenissa's declares that Mira is the "Successor of Pope," she is alluding to the powerful social and cultural norms that devalue the contributions of marginalized voices. By claiming that Mira has the ability to be the period's next cultural authority, Jennens places Leapor's writing skills, labour, and intellect within a very specific cultural context rather than appealing to the popular belief of the natural genius in which Leapor has a natural talent that simply requires liberation from her socioeconomic position.

The Cultural Work of Labouring Things

A pocketbook and a writing desk are both culturally-coded objects that become tools for the poet's literary labour and self-expression; however, it is Leapor's literary representation of these artefacts that provide us with a tool to challenge some of the conventional ideas about labouring-class writers, literary production, and the patronage system. By interrogating the differing economies being imagined around two gifts Mira receives from two different upper-class women—a writing desk from her patron and a pocketbook from a mentor—we can see how the friendship of an upper-class woman like Jennens, in contrast to the formal patronage of one like Freemantle, was integral to a woman like Leapor's growth and development both as a woman and a writer. More significantly, I argue that Jennens managed to perform this role from a position absolved from the power arrangement of traditional patronage. This contrast is not to downplay Freemantle's support of and affection toward Leapor, but to offer a different perspective on their relationship and the relationships between women in literary communities more

broadly. The following discussion is interested in the ideas and implications of the writing desk and pocketbook as gifts given to Leapor by two superior women as tools to aid with her literary labours, and what they can tell us about the relationships between these women and literary production.

Many scholars of Leapor's work, including Richard Green, Anne Messenger and Donna Landry, have noted the unique relationship that existed between Leapor and her patron, Bridget Freemantle. Most researchers point out that because Leapor expresses her patron-poet relationship so explicitly in her poetry, we are able to recognize Leapor and Freemantle's relationship as one based on mutual respect and friendship. Indeed, most of Leapor's poems after September 1745 are addressed to Freemantle (Greene and Messenger xxiv), and Freemantle herself in her prefatory letter to Leapor's volumes claims that "few days pass'd in which [she] did not either see or hear from [Leapor]; for [Leapor] gave [her] the pleasure of seeing all her poems as soon as they were finish'd" (To John *****, ESQ xxxvi); it is widely accepted among scholars that Freemantle was not only a patron to Leapor but a powerful influence on Leapor's rising literary career in myriad ways—financing her subscription, giving gifts such as the writing desk, coming over for visits and encouraging her writing.

Susanna Jennens is a name that we hear far less about when reading studies of Leapor and her works. Although Jennens was a devoted supporter of Leapor and a poet herself (having connections with early feminist writers Mary Astell and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu), she is not well known within eighteenth-century studies, and many researchers of Leapor are not aware of her role in Leapor's life and career (Greene and

Messenger xxi). One of the only reasons Jennens is acknowledged at all as an influence in Leapor's life and literary career is because of these poems on a pocketbook found in Leapor's second volume of poetry. That these poems appear in the second volume of Leapor's collection is an important point to note because it means that these poems were not initially intended for publication, thus making them that much more personal.

Regarding Jennens, these scholars found that she was Leapor's one-time employer at house called Weston Hall. Leapor was very young when she first went to work for Jennens; Greene and Messenger estimate she was probably somewhere around twelve years old. As a young and talented child, Leapor quickly "achieved the status of favoured servant and protegee" (xix) and was granted access to Jennens's library with over five hundred books (xx). Leapor's employment at Weston Hall "was decisive in her broader intellectual developments" because Jennens provided Leapor with the intellectual companionship she needed; she corrected her verses and taught her the basics of parody and versification. Although Jennens was one of the first major influential figures in Leapor's literary life she did not enter into a financial patronage relationship with Leapor; rather, as I argue, Jennens and Leapor shared a deep intellectual intimacy with each other, extending their relationship beyond the limitations of traditional class and power dynamics.

Leapor's poems about a writing desk and a pocketbook can not only tell us about the kind of objects that were becoming available to a woman of her status to use and own, but they also illuminate notions of gift-giving across social and cultural borders and the kinds of gratitude that such a gift generates. Recent scholarship on the histories of

consumption and material culture have pointed to the increasing availability and variety of new objects during the eighteenth century, and this in turn has led to many interesting debates surrounding the economy of the gift, particularly those that cross geographical and ideological borders. Gift exchanges were practiced in arenas such as friendship and courtship, but also within households between employers and workers and, predominantly, within systems of patronage. Theorists including Marcel Mauss, Derrida, and Bourdieu¹⁰ offer similar views of the gift economy as a system of power in which the gift defines people in terms of their obligations to the giver. These critics believe that there is much more to the gift than at first meets the eye and argue that the gift carries along with it a sense of debt, obligation, pressure, and oppression. Reading Leapor's pocketbook poems and her "A Genius in Disguise" in terms of object relations brings into view a paradigm of the gift that articulates an important difference between Leapor's relationship with her Patron, Bridget Freemantle, and Susanna Jennens, and provides commentary on how these cross-cultural and social relationships may have developed.

In the eighteenth century, the typical gift for a servant or labourer like Leapor was her mistress's cast-off clothing, so in a sense, gifts like a writing desk and fashionable pocketbook were inappropriate from a woman like Leapor. A primary literary example that illuminates the gift exchange of cast-off clothing is Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*.

¹⁰ In Derrida's philosophy on the gift, he views the gift as "impossible" in that it annuls itself soon as the gift is recognized as a gift; this then becomes a disinterested and unequal capital exchange, showing how Mira's gift of the writing desk becomes a manipulative gesture to exploit labouring-class writers and disguise capitalist accumulation. Similarly, Bourdieu argues the gift economy, in contrast to the market, "is organized with a view to the accumulation of symbolic capital (a capital of recognition, honour, nobility, ect), which secures the "durable domination" of subordinate parties". The gift however must remain distance from commodities and wages in order to affect such domination, and in the paternalist system, this required direct involvement in the lives of dependents. The great cannot appropriate the labour of others without winning them over personally. See Olli Pyyhtinen's *The Gift and its Paradoxes: Beyond Mauss* (2016).

Pamela is gifted her late mistress's clothes, but these "presents" come with the cost of putting her virtue in peril by attracting Mr. B's attention. Pamela wears such fine clothes that she is mistaken for a woman of wealth and status, as Mr. B says,

and so you must disguise yourself, to attract me, and yet pretend, like an hypocrite as you are-' I beseech you sir', said I, 'do not impute disguise and hypocrisy to me. I have put on no disguise.' 'What a plague', said he, for that was his word, 'do you mean then by this dress'? (Richardson 90).

The main issue with Pamela's gift is the cultural anxiety around class ascendancy.

Because of her fine clothes, Pamela can now be misrecognized for a gentlewoman, which ultimately does seem, at least to suspicious readers like Henry Fielding, like her chief goal. Pamela's materialistic attitude is demonstrated by the clothes she chooses to wear, thereby cloaking the appearance of her poor origins and low status, even though she constantly claims her origins are something to be proud of. In a similar vein, Leapor's poem "The Disappointment" provides us with an image of just how desirable a gentlewoman's cast-off articles of clothing were for the poor servant girl. In this poem, Mira describes her disappointment at being passed over for a dress promised to her by Sophronia, a head maid. Mira was looking forward to receiving the dress, "such Phantom's filled [her] giddy brains". She imagines what it would be like to feel the dress on her skin: "Fans, Lace, and Ribbands, in bright order rise;/ Methought these limbs your silken favours found." However, her fantasy does not become reality, and this incites a poem engulfed with Leapor's emotional outrage, calling Sophronia's act a "still-born gift." This particular dress is not gifted once, but twice over, first from the mistress to the head maid, and then the head maid to a lower servant. If not receiving a cast-off dress that was given away twice over can occasion such an emotional poem then it is not hard

imagine how Leapor must have felt when she received a writing desk and pocketbook, which are not only expensive gifts but are also not typical second-hand gifts.

The writing desk, based on its cost at the time, was most likely used and passed down to Leapor by Freemantle, but the pocketbook, with its “vacant leaves” and “snowy pages,” was likely a brand-new pocketbook. Cynthia Klekar points out that “eighteenth-century England was nothing if not aggressively and proudly engaged in commerce” and thus “the conception of the gift was central in the cultural imagination of the period” (3). However, she continues that “the most obvious—and powerful—manifestation of gift relations occurred through the workings of patronage” (3). Klekar refers to gift exchange within this system as a “top down dispensation of property and status” and is an “intricate system of vertical friendship linking patrons and clients” (4). The writing desk and pocketbook are not just gifts, they are tools given to Leapor to aid with the labour of writing and for her to use for authorial expression. However, as Bourdieu among others have pointed out, there are strings attached to these gifts.

We can never be certain about what Freemantle’s and Jennens’s motives actually were for giving Leapor such gifts, but through Leapor’s poems we can interpret the ways in which she might have received them. In “The Genius in Disguise,” Leapor registers the importance of objects within psychological, social and cultural dynamics among classes when she shows what happens when a bureau, a powerful cultural symbol of aristocratic privilege, moves down through the classes and ends up at her door. In the poem, the writing desk is a powerful force. When it arrives, the door suddenly bursts open and Mira hears a “hollow voice” that demands to enter the cottage. Mira hesitantly agrees, only

because she is persuaded that it is 'safe' in that it is both a "priest" and "wood." When Mira looks up, she sees a figure looming in the doorway that was

As void of Piety as Fear,
And by its Side undaunted stood,
And wou'd persuade us it was Wood:
With Rev'rence then we did presume
To place him in the little Room;
The Priest excluded with the rest
The Stranger *Mira* thus address'd.

The writing desk is aggressive, has physical strength, and commands and controls the attention of everyone inside of the cottage. Its presence forces Mira to perform the role of the passive domestic woman as she "ben[ds] her Knees in act to pray" in the ultimate act of feminine submission to authority. In her study of the writing desk in the eighteenth century, Dena Goodman notes that not only was it always considered a masculine piece of furniture, but that "only exceptional women owned a bureau because working women were not admitted into the ranks of professionals" (186).¹¹ Only men were professionally permitted to engage in the kinds of work, including intellectual labour, associated with the need for a bureau; it was certainly not considered an appropriate piece of furniture for a woman mired in manual labour. In the eighteenth-century, the writing desk was traditionally used for writing about matters concerning professional duties and signalled male upward social mobility; however, bourgeois women soon helped to efface this convention when they transformed writing from professional use to domestic activity

¹¹ Goodman states that "the bureau represented an authority that a growing body of men and few women could claim" (187), but Leapor challenges this ideology by having the writing desk's power and magnificence fade over the course of the poem into a feminized object also subservient to the same patron as Mira: "And from the rest I pray exclude/ 'One sacred Place for Gratitude:/ 'And what our Patron yours and mine/ 'Shall to my trusty Care consign." By the poems' end, the bureau's language does not match his initial grandeur. It "prattles far too long" and in effect, the bureau loses its aesthetic value as it moves into utility, serving the labouring-class poet as a tool for writing.

(187). The desk became a tool for the bourgeois woman to help with her social and household duties which came to include letter-writing. The writing desk not only allowed the bourgeois woman to take part in the culture of writing, but it also became a site for her to explore her subjectivity. The bureau entering Leapor's rural domestic space also allows for an exploration of her identity as a female labourer, but it also aids her in the process of authorial self-definition as a labouring female poet.

The writing desk provides a flat surface to satisfy the authorial need to write, but it also contains depths. In her recent research, Carolyn Sargentson investigates what we might call the inner life of furniture, providing a comprehensive analysis on secret compartments in writing desks of the eighteenth century. Generally, Sargentson argues, these writing desks were only found in aristocratic households and owners were worried about protecting their privacy and theft from their servants so much that "their anxiety was allayed by furniture with ingenious locks, false-bottomed drawers, and recesses hidden behind spring-loaded doors" (118). In Leapor's poem, her writing desk comes equipped with a drawer that, when its "Lid [is] shut up" with "lock and key," adds a private space which will protect her thoughts and ideas. In the bourgeois woman's parlour, a writing desk likely served two functions: a spectacle of wealth and status, and an aid to the act of letter-writing. When this kind of writing desk is geographically relocated to a "small room" in some female labourers' rural cottage it quickly becomes less of a luxury item and more of a practical piece of furniture. In the cottage, the writing desk gains multiple new functions and uses, specifically those relating to domestic duties such as needlework and laundry, but also it functions as a surface to hold other objects. In

fact, in the poem Mira conceptually links the writing desk as a tool to other objects she uses to perform her duties as a maid: a candlestick, ladle, or “Table” (56) are all manufactured tools designed to aid human labours. In this way, the writing desk loses its status as a fashionable object that belongs to an economy of luxury as it moves into the labour economy and is retooled as an object of practical use rather than fashionable use.

By providing a surface for self-expression and self-reflection, the writing desk aids in the construction of the writer’s subjectivity. Moreover, the writing desk points toward the materiality of writing as a condition of writerly agency: it is a thing that makes possible the female writer. In the poem, we can see how important a gift like a writing desk would be for a woman like Leapor to own and use; it is not merely a possession, but an extension of the poet’s physical body and, to the extent that she identifies herself as a writer, her sense of self. According to Linda Zionkowski, there are different manifestations and effects of gift exchange, including its relation to structures of authority such as paternalism and patriarchy, but also challenges concepts of selfhood grounded in the exclusive possession of property (18). While the writing desk has always been a symbolic representation of the writer’s body and mind, the writing desk given to Mira in Leapor’s poem is not just an extension of her body, but it also comes imbued with the expectations of her patron. The writing desk asks Mira, “Canst thou behold me and not find, / ‘The Picture of the Giver’s Mind?’” By stating this, Mira acknowledges that the writing desk is not an unconditional gift but an exchange for her future labours and a conscription of her subject position as a patronized writer. Although a writing desk encourages Mira’s writing and publication, it also demands her labour; she must sit at it

and write sellable forms of poetry for her patron. The large piece of furniture looms in the small cottage room and is a constant reminder of not only the fact that she must write for her patron, but also of her life's contrasts between her work and writing.¹²

Scholars of Leapor have noted that she dedicates many of her poems to Freemantle, but I argue Leapor's poems to Freemantle are merely disguised as gifts because they have always been Freemantle's property, even before they are materialized in print form. For example, in the poem the writing desk explains to Mira that it is "a Monitor and Table too." The ideas for poems Leapor will write while sitting at the writing desk are already inside of the desk, waiting for her to materialize them for Freemantle. The writing desk is not an unconditional gift but an exchange for her future labours. In fact, closer scrutiny of the language Freemantle uses in her prefatory letter to Leapor's volume of poetry shows how the gift of the writing desk is merely an extension of her investment in and ownership of Leapor's poetic persona and literary creations. In her letter she states that

my mentioning a subscription, I believe, occasioned her poem [...] My expressing some fear of being troublesome in coming so frequently, occasioned a great variety of invitations, both in verse and prose [...] I have sent a list of the poems that were written since I was acquainted with her; which, I think, will shew the quickness of her Genius. (To John****, ESQ).

Freemantle claims that she knows exactly what she needs to say in order to get Leapor to produce a specific kind of poem. If she expresses a certain type of "fear" Leapor will produce an invitational poem. Moreover, Freemantle knows what a writing desk would

¹² As Bourdieu maintains, the gift economy, in contrast to the market, "is organized with a view to the accumulation of symbolic capital (a capital of recognition, honour, nobility, ect), which secures the "durable domination" of subordinate parties". The gift however must remain distance from commodities and wages in order to affect such domination, and in the paternalist system, this required direct involvement in the lives of dependents. The great cannot appropriate the labour of others without winning them over personally

incite from Leapor: not just a poem, but several, and not just a poem about one topic but many, because the writing desk does something other than merely suggest poems, it demands them. The writing desk is a gift given in the spirit of self-interest. The tradition of formalized power imbalance pervades not only Leapor's writing but the writing desk, and as such Freemantle's gift to Leapor belongs to a particular category of gift exchange, one that maintains and establishes conventional social hierarchies. It is advantageous for Freemantle cultivate a friendship with Leapor, and such a relationship, whether it is mutually desired or not, it is still predicated on a capitalist relationship in which Freemantle is given a kind of ownership of Leapor and the work she produces.

Although Freemantle empowers Leapor and encourages her to write and publish, Leapor's relationship with her is defined by and therefore indebted to the traditionally patriarchal structures of the patronage system, and this expectation reinforces hierarchies of gender and masculine authority. In contrast, the pocketbook in her pocketbook poems assumes a more interactive relationship between poet, text, and Jennens. It is because of this kind of interaction that Jennens gift seems to be closer to a gesture of pure goodwill as it can be removed from the assertion of formal power and the exercise of established forms of control (Zionkowski 1). Jennens's and Leapor's mutual desire for and engagement with intellectual intimacy pursued inside of the very object that was gifted, reveals the erotics of the power dynamics involved with notions of the gift, and brings the idea of giving and receiving to a new level of intimacy. The pocketbook as gift undergoes several exchanges, but most importantly the ideological structure of the gift undergoes a transformation in the poems and turns the gift into a locus of mutual exchange through

the giving and receiving of uncompensated yet rewarding human labours. Instead of simply accepting the pocketbook as a gift, Leapor sends it back to Jennens with her own request: to read what she has written in it and for Jennens herself to write inside of it. That Jennens writes a response to the pocketbook's request not just "written in the same day and returned to [Leapor] the next" but also in the form of Leapor's it-poems certainly speaks to her dedication to Leapor and her emotional and intellectual investment in Leapor as a writer and as a woman. Jennens receives a poem from Leapor that is a gift in the form of a part of her intimate self. Jennens could have very easily not responded to Leapor's request for her to personalize the pocketbook with her own poetry. But Jennens's does give Leapor her own time and labour, both of which are uncompensated. Unlike the patron relationship evoked in the writing desk poem and the power dynamics which accompany it, in this scenario Jennens is emotionally involved with Leapor as a friend and mentor; she will spend her time thinking, reading, and writing to, about, and for Leapor. Jennens engages in communication with Leapor through the forms of labour such as guidance, support, care and attention and thus stands outside of a capitalist perspective. Freemantle gives a costly gift that creates a relation of dependence. In contrast, Jennens's is a purely gratuitous gift given without specific expectation: she gifts her time, her intellect as co-writer, and her affective labour as respondent.

One fundamental difference between Leapor's literary representations of the writing desk and the pocketbook is that one of the poems was written for a public readership and the other was written for a private one. The pocketbook poems appear in the second volume of Leapor's collection, and this tells us that they were not initially

intended for publication. The pocketbook poems were more likely originally written by the women with the understanding that they were having a private conversation. Therefore, we can make the argument that Leapor did not write these poems out of a “desire to please her patron” (Hinnant 127), unlike her poem “A Genius in Disguise,” where we see Mira going through the conventional postures of a labouring female poet who must play the part of polite protégée when receiving an expensive gift, fulfilling her “expect[ation] to act out, to dramatize [her] gratitude” to her patron (144). The pocketbook is represented more as an amatory gift, and this kind of gift works to dissolve power relations because it embodies an erotic bond between two women from two different classes, whereas the writing desk enforces top down power hierarchies such as class, status, and cultural authority.

Leapor and Jennens’s interaction and cowriting inside of the pocketbook becomes crucial in distinguishing between a gift and a payment for service, between mentorship (intellectual intimacy) and patronage (solicitation). Behind Freemantle’s “disinterested benevolence” lies compelling “incentives to power and gain” (Batchelor 162). Freemantle gives a costly gift that creates a relation of dependence. In contrast, Jennens’s is a purely gratuitous gift given without specific expectation: she gifts her time, her intellect as co-writer, and her affective labour as respondent. Jennens’s gift throws into question the nature and work of the gift in the eighteenth-century as it becomes a marker for a range of values such as friendship, love, and mentorship that stand outside of a capitalist economy. It is important to acknowledge here that class power dynamics do not disappear from this exchange as the gap between their socioeconomic positions remains; however, both

women challenge these power concepts by making the pocketbook about something more than an expensive gift. They collaborate to remake the pocketbook through their intertwined, personalized poetic labours. Furthermore, while Freemantle's language as seen in her prefatory letter claims ownership of Leapor's status as a writer, Jennens voice encourages Leapor to claim her own status by owning property, not just the book, but her verses and literary labour. By calling Mira "the successor of Pope", Jennens does not simply stroke Leapor's ego, she is showing Leapor how to reclaim her literary labour by recognizing herself as a property-owning subject rather than an object of exchange in the classed and gendered literary economy of the time. Leapor as owner of the pocketbook reconnects her to her own literary and intellectual labours, revealing a form of unalienated labour.

Through the autobiographies of these objects, Leapor's poems become vehicles for both cultural commentary and the expansion of popular opinion, evidencing Benedict's observation that poetry in the eighteenth century "had a social value perhaps even more powerful than that of novels" (Benedict, "Encounters" 79). Specific morals or general assertions of what constitutes virtue and vice pervade these poetic narratives and by employing storytelling objects endowed with privileged access to concealed social, economic, and cultural information validates Leapor as a writer who was as much engaged with social issues as with philosophical ones. Leapor's it-poems extend conventional poetic techniques and the philosophical thought about possessions, property, and the uses of objects in order to write and control her poems. While some of her

contemporaries like Stephen Duck and Robert Tatersal¹³ used the tools of their trades to inspire their writing and to find ways to talk about their labourious day-to-day struggles, Duck's flail or Tateral's trowel never take on a life of their own. As readers, we are never made aware of how or what a flail or trowel is made up of nor what it might be for these tools to live in a world where they are repeatedly used and abused by human hands for human gain. In this way, Leapor differentiates herself from both mainstream and labouring-class poets who use objects to simply occupy their verse and innovatively crafts poems with objects that are narratively in control of the very stories in which they appear.

In a 21st-century context, we might be less, or at least differently, affected by a poem that addresses us from the perspective, and in the voice, of an inanimate object; the inner plight of a nail does not grip our imagination quite in the same way that it would have for eighteenth-century readers. The eighteenth century witnessed the rise of 'stuff,' or the rise of material culture and people in the eighteenth century were just beginning to come to terms with what it means to live in a world that interacts with objects, things, and stuff. Leapor joins her century's debates by employing objects found in and around her environment to be used as poetic devices that help her understand herself and her position in the broader world. In doing so, her poems end up crafting subjectivity, prefiguring certain concepts and forms of subject-object relations that later become codified theory. Reading Leapor's object poems in the context of eighteenth-century empiricism and materialist philosophy demonstrates her ability to imagine objects with secret inner lives

¹³ Evidenced in poems like Duck's "The Thresher's Labour" and Tatersal's "To Mr. Stephen Duck"

and to recognize the capacity of things to speak as if human, both of which were pressing thoughts in the eighteenth-century imagination.

Chapter 2: The Erotics of Everyday Things

In the last chapter, we saw how Leapor's it-poems help us to explore the ways in which specific objects gain new meaning and value within a labouring-class economy and how these poems provide us with a greater understanding and appreciation for labouring-class literature and culture. However, readings of her it-poems can extend beyond the exploration of the speaking object's social forms of labour to include the eighteenth-

century female experience of eroticism and pleasure. For example, in her pocketbook poems, female eroticism is played with in such a way that allows Leapor to claim authority as a female subject in literary and intellectual discourse. With this in mind, an erotic rereading of the everyday objects in Leapor's it-poems shows that the nail in is a playful representation of the phallus; it dominates and controls the narrative, it dictates to its author, and it is the object that "tore [Mira's] petticoat". Similarly, in "The Inspir'd Quill," the quill has the characteristics and functions equivalent to a penis. It tells Mira that its "fate is hard," and it asks her if she could "be so kind/ as to comfort [its] afflicted mind" by taking it out of its "hated cell". However, the quill soon regrets its request when it realizes that she is a poet, and an inexperienced one at that. It accuses Mira of bad penmanship; she can only "scrawl unprofitable rhyme" with "scribble[s] that are so rough the quill fears she "will quickly break [its] back." According to the quill, Mira is an amateur when it comes to properly handling it with much-required delicate rhythm and form. Although the quill here undoubtedly stands in for the "metaphorical penis," like Sandra Gilbert and Susana Gubar have argued in the past, if we look again at the quill we can see that there is something a little different, something that is not "straightforwardly male" (Gilbert and Gubar 4).

More recent scholarship by Emily West proposes that the quill and its related practice of penmanship might actually have more hermaphroditic qualities than purely phallic ones. In her study, "Difference Engines: Technology and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Britain", West complicates "the easy identification of the pen as penis" by showing how the making of quills and their accompanying books of penmanship and its

practices take on a more hermaphroditic language because its construction is more about splitting than penetrating: the ends of quills are split and thus represents equal parts phallic and vagina (West 155). In this way, the quill “takes on a much more complex and unfixed kind of signification in relation to the body that manipulates it” (159). Drawing on Cleland’s *Fanny Hill*, West links descriptions to Hill’s body as she comes to be a subject as a mode of producing writing by showing how the quill as “instrument functions as a sexualized supplemental part of the writer’s body, indicat[ing] that the writing body has a complex and potentially unstable relationship to categories of gender” (158). The quill in Leapor’s poem is not only hermaphroditic in its material characteristics but it is also a shapeshifter, its soul passes through many social, cultural, and species categories.

Leapor’s creation of a phallogocentric economy in her it-poems fits well with the story of change in gender relations and the development of separate spheres. While the quill and nail are represented as phallic figures, which is discursively placed within a narrative where phallic objects become less phallic when they are in the hands of its author, her pocketbook poems present a pocketbook as an entirely feminized object, which accommodates phallic figures, but they are embraced within a non-phallic economy instead. The pocketbook has been recognized in literary and cultural history as a representation of the female writer’s body, and so it must, like the diary proper, have open, fragmented, and evolving spaces, connoting female genitalia. Karen Harvey has noted in *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century* that many metaphors were adopted by writers for the representation of female genitalia and these “appear[ed] to be designed precisely to convey a sense of unknowability” (Harvey 106). Generally, the mystery of

the woman's genitals was conveyed in literature by male writers; women writers also participated in the metaphorical representation of their genitals but generally in the context of thoroughly masculinized narratives.¹⁴ However, in Leapor's and Jennens's pocketbook poems, they work against the assumption that the penis is the central element in the ordering of social and literary worlds by privileging the feminine in the construction of meaning and the creation of literature.

Rather than the pocketbook dictating its usage, like we seen in the nail and quill's narratives, in the pocketbook poems by Leapor and Jennens it actually invites usage by opening up an eroticized landscape that offers a site for unpoliced female pleasures. Here, the pocketbook allows for an open interaction between two women; they can write and communicate with each other in a public yet very private manner—no one would know what is inside of the pocketbook in each respective class—and they experiment with roles and choose what parts they will play. Karen Harvey has noted that “there was no democracy of sexual pleasure in erotic material; and in cause, experience and effect, pleasures were gendered” (Harvey 202). However, in the pocketbook poems, an alternative erotic economy is being imagined with their own rituals, rules, and hierarchies. In this world, these women get to try on ascribed masculine and social roles

¹⁴ The industrial revolution controlled the reproductive capacity of the working classes and enforced rigid gender categories and division of labour. Leapor's poem seems to foreshadow this event through its masculine language within an entirely female world. This literary tactic reveals an absent-presence of masculinity within the writing, and this works to highlight the looming industrialism and its codifying of gender as opposed to gender appearing to be of particular uses to labour. Ultimately this shows how Leapor's pocketbook poems raise and explore uncertainties about identity and sexual categories in similar ways that we try to understand ourselves today. However, scholars have tended to avoid delving into the labouring female subject's pleasures and desires, at least scholars have continued to evade the erotic quality of Leapor's writing since Landry first suggested it over twenty years ago. Even then, Landry's critical perspective is in line with feminist movements of the early 1990's and was not yet thinking in terms of fluid identities and categories.

and this shows the ways in which literature can claim all the different positions in an eroticised set of relations for women. This last half of this chapter will demonstrate how in Leapor's poetry eroticism is framed as exclusively female erotic situations or relations where a male body is not explicitly stated, but masculine language is alluded to. I show how Leapor's poetry creates an alternative eroticism in which the idea of phallicism is still played with in her poems, but it takes on different meanings and functions, and, more importantly, women are in charge of them.

Eroticism in Leapor's Poetry: The Critical Debate

In her study *The Muses Resistance* (1990), Landry suggested that there was something "sexy" about Mary Leapor's poetry. In line with feminist and socialist movements of the early 1990's, Landry's study succeeds in demonstrating how Leapor both performs and voices her pleasures and desires in her poetry, arguing that Leapor takes sexual pleasure in simultaneously paying tribute to and subverting the texts of mainstream male authors like Pope (85). Landry further considers questions regarding Leapor's literary representation of non-normative female sexualities and intimacies and claims that this kind of erotic language allows Leapor to create an "alternative green world" (82), which is a world of "a community of women willing to opt out of the heterosexual contract" (40). Landry's early attentiveness to erotic undertones in Leapor's poetry provided eighteenth-century studies with an alternative, productive historical way of thinking about labouring-class women and the tension in their writings around sexuality, creativity, and authorship.

Landry certainly found something sexy about some of Leapor's poetry, and she encouraged researchers and scholars to further play around with her theory and embrace the erotic potential of Leapor's verse; yet, her study has elicited relatively little scholarship on the topic—very few critics have since confessed to being seduced by the “Sapphic textuality” of Leapor's verses (Landry 82). To consider Leapor's ability to express her sexual pleasures and desires was also to acknowledge the possibility that labourers were self-aware and had the capability to explore their own sexual subjectivities. Landry's use of eroticism to pursue questions regarding the relationship between female same-sex relations, class and authorship in labouring-class writing received some scholastic resistance. Some critics, including Michael Meyers and Richard Greene, considered Landry's method to be a rather transgressive analysis and censured it as a little too unorthodox. Both Meyers and Greene disagreed with Landry's readings of feminist ideals reflected in Leapor's poetry. Meyers claims Landry “hail[ed] Leapor as a radical lesbian feminist”; such an allegation he felt “overstated” and “over glorified” Leapor's sexual radicalism (Meyer 2). Meyers accuses Landry herself of flirting with theoretical “extreme[s]” (2). In his work on Leapor, Greene openly states that he “disputes some of Landry's more politicized readings” (Greene xxx), and opts to argue for the presence of an “authentic femininity” in Leapor's poetry instead of a Sapphic one. Anne Milne too, in her sustained study of Leapor “*Lactilla Tends her Fav'rite Cow: Ecocritical Readings of Animals and Women in Eighteenth-Century British Labouring Class Poetry*, (2008), states that she “move[s] away from Landry's focus on Leapor's ‘Sapphic textuality’, promoting, rather, Leapor's conceptualisation of ‘wilderness and

slavery” (Milne 33). Milne elects to follow an ecocritical methodology to focus on Leapor’s powerlessness as a labouring-class female and of the treatment of women and servants more broadly.

Nevertheless, Landry did arouse the interest of a few critics who were willing to explore the notion that even a labouring-class woman had sexual pleasures and desires and wrote about them. Harriette Andreadis’s text *Sappho in Early Modern England* (2001), breathed new life into the erotic nature of Leapor’s poetry by arguing that Leapor’s work produces a “veiled eroticism,” and links Leapor’s poetry to the writings of Katherine Philips where Philips projected an intense passion in her letters to female friends. Andreadis further explores the idea of “homoerotic desire” in the context of a “poetic discourse of female same-sex intimacy” in Leapor’s and in other female literary communities of the early modern period (Andreadis 253). Although Landry’s and Andreadis’s texts seem to be the only studies which offer substantial evidence and analysis of the erotic quality of Leapor’s verse, other scholars have since alluded to ideas about eroticized female friendships in Leapor’s poetry. Kate Lilley and Karen Harvey, for instance, both agree Leapor’s poetry is erotic regarding “homosocial women” (Lilley 4); however, they do so by merely gesturing toward previous work which, unfortunately, merely rehashes arguments about female romantic friendships, rather than offering a fresh interpretation that links Leapor’s eroticism to her critical perspective on cultural relations.

I hesitate to believe Andreadis’s argument that Leapor’s “impulse to create idealized female communities” through a “poetic discourse of female same-sex intimacy” is predicated on her “homoerotic desire” (Andreadis 242). Such a claim not only proposes

that we can confine Leapor's sexual identity to a historically specific category, but also, it insinuates that Leapor's primary motivation for writing was to find a language with which she could express her sexual orientation and romantic feelings towards other women, when this may not necessarily be the case. Moreover, I am not entirely persuaded that it was Landry's intention to proclaim Leapor a "radical lesbian feminist" as Meyer suggests (Meyer 2). Rather, it is my contention that Landry's ambition, instead of trying to establish Leapor within a historical tradition of lesbian identity, was rather to bring awareness to the erotic propensity that impels much of Leapor's poetry regarding female literary creativity and community. For example, early in her chapter on Leapor, Landry defines how she is working within the intertwined categories of Sappho, eroticism and Leapor's verse:

Sappho is synonymous with transgressive female erotic and literary exchange. And the oppressiveness of heterosexual institutions in Leapor's verse necessitates some imaginary alternative or release, generates a powerful investment in 'sapphic' relations between women: transgressive of patriarchal authority and heterosexual obligation, highly charged in terms of affect, constituted through writing despite the criticism or indifference of the male literary establishment. Leapor's poetry lends itself to, even invites, a reading sensitive to the possibility of a Sapphic or lesbian alternative to heterosexual hegemony. (82)

Landry focuses our attention on the "sapphic textuality" of Leapor's verse and puts forth the idea that becoming "sapphic readers" will enhance our ability to identify the erotic quality of Leapor's poetry and read important aspects of literary production and sexuality of this period. Perhaps this is where Meyer founded his claim that Landry labels Leapor a "radical lesbian feminist" (Meyer 2), and possibly what shaped Greene's broader claim that Landry tries to situate Leapor's works within a "Sapphic discourse of feminist separatism" (Greene xxx). There is certainly evidence to suggest such readings, Landry

does home in on Leapor's deployment of the ancient poet Sappho, invoke the word 'lesbian,' and point to female resistance to heteronormative ideology and female oppression. Alternatively, however, I believe Landry's statement here can be read as evidence to support the idea that she was trying to find a language that did not yet exist for thinking about how eighteenth-century women related to each other culturally through eroticized social relations.

Landry's eye toward "sapphic textuality" appears to have anticipated what a particular line of feminist scholarship now calls the sapphic discourse. In contemporary feminist historicism, Susan Lanser (*The Sexuality of History* 2014) and Lisa Moore (*Dangerous Intimacies* 1997) are two key figures associated with taking up the term 'sapphic' in place of lesbian to describe the social and erotic relations between women and the kinds of cultural forms generated by such relations. They use this term to move away from heteronormative frameworks for describing cultural relations among women. This is, perhaps, what Landry was trying to express when she suggests we follow a "Sapphic or lesbian alternative" framework. It is as though Landry senses the complexity and fluidity of relationships and eroticisms in Leapor's poetry but lacks the vocabulary for an interpretive framework that is not entirely lesbian nor fully sapphic but is both of those concepts and much more. Lanser and Moore today are trying to generate this kind of vocabulary for talking about eroticized social and cultural relations that are not unrelated to lesbian sex relations, but they are not limited or reducible to such a category either. In the remainder of this chapter, I intend to develop Landry's view of the "sapphic textuality" of Leapor's verses; this more expansive understanding of the sapphic shows

how Leapor mobilises an erotic dynamic in her poetry to illuminate a complex network of women's relationships that are central to the production of her writing.

The Autoerotics of Poem Writing

Leapor focuses our attention on erotic pleasure in "A Hymn to the Morning." So far, there has been little scholarship about this poem, which is, arguably, the most overtly erotic poem in her collection. Landry is still the only critic who has offered an analysis of the poem's entirety. In her reading, she argues the poem's highly eroticized feminine landscape allows Leapor to build a world in which a labouring-female poet "feels inspired and safe," a place where "she [can] poetically escape" from the hard realities of her labouring life (Landry 85). But as much as "A Hymn to the Morning" is about creating an alternative female world where a woman like Leapor feels safe and empowered as a female writer, the poem is also about female pleasures and desires and the extent to which the female imagination can arouse itself.

In what follows, I explore how "A Hymn to the Morning" is expressive of female pleasures and desires, both sexual and otherwise, and suggest ways in which the poem evidences Leapor thinking about the pleasures and values of her own writing and whether there is room for pleasure in a labouring subjectivity. Leapor's writing explores the nature and value of female pleasure while underscoring how historically masculine literary traditions have written the female body. In the poem, Leapor extracts female figures from classical mythology and reworks them in a revised version of pastoralism. And by rethinking and rewriting the literary value of classical textual female bodies, Leapor's poem claims not only a space for female creativity, but also reclaims a heritage of writing

for all women by bringing female pleasure to the forefront of literary creation.¹⁵ The consensus among scholars is that the image of Sappho in this poem appears to operate on a much more personal level for Leapor. Landry believes Sappho's invocation is a clear illustration of Leapor's thwarted poetic ambition, her poem having not measured up to the erotic skills of Sappho. In addition to reading Leapor's poem for the quality of her erotic poetic skill, I propose we should also explore the poem for literary aspects of autoeroticism. Here my argument takes a turn away from the familiar territory of female same-sex erotic relations. On the one hand, the poem is about erotic relations between women and is sapphic in the sense that a landscape is constructed as a place suggestive of the fulfilling of mutual female desire. On the other hand, the poem is an erotic poem about poem-writing and about Leapor's personal recognition of her literary limitations, which, I argue, she comes to identify through a kind of sapphic dialogue between herself and her poetic persona, Mira. This internal erotic conflict materializes in the poem as we begin to see how Leapor positions herself as immersed in the pleasures of her own text. Through my reading of the figure of Clione it becomes clear that Mira is the object of Leapor's desire, an erotic symbol acting in her imagination. The poem then reveals that Leapor finds thinking and writing both pleasurable and painful: the practice of writing poetry becomes her autoeroticism. "A Hymn to the Morning" reveals Leapor, and here I embrace the words of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, as "the masturbating girl" whose fruits of her pleasure's labour are deemed unproductive by society.

¹⁵ This is not the only poem where Leapor uses classical figures to rethink and rewrite the female body and female sexuality. See "The Muses Embassy" where she rewrites classical mythology in order to create a place and history for female agency and authorship

“A Hymn to the Morning” is written in the language of traditional pastoralism. Mira inhabits a dreamlike world where she sings and strums her lyre while “Zephyrs round her play” and her eyes meet with beautiful, idyllic “hills with flowers crown’d.” Mira watches as Clione experiences the delight of rural solitude, observing that as she “wanders lonely o’er the plains” her presence awakens the flora—oak trees, honeysuckles, roses, and lilies spring to life with intensity. Mira describes Clione’s sensuous interaction with warm winds in terms of a material force that washes over her body, seemingly bringing Clione a sense of pleasure, leisure, and an absence of care. It soon becomes clear that Mira desires to experience the same kind of unpoliced pleasure and leisure that Clione does within this landscape. Mira calls out to the winds: “Come, ye Gales that fan the Spring;/ Zephyr, with thy downy Wing, / Gently waft to Mira’s Breast” (37-40). But the morning breeze will not soothe Mira’s discontent because, unlike Clione who can retreat into pastoral seclusion to escape her complex web of social restrictions, Mira resides in the very countryside Clione visits. And here, warm breezes do not bring her a sense of ease and relief; rather, they remind her of her agricultural duties and her socioeconomic confinement. With this recognition, Mira’s idyllic dream collapses, and she is forced to return to the hard realities of a labouring-class woman who has no access—and therefore no right—to the creation of pastoral poetry.

Clione is not a real shepherdess but an aristocratic woman traveling to the countryside in her “gilded car” to enjoy a pastoral day out. The form of the pastoral is in its very origins implicated in class relations. The neoclassical pastoral acted as a mechanism for the illumination of social difference, allowing the upper classes to

formulate social fantasies of pleasure and leisure through the voices of shepherds and shepherdesses (Bending 4). Leapor's poem reproduces this pastoral tradition, but rather than an upper-class figure adopting the perspective of a peasant, Mira articulates upper-class bucolic pleasures of "Health, content, and balmy Rest" in juxtaposition with the labourer's, particularly the labouring poet's, struggle of "Sorrow, Care, and sickly pain." The figure of Clione is emblematic of leisure and recreation. She strolls through the countryside with languid dignity and enjoys the serenity of warm breezes, blooming flowers, and the fresh scent of morning dew. Her face bears an "eternal smile," showing she has very little she cares about at the moment. The labourers in the landscape are not shepherds or agricultural workers, they are urban servants, "waiting slaves" left behind by Clione to watch over her horses and carriage while she experiences the pleasures of nature in solitude. Since agricultural labourers are commonly treated as objects in conventional pastoralism, whether they are portrayed as cheerful and domestic or ragged and exhausted, while the subject tends to be the speaker who is in a position of power and control over the workers, it is curious that agricultural workers are not called upon in this way in Mira's pastoral. The real peasant in this poem is Mira, but her voice is subsumed into the narrative as she plays the complex role of impersonating the upper-class voice impersonating the voice of a shepherdess. In a sense, Mira could be viewed as reclaiming the voice of the peasant, yet at this time for Mira to play the authorial role of pastoral shepherdess she is essentially performing an implicitly illicit act. For Mira is not to waste her time being "idle" and leisurely compose poetry; she must perform manual, not aesthetic labours.

Leapor's poem does not merely elucidate social relations; it also expresses a labouring-poet's literary pleasures in contrast with her exclusion from poetic authority, and, more significantly, articulates how female pleasure and desire stand in opposition to patriarchal hegemony. Leapor employs the form of the pastoral for two specific reasons: first, to prove her knowledge of the genre and to show her poetic and intellectual ability to participate within it; and second, to challenge patriarchal ideology within the pastoral tradition, and, in turn, use the form to construct a space for the expression of female pleasure and desire. In the poem, the rising dawn is described in terms of a feminized landscape, where not only do classical female figures become objects of female desire, but also readers are invited to see a metaphorical sunrise as a female body (Landry 82). Since classical antiquity, literary representations of the dawn have been personified as a female body, given the name Aurora, goddess of the dawn, and specified as having maternal attributes such as renewal or rebirth. Leapor opens her poem with a devotion to "Aurora, Nymph Divine," describing her motions as she fills the Eastern sky with her blended tones. It is a particularly erotic rendition of the disrobing of the dawn: her "Hills with Flow'rs crown'd" gently spill out as she "Gaily spreads" her "Saffron Robe," forming a richly seductive "Valley" inviting of sensuous exploration. Here, Leapor follows many of her male literary antecedents in her description of the morning's approach as a metaphorical female body, and even invokes a language similar to them.¹⁶

¹⁶ Texts by male authors, such as Edmund Fairfax, Edmund Spenser, and George Chapman are works of literature that Leapor may have accessed through the libraries of Bridget Freemantle and Susanna Jennens. For example, in his translation of Homer's *Odyssey* (1616), George Chapman renders Aurora as "the cheerful lady of the light, deck'd in her saffron robe,/ Dispers'd her beams through ev'ry part of this enflow' red globe" (book 8 11-12). Fairfax's dawn is: "The purple morning left her crimson bed,/ And donn'd her robes of pure vermillion hue;/ Her amber locks she crowned with roses red," taken from his

The classic pastoral and its idealized and romanticized view of nature and landscape was, as Stephen Bending has noted, without exception imagined for those who were male, wealthy, and educated (Bending 10). Therefore, the personification of the dawn in a relation to the topography of the female body is a masculine tradition, and one that writes the female body as an object for the satisfaction of male desire. As Julie Peakman argues in her account of how the sexualized body was constructed in the eighteenth-century imagination, male poets made their literary gardens into their own “private classical sexualized world” (Peakman 166), which could only be protected and enjoyed by men. Such a design enabled sexualized bodies, particularly female, to be brought under male control (162). The idealized view of the female body in traditional pastoralism not only marks out men’s cultural possession of pastoral poetry, it delineates male possession and oppression of the female body and female sexuality. Leapor is a participant within this masculinist tradition, as she also objectifies the female body in her poem, but where she differs from her male predecessors is with her reimagining of the metaphor and subsequent rewriting of the female body.

On the one hand, Leapor’s poem follows traditional forms of pastoral writing since it does depict an easy and graceful vision of aristocratic pastoral simplicity. On the other hand, the poem is also a form of female transgressive writing, as its pastoral description develops into a much more complex form of erotic cathexis. The poem opens with a classical version of the metaphor of the sunrise as a female body to show her

translation of Tasso’s *Jerusalem Delivered* (1600). And Spenser describes Aurora: “Now when the rosy-fingered morning fair/ Weary of aged Tithon’s saffron bed,/ Had spread her purple robes through dewy air” (*The Redcross Knight*, Canto 2 55-58).

readers how the female body has been constructed by masculine literary traditions.

Leapor immediately follows this model with her own rewriting of the metaphor, turning the female figure of Clione into a sunrise, and in the process, conveys the potential for women to create alternative symbolic systems, ones that permit autonomous female creativity. While Leapor does use conventional tropes in her writing of Clione's body, they are deliberately manipulated by her to describe female erotic activity, and in so doing, her poem shows that tropes like these can be removed from the body of masculine literary tradition and independently wielded by women writers to procure their own literary pleasure. In the poem, Mira writes "Soft Clione['s]" body as an object composed of abstract qualities and concepts (note that Clione is "half-divine," her complexion "Lovely as the dawning Sky," and her demeanor is equated to "light upon the Vale"); however, here her body is re-inscribed and celebrated as partaking in a socially and culturally degenerative act rather than a morally regenerative one. For Clione is not simply reimagined as the dawn breaking over a beautiful landscape, she is described as an imaginary landscape associated with the imagery of the act of female masturbation: "her snowy Hand she waves" as she "wanders lonely o'er the plains," causing her "cheeks" to flush with color "of the dawning sky," and when reaching her "Lips that wear eternal smiles [...] now rivers smoother flow" and her "op'ning rose glows." An intense orgasm is signalled with the release of 'creamy' white fluid: "Lilies paint the dewy ground/ And Ambrosia breathes around." The color of lilies in combination with the idea of saturation arguably resembles the white discharge emitted from a woman's body during orgasm. Likewise, the word "ambrosia" is evoked here as a scent, a "creamy, luxurious, and

sensual fragrance” (Blackledge 229). According to Catherine Blackledge, this scent is, “in essence, the intimate scents of a woman” (229). Such sensational pleasure relieves the figurative female’s external pressures and allows her, however momentarily, to escape the confines of “Sorrow, Care, and Sickly pain.” Mira transforms the natural landscape into erotically charged metaphors that converge to form a detailed description of Clione sensually touching and exploring herself and allows us as readers of the poem to participate in Clione’s deeply personal and private encounter as voyeurs with her. Given that the eighteenth century was a time of unremitting sexual transformations, especially involving cultural understandings of the female body, reading the poem as the unfolding of Clione’s self-pleasure session generates an image that serves as a powerful sign of a woman’s ability to control the workings of her own body. In this way, Leapor’s poem situates women like Mira and Clione within the century’s redefinition and reorganization of sexual and gender categories. And by actively employing the eighteenth-century’s anxiety-ridden cultural concept of masturbation as a trope for the creative female writer, her poem makes an important intervention in the period’s philosophical debates about the pleasures of the imagination and the pleasures of the body.

Leapor introduces a new erotics into the pastoral landscape of her poem as its soft, flowery language quickly turns into an account of erotic desire where a woman’s actions are described in terms of solitary sexual satisfaction. It is important to understand the magnitude of the claim Leapor’s poem is making about masturbation as productive

and highly valuable to the female creative mind.¹⁷ The poem's image of a shepherdess observing a masturbating woman was conceived at a time when genital masturbation was moralized as an economic and biological aberration. In *Solitary Sex*, Thomas Laqueur describes changing ideas on masturbation and its representations in literature. He argues that modern masturbation was a "creature of the Enlightenment" perceived to be a selfish act of imagination, a form of "uncontrolled privacy" (Laqueur 236) that was considered a "socially meaningless freedom" (226). In traditional pastoralism, members of the upper-classes register rural solitude as morally superior to urban corruption, and highly valued the desire, pleasure, and privacy that rurality afforded them, believing these aspects aided with their moral regeneration (Spacks 202). Paradoxically, however, the qualities of a country landscape that they so valued—desire, pleasure, and privacy—came to represent aspects of the immoral, degenerative, and unnatural act of masturbation. That Leapor can write a pastoral poem that is expressive of female pleasures and desires is remarkable in itself but writing one that includes the metaphorical appearance of female masturbation to speak to those pleasures and desires is doubly so, and one that is achievable only by scandalous self-pleasuring and the perverting of conventional literary practices.

Whilst Clione is presented in the poem as a female figure actively asserting feminine agency and sexuality, she simultaneously embodies social and cultural anxieties

¹⁷ This same kind of writing that challenges dominant views of masturbation does not really emerge until the 1960s, when researchers and scholars begin to question the nature of masturbation and sexuality. Even in the early 1990s academe was not yet ready to accept masturbation (in every sense of the word) as a topic generative of scholarly discussion. Many critics condemned Sedgwick's scandalous essay "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl," some critics perceived Sedgwick's theory as a cultural abomination, shaming Sedgwick for attempting to pervert and corrupt familiar academic protocols by releasing a culturally degenerative practice doomed to breed abnormality into academic scholarship. But Sedgwick successfully ushered masturbation into academe, and her work helped to launch queer literary studies.

surrounding both masturbation and female sexuality. Laqueur argues that these concerns were the result of a fundamental change in human attitudes toward anatomy and the emergence of a two-body model. The paradigm shift from a one-sex to a two-sex model compelled a radical reorganization of sexuality because the idea of an entirely female sexuality was new and unknowable to men, and thus threatened masculine order and control. At the same time, medical developments about sexual reproduction increasingly disassociated female pleasure from biological reproduction because they had learned that female orgasm was not necessary for women to perform their reproductive functions (Laqueur 122). All forms of female pleasure, like female power, were seemingly irrelevant to the productions of procreation. As a result, women's sexual roles were assigned new social and cultural values, and female desire was reorganized and forced to find new forms of expression. As female pleasure was gradually written out of biological procreative activity and male pleasure prioritized, women looked elsewhere for new methods to satiate their sexual desires. One of these avenues to satisfaction was of course masturbation; another was to engage in the activity of "gratuitous" reading and writing, an avenue that was similarly considered a social vice and economic sin.

In the eighteenth century, cultural practices such as reading and writing poetry shaped how women understood their sexual desires. Leapor's erotic reconceptualization of the classical metaphor of the rising dawn delineates the act of female masturbation, which at the time was a significant source of cultural anxiety, as a form of feminine power and agency. During this time, the image of someone pleasuring their genitals and lost in a masturbatory fantasy served as a metaphor for active engagement in the process

of writing. While there was anxiety around ‘playing with oneself,’ Paula Benet and Vernon Rosario explain that “equally troubling was solitary play with words especially in [...] poems” (Benet and Rosario 10). Although Leapor must choose her words carefully so that they remain safely within the boundaries of neoclassical landscape description, she skilfully selects her words so that if her reader is tuned into the erotic potential of her verses they understand very readily how the poem brings the female experience of pleasure to the fore. Words like “lilies,” “dew,” and “ambrosia” do far more than effectively encapsulate the concept of the female orgasm—they reclaim female pleasure by offering an account of female sexual pleasure that dispenses with the male role altogether. This tells us that the male body is not necessary for female pleasure; all Leapor really needs, to borrow Laqueur’s phrase, is “the imagination and a hand” (121).

The generation of the kind of erotic imagery found in Leapor’s poem is evocative of verses by Sappho. However, it is difficult to gauge just how much Leapor’s erotic symbolism was inspired by Sappho’s verses. Although Sappho was not granted the same status as someone like Homer in the classical tradition, she haunts the Western imagination and literary tradition, being widely commemorated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the tragic poet who threw herself into the sea from the rock of Leucas. Most interpretations of Sappho available in the eighteenth century were carried out by male writers. Both Dryden and Pope wrote translations of Horace’s version of the moment leading up to Sappho’s apparent suicide, and Leapor may have had access to their texts. However, it is unlikely that such explicitly erotic images of female desire and sexual power as Leapor chooses to employ would have derived from one of these male

poets' works. The eighteenth-century male-dominated literary establishment viewed Sappho as a transgressive female figure who was dangerous to the reading public. Since a woman's sexuality was closely aligned with her imagination women were thought particularly subject to the dangers Sappho's writing represented. Therefore, most male authors who interpreted Sappho's verses did so in a heterosexual context, replacing female pronouns with male pronouns, and essentially correcting and taming Sappho and her verses to fit into their mold of heterosexual normativity.¹⁸ However, the female perspective of Sappho at this time greatly differed from that of the male. In her study of women poets and female agency, Bakscheider writes that "Sappho had become a standard in many original poems throughout the eighteenth century" (Bakscheider 26). Andreadis, too, identifies an emerging sapphic tradition that female writers identified with. She calls it a "double tradition of Sappho's reputation [...] as the world's preeminent female poet and as an example of prototypical female sexual transgression" (Andreadis 149). It seems Sappho was held in high esteem by many female writers and they looked up to her as the first female figure of poetical excellence even if her verses were not readily available to them.

In the poem, Mira calls Clione "half-divine" and describes her approaching carriage as a chariot of fire streaking across the horizon. Clione's "gilded-car" is a symbol of her wealth and status. Her highly decorated horse-drawn carriage is a mode of travel which differentiates her from lower classes, who frequently ride on horseback or in 'dung

¹⁸ Landry points out that Joseph Addison gives an account of Sappho in his *Spectator no. 223* in which he states, "I do not know, by the Character that is given of her Works, whether it is not for the Benefit of Mankind that [her verses] are lost. They were filled with such bewitching Tenderness and Rapture, that it might have been dangerous to have given them a Reading."

carts,' and its gold-plated body symbolically reflects her superior status and power in society. Landry has suggested that Clione is modelled after a local woman and is "half-divine" because she is a descendant of Clio, the Muse of History (Landry 85). Clio's main role was to relate histories by inspiring poets like Homer to sing, tell and write stories of the past. However, Clio's role is ultimately a passive one; it is "not one of an active creator" and this typecasts women as merely capable of assisting men with their literary productions (Parker 2). While it is plausible that Leapor creates Clione in the image of Clio to act as Mira's divine inspiration, this association is inconsistent both with Clione's role as an active participant in the action of the poem's unfolding and with the story the poem tells of female pleasure and desire. Instead, I suggest that Clione is a relation closer to Chloris, the goddess of flowers, who is known for her attributes of fertility, sex, blossoming, and, most importantly, her sexual reputation¹⁹ In Leapor's poem, Clione resides within the patriarchal nature of pastoralism but in here her feminine power, much like Chloris's, stems from her sexuality. Leapor uses the role of Clione in her poem for a much higher purpose than to simply recount a history of the phallogentricity of classical texts and female sexuality. Her poem generates female pleasure and desire and uses the figure of Clione to actively rewrite a literary past that has given and continues to give consent for masculine agency to exercise itself upon the female body.

¹⁹ Chloris as a figure of a potentially licentious female sexuality appears in many works in the 17th and 18th centuries by authors including Earl of Rochester and Aphra Behn. In Leapor's poem, Clione is seduced by sensuous winds, that moves in an erotic rhythm, playfully arousing her body until she yields to its pleasures and she herself becomes "Fond to meet the western gale." Chloris was a mortal whose beauty attracted the attentions of Zephyrus, the god of the west wind, who ravishes and rapes her. However, Chloris is awarded marriage to Zephyrus and immortality for enduring "the dishonour done to her by the wind" (Hyde 15).

A question remains as to why Leapor prefers Mira to describe an aristocratic woman engaging in erotic activity rather than choosing a female representative of her own class to play the role of the transgressive female. Scarlett Bowen tells us that “class distinctions between women mattered for conservative purposes,” chiefly for the maintenance of hierarchical and heterosexual narratives of reproduction (Bowen 221). If a woman like Clione wished to survive in her aristocratic world she was required to adhere to its cultural codes of the ideal woman, a model which explicitly forbade her from engaging with solitary sexual activity, or any pursuit of sexual satisfaction for that matter. She is expected to resist her sexual desires through her reasoning, and yet, her reason serves a patriarchally-motivated oppression of the female body and female sexuality—for she is conditioned to reason that the indulgence in her sexual desires would interfere with her desire for social propriety, which is ultimately her means of survival.²⁰ Social propriety for an aristocratic woman included adorning her body with materials proper to her class. Clione’s carriage is not merely an object used for transportation, it is also a cultural object that she needs to perform a distinct type of femininity that her sociocultural world demands of her. Just like Leapor must wear an apron to denote her position as kitchen maid, Clione must be accompanied by a “gilded car,” horses, and “waiting slaves.” Katherine Kitteridge notes that upper-class women’s sexuality and propriety were judged not by actual sexual transgressions but by social practices and

²⁰ Pope’s *Belinda* in “*The Rape of the Lock*” is an apt illustration of how an upper-class woman’s public appearance was her job—it was her duty to remain well dressed, mannered and to follow the structure of high society. The Sylphs in the poem become an allegory for the mannered conventions that govern female social behavior. Principles like honor and chastity have become no more than another part of conventional interaction. Pope makes it clear that these women are not conducting themselves on the basis of abstract moral principles but are governed by an elaborate social mechanism.

codes that were designed to make women's sexual purity highly visible in a public context. For Kitteridge, the eighteenth-century obsession for social propriety encouraged the distortion of female desires because they were developed through rules that dictated female "dress, comportment, [and] conversation" (Kitteridge 6). For example, in Leapor's poem, as much as the lines "Her snowy Hand she waves, / Silent stand her waiting slaves, / And while they guard the Silver reins, / She wanders lonely over the plains" (Leapor 21-24) are about articulating the moment when Clione steps into the simplicity and solitude of the countryside, they are also about conveying the moment when Clione asserts her agency and walks away from a world bounded by the conditions of patriarchy. When Clione removes the markers of her identity, by leaving behind her urban material pleasures, she moves outside of sanctioned areas of social order that govern her. When she moves outside of the realm of society and community, which is presided over by male authority, in favour of solitary activity she is not performing a behaviour that conveys appropriate female behaviour expected from a woman of her class. She could potentially be labeled a transgressive woman because she intentionally sought a form of "uncontrolled privacy": a social vice, or measure of anti-social self-abuse whereby her pleasures and desires, thoughts and actions associated with her solitary activity cannot be regulated nor defined (Laqueur 236).

What Leapor's poem tells us so far is that both female sexual desire and reason are not natural and unchanging but are created and constructed by social and cultural formations of her time: patriarchally-motivated ideologies hold onto a woman's 'silver reins' in case her passions might try to get away from her. Clione's "waiting slaves" are

tasked with “guard[ing] the silver reins”; they are to watch over the horses to ensure they perform their function in a system of human transportation. Similarly, a woman’s reason or intellect is conditioned to guard against a deliberate pursuit of her sexual passions, thereby ensuring she properly performs her social and cultural roles. But, here we can again see how Leapor’s poem is rife with erotic meaning. The OED states that the word “reins” in the eighteenth-century referred to “the seat [...] of sexual desire; sexual impulses.” Therefore, while the term “Silver reins” in the poem can denote horse leads, it also can signify Clione’s burning sexual desire that “Shine[s] in her and her alone.” In this interpretation, Clione “waves” her hand and the voice of reason that tells her to deny her sexual behaviour is “silent,” no more than a “slave” to her burning sexual desire. But, this is not to say that her reason and passions are not tethered, because they are ideologically. According to David West, “sexual desire or impulse is one of the most likely to challenge reason” (West 1); “Western philosophical tradition has to a considerable degree defined reason in opposition to sensual, sexual impulses and behaviour” (3). Moralists of the time pushed for an ideal of the triumph of reason over feeling, urging people, chiefly women, to regulate their behavior with reason and grant it dominion over the passions. The double meanings attached to the terms ‘slaves’ and ‘reins’ in the poem resonate more clearly with the thought of David Hume. At this time, Hume claimed that reason does not oppose the passions, but is a slave to them. He states, “[r]eason is, and ought only to be the slave of passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them” (Hume 416). Clione actively resists this symbolic construct of herself when she chooses to stop her gendered social performance.

Clione walks away from her world, leaving both her 'slaves' and 'reins' behind, and with no materials to identify her as an upper-class woman she is just woman with naked instinct, "innocence that ne'er beguiles."

Although the posture of Clione waving her hand to signal her "waiting slaves" to stop from following her as she continues into the countryside alone does create a powerful image of female resistance and empowerment, it is ultimately a feminine pastoral idyll. That a woman could assert her authoritative voice and reclaim her body and experiences with a simple gesture of her hand is a fantasy, an idealized manner of a way of female life. Nonetheless, Leapor weaves this complex illusion by using a level of superficiality associated with an upper-class woman and her gold-plated carriage to speak to the artificiality of both the pastoral tradition and social and cultural mores in relation to female pleasure and desire. The Aurora metaphor with which Leapor opens her poem illustrates how historically masculine literary traditions lay claim to and culturally define the female body and female experience. But with the refiguring of the metaphor, her poem then asks women to recognize the cultural significance of their body as not just a corporeal entity, but as a symbolic construct that has been determined by male representations and mediated through the conventions of the pastoral. Thus, Leapor's objectification of the female body in her poem is less about the female body's desirability to the masculine subject than it is about writing the female body as an object that generates female subjectivity and creative self-exploration.

Women from all levels of society who indulged their pleasures and desires, sexual or otherwise, risked their livelihood. Perhaps Leapor's use of an upper-class woman to

play the role of alleged female masturbator was not about articulating labouring women's difference from leisure-class women regarding sexual expectations, but about showing how women are universally punished for actively pursuing nonprocreative forms of creativity and pleasure. For chastity and moral sexuality were not universally important virtues for all women. Bowen points out that labouring women were "excluded from the degree of bodily self-respect that the intention to preserve one's chastity requires" (Bowen 258). She further says that "women of the lower ranks were perceived as more sexually active and conversant in sexual matters, whereas leisure-class women, at least 'proper' ones, were thought to be sexually chaste and innocent" (267). For Mira, sexuality is more permissive to her than to her social betters; she is at more liberty to fantasize about potential erotic encounters. However, to openly write about them would be just as detrimental to her survival as it would to Clione if her act of solitary pleasure was to be found out. The eighteenth century was not a period where an upper-class woman was encouraged to explore and experiment with her sexuality without censure and the threat of losing her status. Likewise, Leapor's economic position was not an environment where she was encouraged to explore her writerly body and develop her creative imagination without criticism and the threat of losing her employment.

Leapor was discharged from her position as a kitchen maid for scribbling words instead of scrubbing dishes. It is quite plausible that Leapor's employers at the time, presumably the Chauncy family, did not dismiss her for a first-time offence; more than likely, Leapor was a repeat offender when it came to "scorching the meat" in favour of

scrawling her verses.²¹ The significance of this account does not just rest in the material evidence it provides for Leapor working on her verses while at work; rather, it signals to us a point of even greater importance, which is that Leapor clearly had urges to write, so much so that she indulged in this pleasure in the full knowledge of the extreme consequences that her writing might bring. As a servant, all Leapor's time and labour was conscripted in service to the continued social and economic growth of the Chauncy family household. She was not permitted to use any of her time or labour for her own pleasurable pursuits like writing poetry because such endeavours had no (re)productive value to the family household. Writing was for Leapor an experience of pleasure for her own pleasure's sake, and therefore as a servant she was committing a socially illicit act and an economic sin (Bowen 260). Her refusal to abide by her duties as a kitchen maid upsets the economic productivity of the Chauncy household. To a large extent, we could read Leapor's record of dismissal as a script of her public performance of pleasurable exhibitionism: a purposeful performativity of herself as defined by her pleasure's labour, revealing herself as a pleasure-seeking body rather than a subjugated body that can perform only manual labour. In other words, this document not only tells us that Leapor worked to position herself as the defiant servant, but also it reveals to us an essence of Leapor's "erotic identity" as the "the masturbating girl" openly exposing herself at her workplace in want of discipline (Sedgwick 114). Leapor does in fact receive a measure of discipline, since she is fired from her job for indulging her pleasures, but what her writing

²¹ An account that surfaced years after Leapor's employment at Edgcote House, which was under the direction of Sir Richard Chauncy, explains that Leapor's "writing verse there displayed itself by her sometimes taking up her pen while the jack was standing still, and the meat scorching" (GM, 54 (1784), 807).

demonstrates is that she exceeds the limitations of the workplace discipline. Despite termination of her servant position as kitchen maid, Leapor continues to write, showing that she recognizes her labour as much more than the labour she is paid to do and dismissed from doing.

Although “A Hymn to the Morning” may not be “sapphic in any technical sense” (82), as Landry notes, if we shift our critical perspective to include the notion that “art making [...] is literally masturbating” (Laqueur 177), then it becomes hard to ignore the masturbatory quality of the poem. The theme of masturbation, as I have been discussing it so far, amounts to more than just a metaphorical sunrise described as a woman’s erotic encounter within nature; this poem is also a representation of Leapor’s libidinally saturated body and imagination. Leapor’s poem writing is self-reflexive, a form of mental masturbation perceived by outsiders as the pleasuring of oneself with no obvious productive or reproductive end. The poem exposes Mira as an open masturbator and Leapor as a symbolic and hidden one, and together they show that mental masturbation is for Leapor both pleasurable and painful: the practice of imagining a kind of female power in an erotic fantasy and the means of writing it out is her autoerotic secret. For Leapor as author achieves a certain kind of pleasure from visions of Mira strumming her lyre while singing an erotic narrative, and here we begin to see Leapor’s eroticization of poem writing and how writing is an irresistible passion within her. Mira transfers erotic desire onto the figure of Clione, describing Clione as actively exploring the erotic landscape of her body and discovering pleasures she can bring to herself. Mira’s act of erotic transference is at the same time the materialization of Leapor’s exploration of the erotic

landscape of her own writerly body, and her discovery of the pleasures and pains writing brings to her imagination. Clione is presented here as an object *of* Mira's erotic desire, but it soon becomes clear that Mira is an object *for* Leapor's erotic desire. What this reveals, is that in writing out this poem Leapor became the subject of her own desires, as what she feels (the pleasures of her imagination) becomes a visceral effect in not only her own figurative body, Mira, but in the textual body of the poem itself, thus translating her bodily desire back into imaginative generation.

The poem is structured to make use of the rhythms of masturbation. There is a clear narrative link between literary pleasure, self-criticism, and autoeroticism. The poem is constructed to ebb and flow with excitement, providing the author herself with essential parts of literary foreplay that will lead to an erotic encounter of imaginative textual intercourse. Each stanza an active build up of sensual stimulation and intellectual pleasure. They work toward the accumulation of anticipation into one glorious crescendo and momentary state of bliss followed by an intellectual low. With the return to reality, Leapor's imagination is left wanting, exemplified by her cry of post-masturbatory blues: "Ah! Sappho sweeter sings, I cry." When the erotic fantasy ends it appears that her own creative climax feels false and leaves her unsatisfied. The stanzas mimic the rise and fall of creative generation and intellectual engagement and shows how Leapor engages with her creative imagination as a form of self-pleasure, even though the process is not always entirely satisfying. Through the material processes of writing, Leapor explores her creative and textual body and identifies her intellectual, erotic, and literary limitations. Mira is the object of Leapor's desire, and this translates into a representation of Leapor as

the subject of her own desire rather than the object of the readers gaze. This reveals an erotic relation between Leapor's poetic persona, Mira, and her autobiographical self, and represents a blurring between the textual body and the writer's body, ultimately demonstrating how Leapor's sexuality and erotic subjectivity impact her writing process and, more importantly, provides evidence that eighteenth-century labourers were self-aware and did have the capability and inclination to explore their own subjectivities.

The appearance of the lyrical 'I' at the end of the poem is abrupt and appears out of nowhere but marks an intense shift in the poem from a mythological world to a more technical, "spiteful," and "jarring" one. As readers, we experience the same kind of confusion as Mira who is jolted from her dream and trying to get her bearing on reality. Readers suddenly find themselves thrust into a world that is no longer idyllic and masturbatory but highly politicized, where it seems a violent contest over literary authority is taking place. Landry argues that the lines, "Thus sung Mira to her lyre, / Ah! Sappho sweeter sings, I cry," exposes "Mira's yearning to match Sappho in poetical sweetness" and where the "eroticism of Leapor's textuality becomes distinctly noticeable" (Landry 85). She highlights the last stanza as a key point where the poem becomes one about "thwarted poetic ambition," arguing that the intrusive poetical "I" is Leapor's recognition that her poem has not measured up to the erotic skills of Sappho (86). Whether the "I" that cries out in the poem is Leapor's poetic or personal voice is still up for debate. A common trope in many of Leapor's poems is her use of dream vision, where Mira withdraws into a dreamlike world and a third-person lyrical 'I' follows and narrates the dream. Anne Messenger argues that the 'I' is more immediate

than Mira, but at the same time twice removed from Leapor herself (Messenger 179).

Landry and Backscheider also note that the lyrical 'I' is a highly-constructed persona, but not necessarily autobiographical. These critics claim that the effect of this kind of double removal is for Leapor twofold: it allows her greater social and literary freedom within created imagined spaces, while at the same time it reveals her double identity as labourer and poet who is estranged from the community she aspires to join (Messenger 179).

However, I argue the lyrical 'I' is different from that of Leapor's other poems where Mira retreats into a dream world. For the 'I' here does not appear inside of the dream with Mira, but rather stands outside of it, first observing and listening to Mira's performance, and then violently collapsing the dream and ending Mira's erotic journey prematurely. It is for this reason that I am more inclined to read the 'I' as autobiographical, and, as I argue shortly, it represents a clear demonstration of Leapor's performance of active resistance to the extraction of literary value from her pleasure's labour.

Since Landry's first analysis of the poem emerged in the early 1990s, critics who have subsequently studied the poem subscribe to a similar belief that the last stanza is the crux of the poem. Scholars including Andreadis (2001), Gabrielle Starr (2004), and Backschieider (2005) are among a handful of scholars who have singled out the last stanza as a critical point of literary interest, evidenced by these critics reprinting the stanza in their studies. However, most of these studies reiterate Landry's original reading of the poem. As scholars, we latch onto the appearance of Sappho's name, and, understandably, want immediately to set it in the context of the sapphic tradition. This then begs the questions of whether the popularity of this poem among literary studies is owing to

Sappho rather than to Leapor as a poet worthy of sustained literary criticism. It could very well be another instance of our view of the stereotypical labouring-class poet going through the conventional postures of compromising and apologizing for her writing by, as Penelope Wilson suggests, positioning “herself in relation to Sappho with characteristically self-deprecating wit at the end of the poem” (Wilson 501). Perhaps reading her poem for its masturbatory sapphic poetics might productively undermine our familiar practices for evaluating and ascribing value to Leapor and labouring-class writing more broadly. Moreover, given Leapor’s history of resisting having her value as a servant extracted from her at the price of her own pleasure, I suspect that she is not about to let her literary value be extracted by the institution of English literature at the cost of her pleasure’s labour either.

A common cultural belief in Leapor’s time was that the writing of a labouring-class woman would never be considered serious poetry, because serious poetry—that is, poetry with power to rewrite symbolic constructions of the female body or to make important social and cultural interventions like claiming a woman poet’s place within authoritative literary forms—can be only produced by those occupying social positions that afforded leisure. Landry identifies an important aspect of the poem when she proposes that Mira is unable to reach full erotic literary maturity because, as much as the poem fails to be a “sapphic production” it neither reaches full traditional pastoralism or a completely classical lyric, nor does it comfortably fit into our usual theorizing of labouring-class writing (Landry 86). If Leapor’s poem was to claim its status as a “sapphic production,” it would then have productive value, both literary and cultural, and

this would mean that her pleasure of poem writing is now measured for procreative purposes rather than for purely pleasure. Her pleasure-seeking body would be disciplined, quite literally as she would be confined within a discipline of literary tradition, such as the category of sapphic literature. Therefore, even as she strokes and caresses her writerly body, she simultaneously teases herself, performing an act of self-discipline by not allowing herself to reach the poetic heights of Sappho. Perhaps Leapor's sudden authorial intrusion, where she exclaims "Ah! Sappho sweeter sings I cry," is not so much a cry of cultural guilt or shame, nor one entirely of creative frustration in the sense of poetic failure. Rather, the cry could be read as her wilful disavowal of her literary value. It is possible Leapor intentionally baits her readers with Sappho's name, knowing full well that her readers want to extract literary value and subject it to productive models of serious poetry. In a kind of anti-pastoral twist, her disavowal of her literary value actually obscures her pleasure's labour from view by leading her readers to indulge in fantasies of canonizing her poem. But, equating Mira with Sappho we are not necessarily reducing Leapor's art to the authority of a literary exemplar, we are, however, bringing Leapor's intellectual and writing pleasures into focus as hidden labours, and thereby exposing writing as her autoerotic secret that must be hidden from the world that she inhabits. Her hidden labours are labours she has devoted to herself and her writing and is labour that literary culture cannot put a price on—they are her pleasure's labour for her own pleasure's sake. Similar to how the workplace discipline cannot touch the body of labour Leapor has devoted to herself and to her writing (even though the dismissal from her job is reinforcing through discipline the idea of pleasure's disavowal from a labouring

subjectivity), here Leapor defends her labour from being subsumed into a narrative where her literary pleasure equals productive value, not by refusing to write but by refusing to market her writing as useful ²² .

Once we decipher the poem's erotic significance, it shows to women that there are ways to reclaim the cultural possession of their bodies. And that the understanding of metaphors that are in service of the patriarchal institution is one way of recognizing the subjugation of female subjectivity, but for women to indulge their pleasures and desires, especially of the libidinal nature, is another much more exciting and enjoyable way to become cognizant of their autonomy. Moreover, Leapor's poem writing demonstrates a resistance to authoritative social and cultural norms and displays her unwillingness to along with the narrative that the labouring life affords no pleasure to the labourer. In the same way that Leapor was too busy writing her poems and not contributing to the orderly running of the Chauncy household, "A Hymn to the Morning" shows us that even when writing at the height of her powers Leapor is reluctant to offer her writing as a contribution to something like a sapphic or pastoral canon. Instead, Leapor disavows her

²² Many of her poems including "A Hymn to the Morning," "To Artemisia. On Fame" and "The Penitent," evidence her refusal to subject her writing to the value-adding labour of mainstream poetry. Moreover, in Bridget Freemantle's prefatory letter to Leapor's subscription, she states that she desired Leapor to "prepare a handsome dedication" for "some great lady" she was planning to ask for financial support with the publication of Leapor's poems. Leapor's alleged response: "I'm not acquainted with any great lady, nor like to be." Leapor refuses to devote her literary labour to writing "an encomium upon a person [she] know[s] nothing of, only because [she] might hope to get something by it" (xxxviii).

own pleasure to withhold herself from achieving conventional canonical literary heights. And although the intense pleasure that accompanies Leapor's writing serves to motivate intellectual and creative generation, which facilitates cultural reproduction, she will not let her writing be absorbed by literary tradition that is its own kind of mechanism for generating cultural value. Self-pleasuring via masturbatory sapphic poetics exposes Leapor as having a much vaster body of labour that she devotes herself to, and this is labour that serves entirely different interests and purposes and affords different pleasures. Leapor resists the extraction of value from her labour—as a servant and a writer—and the fact that she continues to write as a labouring-class writer even after she has been released from servant labour is Leapor's way of insisting that a labouring subjectivity does involve and can involve pleasure.

That a female can experience pleasure on her own—like the figurative woman in Leapor's poem, but also like the narrator recounting a story, and like the poet who goes through the material processes of writing it out, and, even, perhaps, like the voyeurs who are reading the very poem—shows that the female imagination can escape patriarchal control of female sexuality and pleasure while reclaiming a generative aspect of their bodies. "A Hymn to the Morning" is like the pocketbook poems in that they both create a female-constituted space with an active interplay of masculine elements in order to rethink the logic of literary paternity and to bring female pleasure to the forefront of literary creation.

The Work of Sapphic Dialogue

Leapor's poem "The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa" (1751) is one of two poems in her collection in which a female poet takes on the persona of a pocket book and addresses another woman

I ask—(and now you look aside)
The Favour's great to Me, 'tis true\
But sure it means no Harm to you.
Dear Madam, only take your Pen,
And dip it in your Ink; and then,
Move o'er my Leaves your easy Hand:
Then sprinkle on a little Sand:
This done, return me when you please.

In the passage above, the poet essentially asks another woman to 'please, take your pen, dip it in your ink, and write inside of me.' This is an oddly sexual way to ask her friend for a written response, and the poet is aware of its seductive nature as she imagines the other woman bashfully turning away her gaze in anticipation of her request. She knows how the addressee will react even before she proceeds with her request because they have likely shared in this illicit act before. Even more interesting, however, is the provocative way in which the poet describes exactly how she wants the woman to write inside of her. The poet presents herself to the woman in the form of an open-faced pocket book: her silky covers parted and pages widespread, revealing her "swelling side" and exposing "snowy" white flesh within. In this position, she implores the other woman to saturate her white void with her ink; to take her pen and sensually stroke her "vacant" leaves until liquid flows from the cylindrical object. She then wants the woman to "sprinkle on a little sand," and gently vibrate her entire body allowing all excess materials to slide from her smooth surface. By transforming the materiality of the writing process into erotically charged metaphors, the poet performs a kind of literary foreplay for her reader with hope

that she will arouse the woman's interest and generate enough poetic excitement within her that she will engage in textual intercourse. More significantly, the poet illustrates a kind of female literary pleasure in a way that leaves her in total control, and this provides a rare, powerful form of female satisfaction. In these pocket book poems, Leapor provides an apt illustration of transgressive female same-sex desires through a celebration of writing for mutual pleasure rather than purely reproductive purposes, and in this way, she invites us to consider the eroticism of her poetry in the context of eighteenth-century material culture and same-sex intellectual intimacy, labour, and authorship.

In what follows, I move away from traditional Marxist feminist perspectives and lesbian separative discourse by providing a cultural materialist approach to the writing process as an emblem of erotic potentiality, a potentiality that when explored reveals a non-gender-and-class-specific understanding of the fluidity of eroticisms that may or may not have to do with sexual organs. I take as models recent studies by Caroline Franklin in which she defines the material culture of women's writing as "the objects, tools, practices and spaces connected with female penmanship" (Franklin 2), while attending to notions of transgressive female erotic literary exchange. Primarily focusing on three pocketbook poems found in Leapor's anthology, "The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy," "The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa," and "Parthenissa's Answer to the Pocket-Book's Soliloquy" (1751), I will examine the ways in which an erotic economy is being imagined around two women's mutual interaction with a pocket book. I argue that this erotic economy reinvents the conventional relationship between patron and author by transfiguring its established forms of unidirectional power to a more expansive field of

movement. In place of a straightforwardly hierarchal relationship between upper-class patron and the writer she materially supports, Leapor's poems reveal a more complex web of women's relationships underlying the production of writing, relationships in which power and desire move in multiple and sometimes unexpected directions.

I then turn slightly away from the general consensus by scholars including Greene, Backscheider, Landry and Andreadis that Leapor creates all-female literary environments void of heterosexual hegemony by demonstrating how these pocket book poems evoke a feminized world where masculinity is not entirely negated; rather, these women adopt and play around with traditional masculine roles by creating an imaginary world that accommodates phallic figures, which are ultimately embraced within a non-phallogocentric economy. This creation of a female-constituted space with an active interplay of masculine elements expands contemporary debates about the complexity of gender roles in the mid-eighteenth century by asking us to stray from the language of the "heterosexual matrix," as Judith Butler calls it, and to see how a fashionable pocket book can construct an alternative eroticism that opens into a space where a variety of sexual subjectivities and relationships can be imagined, manipulated, and explored. The interpretive framework I propose here suggests ultimately that female same-sex desire helps to generate female subjectivity, and to have this kind of discussion requires a new kind of vocabulary; for this, I turn to recent feminist historicist scholarship on Sapphic discourse. The "Sapphic," in Susan Lanser's use of the word, is a wide umbrella term for describing social and eroticized relations between women and how these relationships'

engagement with social and cultural systems can loosen and disrupt established forms of power.

Both Bridget Freemantle and Susanna Jennens's voices appear within Leapor's anthology; however, Freemantle's speech is calculated for public opinion, while Jennens' voice is consciously, at least at the time she writes her poem, for a private conversation. What these women's distinct voices tell us is that each of them perceived Leapor in differing ways. Freemantle's character reference of Leapor portrays her as a modest woman with "virtuous principles, and that goodness of heart and temper which so visibly appeared in her" (xxxvi). Freemantle presents an idealized view of Leapor as a desexualized, passive, domestic servant. Such a perception aligns with emerging middle-class ideals about sex and gender, as Karen Harvey points out that "modest women did not display their sexuality in an open manner"; modest women were to be innocent of sexual knowledge and their own sexuality, which eventually led to women's practices of concealment (Harvey 218). Freemantle's statements may be her true opinions of Leapor's sexuality, or they may be completely fabricated to sell the idea of the good, homely, and virtuous labouring-female poet to the public. In either case, we can never be certain about her true sentiments toward Leapor because her voice remains fixed to her position as patron and her words are held accountable to the systems of literary patronage. On the other hand, Susanna Jennens's voice in Leapor's collection is different precisely because her poem was not shaped for public discourse. She did not write her poem to sell her thoughts about Leapor's character, economic position, or poetic skill to the public, rather, they are her personal thoughts about Leapor written to and for Leapor. Jennens's voice is

distinct from Freemantle's because her speech is not obscured by public opinion and this offers us a much more intimate view of Leapor. In fact, Jennens's and Leapor's poems create a kind of sapphic dialogue where the young sexually inexperienced female's initiation into sexual activity is playfully represented as the young inexperienced female writer who receives guidance from an older, more experienced woman writer. This dialogue is revealed to be an erotically inflected discourse of female patronage that works to construct modern female sexuality, and thus providing an early cultural model of non-kinship bonds.

There remains little study of erotic literary exchange between women within Leapor's poetry. Although the three pocketbook poems found in Leapor's anthology—"The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy," "The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa," and "Parthenissa's Answer to the Pocket-Book's Soliloquy"—have gained recent attention from several scholars including Overton and Christmas; it is surprising that no critic has yet attended to the erotic quality of these poems and what these poems have to offer eighteenth-century studies in terms of the complexity of gender roles and the innerworkings of female relationships underlying the production of writing. In Leapor's and Jennens's pocketbook poems, the writing process is sexualized, and female literary labour is eroticized. These two women take conventional literary tools, like a pen and a pocketbook, and appropriate their meanings and functions, dismantling and reassembling established forms of power. According to Raymond Stephanson, the conflation of the writer's pen with the penis is as old as the creative process itself. He points out that in the eighteenth-century imagination "writing and ink could be figured as the copulatory pen-

as-penis” (Stephanson 94). In their poems, Jennens and Leapor playfully appropriate the long-held metaphor of the writer’s pen as phallus as they write to each other inside of a pocketbook which is described in terms of a largely feminized object. The actions of the women wielding pens and “scrawling” or sensually rubbing the inside of a pocketbook build toward a new image of female creative power and serves as a powerful image of a woman’s ability to control the workings of her own body, and places these women within the period’s transformations, or redefinition and reorganization of sexual and gender categories.

One of the most noteworthy features of the pocketbook poems is that they show the blending of two socially and culturally distinct female voices within an object traditionally intended for the upper classes. Overton, Christmas, and Greene and Messenger all concede that Leapor and Jennens appear to have actually exchanged the pocketbook back and forth with the poems written inside. The idea that two women might have been passing back and forth the very poems we are reading within the pocketbook that the poems are about is an important piece of information that has largely remained unexplored. The exchange of an object, embodied with a blend of two socially and culturally distinct female voices, that cross geographical and ideological borders, is pregnant with meaning, especially when we take into consideration the that the pocketbook’s culturally coded exterior and its deeply personal inner folds have long been considered a symbol of femininity. With its shape, form, and function symbolic of female genitalia and fertility, this literary representation of a pocketbook symbolizes the mixture of female ideas and labour within a female body, transforming it into a space for female

agency, identity formation, and shared literary creation. By communicating back and forth within the pocketbook these women create a literary community where they support and encourage each other's writing and intellectual pursuits. That Leapor's and Jennens' poems show how a pocketbook aids in the creation of an imagined all-female community of writers is particularly striking in light of Paula Backscheider's observation that eighteenth-century women were always somewhat isolated: "if [women] were not separated geographically, their sex determined limitations on their integration into any intellectual or literary community" (206). Leapor and Jennens are ideologically and geographically separated from each other, but they somehow manage to defy these social and cultural limitations, facilitated by an easily exchangeable object.

Moreover, as symbolic female genitalia, this particular pocketbook acts as an active agent that penetrates one space to another, permitting these women to redefine the terms of social order, as the ability to penetrate different spaces is traditionally a masculine performance. Although viewed in this way, the pocketbook represents long-established masculine views of the female body as an object of sex, ownership, and exchange, as it is given away against its will and does lack independent agency. In literature of the period, the objectification of female genitals as inanimate objects is a practice that typically endorses the female as a nonsexual being. John Cleland's *Fanny Hill or, The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, for example, is populated with many examples of the vagina as an inanimate object. Fanny, at one point early in the novel is awakened by shuffling noises coming from Mrs. Brown's room next door. As she spies through the closet door, she describes Mrs. Brown's naked body:

As he stood on one side, unbuttoning his waistcoat and breeches, her fat brawny thighs hung down, and the whole greasy landscape lay fairly open to my view; a wide-open mouth'd gap, over-shaded with a grizzly bush, seemed held out like a beggar's wallet for its provision. (43)

While male manhood is described as a “brawny young horse grenadier, moulded in the Hercules style,” Fanny illustrates the woman and especially her vagina in very unflattering terms, as terribly loose and unkempt, but also as a “beggar’s wallet.” Hannah Aspinnall has argued that Cleland often portrays his female characters as masculine and unattractive, and here Mrs. Brown’s genitals, described as a wallet, evoke not only the “the image of leatheriness” but also that the “vagina is perpetrated as being used for financial gain and not sexual pleasure” (Aspinnall). Cleland’s objectification of the vagina stays true to long-established masculine views of the female body as an object of sex, ownership, and exchange. Leapor and Jennens also objectify the vagina as an inanimate object, but their representation is not to exploit the female body. Instead, it is to evoke woman as an autonomous sexual being. In their poems, female genitals are symbolized as a pocketbook, which is described as one with a “robe of shining hue” and “snowy page[s]” that “may for ages live.” The pocketbook as vagina is described as softly upholstered, feminine, and delicate, and is delineated for literary satisfaction and production, female agency, as well as a mechanism for female pleasure. Leapor’s and Jennens’s representations are not associated with the material practices of enforced heterosexuality, which arrange women and their bodies as objects of exchange, despite the pocketbook’s complaints. Rather, their pocketbook is used to silence these long-held patriarchal myths, quite literarily, as they let their symbolic vagina speak for itself.

Jennens's and Leapor's poems are written in the form of a sapphic dialogue where the young sexually inexperienced female's initiation into sexual activity is playfully represented as the young inexperienced female writer who receives guidance from an older, more experienced woman writer. In Leapor's poems, Mira is portrayed as an amateur when it comes to properly handling the pen. The pocketbook laments Mira's writing style, complaining that she "hurts [its] Page," and that it dreads the next time Mira returns to "stain [its] snowy page" with a beating of asymmetrical "metre." The pocketbook's treatment at the hands of Mira is unpleasant and painful, and it begs Parthenissa to rescue it from its precarious situation, pleading with her to "preserve [it] in this dang'rous time." The pocketbook was not prepared for the work of Mira's hand, and this is because Parthenissa seems to have initiated its experience of penmanship with her own hand. The pocketbook desires a more delicate rhythm and form, one where an experienced "easy Hand" gently "Moves o'er [its] leaves." However, Parthenissa does not give the pocketbook the kind of writing that it wants. Instead, she takes on a more masculine role and is very rough with her pen. Similar to erotic literature which depicts a female's introduction to sexual intercourse as both painful and bloody, like Rochester's "The Delights of Venus," and Cleland's *Fanny Hill, or The Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure*, Parthenissa, in a violent and rough manner, plagues it with a rhythmic pummelling and "scrall[s its] swelling side" for "an hour" with her "rage," very much conveying the pocketbook as the figure of the ravaged virgin. Parthenissa tells the pocketbook that Mira is the most advantageous match for it because Mira is the "successor of Pope," and although she may be a little inexperienced now and "stain its

pages,” she soon will be rich with cultural capital and literary authority so that the pocketbook “may for ages live.” The pocketbook becomes a site for Leapor and Jennens to discuss sapphic activity metaphorically through their discussion of the materiality of writing.

The pocketbook’s narrative ultimately is entangled with social issues. It reflects the century’s growing concerns with social mobility and changing marriage trends, which sought to unite the propertied elite with those with economic or cultural capital, and the ways in which female sexuality was operating within and against these social matters. On one level, these poems characterize a kind of arranged marriage between Mira and the pocketbook where the pocketbook is forced into communion with “a Mistress that [it] hate[s].” In Jennens’s poem, we have an upper-class woman marrying off an object meant for her class to a woman of the labouring class because it is seemingly a culturally advantageous union. On another level, Leapor and Jennens engage in a kind of courtship and union of their own which is mirrored by the exchange of the pocketbook itself. In the first poem, “The Pocket-Book’s Soliloquy,” we are introduced to the pocket book during a moment when it realizes that its owner has given it away to another woman. In its soliloquy, the pocketbook uses a kind of courtship language to talk about itself as a thwarted lover who has been “cast [from its mistress’s] arms.” From the pocketbook’s complaint, we learn that it once was loved by a “gentle dame” in whose “smiles” it “rested secure”; they were “contented” and “happy” together and “would [never] wish to range.” But then the pocketbook suddenly finds itself cast out from its mistress’s home and given away to a woman who is not as “beauteous” nor a “nymph of high degree. The

pocketbook believes Mira cannot love it like it was loved before, and that she will “stain [its] snowy page” and “degrade [its] charms” to an object of lower status and worth.

In Parthenissa’s response to the jaded pocketbook’s lament, Parthenissa indulges it by complying with its request for her to write inside of it one more time, but she most definitely does not do it in polite terms, as is customary in courtship language of the time.

Parthenissa is not interested in a union with the pocketbook and very sternly lets it know that it has misguided notions of their romantic love. This narrative is consistent with

historical shifts in marriage trends: the eighteenth-century was a transitional period and the character of the landed gentry and aristocracy was changing due to the rise of market

capitalism. By mid-century, a significant population of merchants, comprised of small land owners, prosperous farmers, professionals, merchants, manufacturers and

tradespeople, were wealthier than many of the landed gentry who inherited their land. The

mercantile classes’ wealth came from their knowledge of trade and the world markets,

and this set them apart from the aristocracy and landed gentry who did not know how to

generate new wealth. Although this class gained social power through their wealth, as

they no longer were dependent on the state for capital, they most successfully exercised

cultural power, forever transforming social and political structures of the British Empire

(Sherman 16). Members of the mercantile class could now buy land titles and erase long-established lineages, much in the same way that anyone could now, in theory, write their

way into literary authority; the shifting cultural nature of writing and authorship

contributed to a sense of society as increasingly divided and perplexed, because lower

classes could now write or work their way out of economic oppression and marginalized status, ultimately altering both the literary market and the structures of society.

Courtship in the eighteenth century traditionally followed a heteronormative model which was dependent upon social processes, and many feminist scholars such as Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, and Katherine Sobba Green (*The Courtship Novel 1740-1820*) have argued for the many ways in which the heteronormative courtship process is organised to subjugate women. However, Leapor's pocketbook poems engage with notions of the courtship process and its language in order to create a different kind of unification, one that is about labour and is not gender or class specific. The literary representation of the Leapor's pocketbook plays a fundamental role in this kind of courtship process precisely because the pocketbook becomes an object that acts as the site of their courtship—it becomes the vehicle for communication and it becomes the object which contains the union of two women's textual bodies. From this, erotic relations between two women are constructed within and against the terms of a courtship between a heterosexual couple, but ultimately departs from the model by suggesting that the social processes of courtship, and its subsequent union of the sexes in the eighteenth century, need not refer solely to relationships that result in heterosexual marriage. By using the model of heterosexual courtship, the pocketbook becomes a material representation of the cultural union between Jennens and Leapor and shows how a shared material culture unites a labouring woman and a gentlewoman, and results in a kind of social solidarity and cohesion in an effort to push the literary economy further in the direction of caring, equality, and sharing.

While we could technically categorize Leapor's poem as a relatively conventional request poem, it takes a queer turn when the poet adopts the persona of a pocketbook evocative of female genitalia and basically says to another woman, please, take your pen, dip it in ink, and write inside of me. While the pen is here clearly meant to reference the penis, as the act of dipping the pen in ink is a sexually suggestive posture generally reserved for the male writer, we can also read the pen as an erotic instrument that has been fully appropriated for a non-phallogentric encounter. For the act of dipping a pen in ink does not necessarily suggest penetration. In the period's popular male-centric erotic literature women are objectified in a particular way so that the penis—or the pen—is the hero of the story. Leapor's erotic narrative is neither fully erotica nor amatory fiction but seems to draw on elements from both genres mixed with her own original twist: her erotic narrative "fawningly solicits" a woman's hand and the idea of the copulatory pen-as-penis is appropriated for a non-penetrative eroticism.

The motif of a woman's sexual initiation by another woman is common in early erotic novels. In *Amatory Pleasures: Explorations into Eighteenth-Century Sexual Culture*, Julie Peakman observes that by the mid-eighteenth century "sex between women was often key in sexual initiation [...and] did not necessarily involve men at all" (103). Peakman argues that male writers such as Cleland and Fielding knew that their "society had not yet constructed a lesbian role" and therefore portrayed female-female roles as part of the progression of natural sexual development in their novels, often "initiated through conversation about size and shape of genitalia and dialogues about love-making" (103).

The sapphic dialogue between Leapor's and Jennens's does resemble examples of

a young female's sexual development found in erotic novels, but rather than use explicit sexual language to describe female genitalia, Leapor and Jennens's erotic and femininized amplification of a pocketbook stands in as its symbolic representative. Take, for example, the provocative way in which the pocketbook describes exactly how it wants the woman to write inside of it, giving her a very detailed, step-by-step instruction of how Parthenissa can succeed in pleasuring its pages. Most erotic literature from the period follows three basic plot lines: penile penetration, male pleasure, and semination of the vagina. In her poem, Leapor lays out the components of a fully nonpenetrative erotics and thus creating a different erotic experience by reconstructing the familiar hierarchy of heterosexual activity. She takes all the pieces of a traditional phallogentric encounter and not only does she dismantle it and separate out different moments, but she remixes the act in a temporal order. For example, the pocketbook provides the woman with a plethora of temporal markers such as "and now" "and then" "this done" and so forth, essentially saying that when this is done then do this to me and then do this. Whereas penetration and ejaculation generally occur at the end of the sex act in most erotic literature of the period, in Leapor's erotic narrative, the first sexually suggestive gesture begins with a pen that has already been dipped and wetted, only then does the pen move around and explore parts of the pocketbook's "vacant leaves." The eroticized writing encounter begins with the gesture of penetration rather than appearing at the end and vibrating its pages at the end inverts the action of the traditional sex narrative as well. In this way, Leapor creates a different erotic experience from the conventional male conquest of the female body, but she invites another woman to stand in its place, suggesting that, just like two women can dismantle

and reorder the traditional sex act in other just as pleasurable ways, so too can women render female the proverbial masculine posture of writing.

In the tradition of literary paternity, the pen is presented as a tool of activation and control. Women writers like Anne Finch and Aphra Behn defined long ago the pen as essentially a male tool inappropriate and alien to women.²³ Whereas these women purposely took up the pen to use it to make visible the patriarchal theory of literature, Leapor and Jennens evoke the pen as a playful object to work against the assumption that the penis is the central element in the creation of literature. While they do evoke the pen as an instrument of generative power, it is wholly female power—their hands control, dismantle, and play around with the phallic figure within an entirely feminized object. They privilege the feminine in the construction of the pen's meaning. These women recognize gender hierarchies in the role of cultural production and attempt to outwit them by controlling the phallic object and reordering the procreative act. This image of these two women brandishing their pens and scrawling, scribbling, or sensually gliding it inside of a pocketbook serves as a powerful sign of a woman's ability to control the workings of her own body, and this image places them within the period's transformations, or redefinition and reorganization of sexual and gender categories.

Leapor and Jennens use the position of literature to play around with established heteronormative roles and structures, finding fun and amusing ways to reclaim their agency as women and to legitimize themselves as cultural producers. But even more important to recognize here is how a fashionable pocketbook fosters sapphic discourse.

²³ See "The Spy who lived by her Pen" and "Aphra Behn's "A life of Pleasure and Poetry"

The poems are about women's mutual pleasure and desire in disrupting paternal forms of power that conventionally govern literary production. Leapor's and Jennens texts don't emphasize a hidden sexual desire for one another, but they do highlight questions of literary authority and social cohesion and enact a challenge to paternal power by using female desire to alter the represented world, and the assumptions that have governed literary patronage relationships.

It is important to acknowledge here that class power dynamics do not disappear from the pocketbook exchange as the gap between their socioeconomic positions remains; however, both women challenge these power concepts through the collaboration of their intertwined personalized poetic labours. While Leapor's other patron, Freemantle, uses language in her prefatory letter to Leapor's collection that claims ownership of Leapor's status as a writer, Jennens's voice encourages Leapor to claim her own status by owning property, not just the pocketbook, but her verses and literary labour. By calling Mira "the successor of Pope", Jennens does not simply stroke Leapor's ego; she is showing Leapor how to reclaim her literary labour by recognizing herself as a property-owning subject rather than an object of exchange in the classed and gendered literary economy of the time. Leapor as owner of the pocketbook reconnects her to her own literary and intellectual labours, revealing a form of unalienated labour, and showing how both women take part in the cultivation of subjectivity rather than trying to lay claim to some one else's. For it is the way in which the transfer of the pocketbook from one woman to the other facilitates the intersubjective exchange that renders both women female subjects worthy of agency, authority, and literary fame.

These poems represent erotic relations between two women that are constructed both within and against the terms of a courtship between a heterosexual couple, but ultimately depart from the model by suggesting that the social processes of courtship, and its subsequent union of the sexes in the eighteenth century need not refer solely to relationships that result in heterosexual marriage, demonstrating the ways in which female sexuality might produce as well as mirror divergent visions of literary production and social authority. Their texts represent sapphic desire and the “levelling implications of female-female relations” (Lanser 100) because, in the words of Lanser, they “insist on the logic of woman plus woman as both sufficient unto itself and equal in subjectivity to man plus woman,” and thus articulate a collective female subjectivity through an eroticized cross-class female patronage relationship. Leapor’s and Jennens’s sapphic discourse does not just represent the elevation of the subjectivity of woman, their textually forged intimacy elevates Leapor, the labouring female, to subjectivity, in a kind of “upward levelling” (101). The traditional lines of authority, especially within a system of literary patronage were hierarchical or vertical, but these poems show us that Jennens’s manages to perform the role of patron from a position absolved from established forms of hierarchical power. Their texts show us a leveling of the authority of both sexual and poetic agency, which allows them to challenge the patriarchal theory of literature and provides us with a perspective on the development of female subjectivity counter to the patriarchal schemes of their society.

In these poems, Leapor and an upper-class woman transform a pocketbook into a space that allows them to rethink the logic of literary paternity and to bring female

pleasure to the forefront of literary creation. With their flirtatious language, these women transform not only the materiality of the writing process but also the relationship between patron and poet into one of erotic play and an ethic of mutual pleasure and exchange, bringing female pleasure to the forefront of literary creation and defying long-held notions of authority and privilege that ultimately inform the rules of literary patronage. Ultimately, their poems show how a pocketbook can foster female alliances, and how literature can claim all the different positions in an eroticised set of relations for women. Leapor's and Jennens's desire for same-sex intellectual intimacy is different both from the desire to be sexually intimate with each other and from the descriptions of same-sex romantic friendships in our modern literary scholarship of their period. For their same-sex intimate friendship has a labourious component; their intimacy involves multiple forms of reproduction and labour. For example, the poetry that Leapor and Jennens create together is not a form of conventional pastoral poetry, a tradition that excludes labour from view; nor is it a traditional form of letter writing that excludes the participation of lower-class women. Rather, this is a tradition all of their own, one that includes erotic pleasure, social pleasure, and cultural (re)production, which in the process of writing empowers their female creativity, subjectivity, and authority, regardless of their social class or rank.

In these poems, Leapor and an upper-class woman transform a pocketbook into a female constituted space with an active interplay of masculine elements to rethink the logic of literary paternity and to bring female pleasure to the forefront of literary creation. These women transform a fashionable pocketbook into what Susan Lanser calls a space that is 'erotically sapphic.' For this pocketbook holds these women in a shared state of

intimacy, their textual bodies remain in perpetual erotic play, always flirting, communicating and experimenting with masculine and feminine subject positions. In this way, Leapor and her patron are what we could call sapphic subjects, working to engender female literary creativity and community. A deep and reciprocating intellectual intimacy is fundamental to the creation of Leapor's and Jennens's poems because these poems are not just about pleasure and play, but about making something together with their combined labour.

The Pleasures and Labours of Literary Maternity

The pocketbook as a symbol for female genitalia presents the female body as sexualized, and so it is within this pocketbook where female pleasure literally resides. The pocketbook is formed of two folds in continuous contact and represents a distinctly female form of great usefulness and flexibility: it can open and close, love letters can slide inside, things can be removed from it. That the pocketbook can be opened like a vagina represents its role as a portal into literary life; it within this space where literary life begins without the aid of men. In the poem, the eroticized space of this pocketbook is where both Leapor and Jennens' textual bodies reside in constant contact with each other. Their textual bodies are literally always touching, flirting, and communicating (and always creating and in a state of becoming). Here, these women's textual bodies carve out a space in literature where boundaries and gender categories dissolve into a free for all and allows them to experiment with all kinds of different positions, roles, and abilities. In many of her other poems, Leapor uses concepts such as the mother, birth, child, caregiver, courting, and mating to show how women together can produce literature. In

fact, Parthenissa returns in “The Muses Embassy” and takes on a similar role in the (re)production of literature. In this poem, Leapor extends her heterosexual courtship metaphor to a marriage including children, and in doing so, she births a metaphor for literary maternity and reclaims a heritage of writing for all women. The poem-as-child appears several times in Leapor’s works, and her poems such as “The Muses Embassy”, “The Headache”, and “The Birth-Night”, are grounded not just in the materiality of reproductive labour, but they engage with maternity as a concept separated from its biological function. Women writers from the Romantic period, such as Mary Anna Laetitia Barbauld in her poem “To a Little Invisible Being who is Expected to Soon Become Visible,” used her own personal experiences with biological maternity and motherhood to talk about the writing process and female authorship and authority. However, Leapor’s poems, despite her not being a biological mother, reveal her as a literary mother whose maternal corpus extended the limited discourse of maternity to a cultural category before the mid-eighteenth-century.

In the eighteenth century, mainstream writers assumed the Zeus-Athena model in efforts to maintain control in a growing and unstable literary economy, and further alienated women from the value of their reproductive labours placing all emphasis on the procreation of ideas rather than on human beings. In “The Muses Embassy,” Leapor transforms multiple poems into a single daughter and proposes that her conception and birth is a shared creative process that is essentially fatherless. The poem illustrates this practice as a collaborative effort by a community of females who share in the labours of a creative process comprised of birthing and caring for poems, sending them to school to

undergo aesthetic growth, and preparing them for entry into the literary market, and the women do so without the assistance of men. Leapor challenges traditional models of literary paternity, particularly the tradition of motherless brain-births, by aligning maternity with artistic procreativity, radically revising classical mythology and giving life to a metaphor for literary maternity.

In more labour-intensive examples of literary creation, male writers adopted the language of female reproduction to account for their literary labours that included all the bodily effects of gestation, maternal confinement, and birthing pain (Stephanson 44). But unlike these male writers, Leapor adopts a broader language for maternity, using terms such as “brought forth” “ever-blooming”, and “form bodies” to account for female literary labours. In fact, Leapor adopts a language of nurturing, care, and sentiment which is closer to modern conceptions of motherhood. For example, even though Iris is in utter disarray and fears that she may have made a mistake by choosing the wrong fertile dame, because this one has birthed children

With Scars and Botches blemish'd o'er;
Some hump'd behind, and some before;
And Cripples in the last Degree,
Some ne'er a Foot, and some had three.

These monstrous children suggest the possibility that Iris failed at her quest, and, consequently, the Muses' empire will be sure to see destruction. But even in the face of this adversity, “thus Iris stood with care”; she does not abandon the fertile dame and her children. Unfortunately, it seems the fertile dame herself does not have the means to raise up her poetry. Living on “the skirts of fame”, she does not possess the tools necessary to teach her children the appropriate attitudes and values needed to succeed further within

the literary world; therefore, she must give up her children in the hope that someone will raise and care for them, and, maybe one day she might have the means to reclaim them. Parthenissa then appears and “on the crippl’d infants smil’d/ and pity’d each neglected child” and she offers to care and nurture them. She will “form their Bodies, and their Minds, / Till they should flourish into Rhymes,” and she will prepare them for entry into the literary world. Parthenissa does not reject these children who have visible disabilities and obvious defects, despite the fact that this was a time when such children were at the bottom of the love and nurture hierarchy, much as interest in what a labouring-class woman has to say, might have been at the bottom of publisher’s list of priorities. In fact, Parthenissa’s position as surrogate mother to the fertile dame’s children is a paid position, as Iris tells her that “for the Charge... The Muses would be sure to pay.” Here, Leapor speaks to the invisibility of women’s reproductive labours by expanding analysis of uncompensated female labour beyond the confines of the social, showing that the rearing of children is a highly skilled enterprise of major social significance. This was a time when women were actively engaged in the dissemination of useful knowledge to the following generation, and, hence, the art of teaching mechanics by which children are prepared to navigate the world is a female domestic labour and should, like female literary labour, be recognized and compensated as a valuable service to society. Leapor conflates literary labours and female domestic labours by balancing multiple forms of reproduction and labour in a variety of contexts in order to show her readers how to recognize women as producers, capable of generating things of value for society.

The figure of childbirth is not subtle in this poem and it highlights the idea that this kind of creation or reproduction is one that results from a sexual partnership; however, what the poem is really about is making literature where a poet imagines a coming together of women's writing and out of their pleasure and play is going to come the literature. Leapor constructs a world in which she extends literary parentage to processes that occur outside of the body, showing that maternity and femaleness can inspire not just female minds, but the imaginations of all human beings. Noble blood and patriarchal biases cannot govern and sustain English literature on their own; poetry, lyrical songs, plays, and by extension, learning, need to interact and reflect with a world outside in order to be a truly complete act of creation. Leapor's rewriting of classical mythology liberates and validates intellectual abilities of women and calls into existence a permanent expansion of women's role in the production and dissemination of literature.

The image of an all-female community coming together to complete an act of creation during a moment of creative crisis shows the value of intellectual intimacy among females and how it becomes a bridge across the gap that separates social unequals. The bonds presented in this poem show how relationships can in many ways do much for a female poet's professional standing and creative imagination. Further, it shows women's engagement in professional authorship within a new capitalist print economy where literary value is conceived as a form of reproductive labour. For instance, we can imagine the Muses and their empire as the literary market and its consumers who are willing "to pay" for texts they want to read. The patron, Iris, acts as the go-between with market and supplier; while the poet and her editor together create and form the product

the market demands. This kind of cultural factory manned by women in the poem emphasises female agency, rationality, expressive control, and intellectual complexity rather than the passive and physical unfolding of biological necessity we traditionally find in the language of maternity in the eighteenth century. Leapor's imagining a female child adopted into the ranks of literature counters emerging concepts about the spontaneous natural generation of poetry and individual artistic self-expression, calling into question notions about traditional literary kinship practices. Speaking against the belief that biology determines the capacity for intellectual work, Leapor rewrites the paternal birthing metaphor, creating one that reflects the emerging literary market of her time. Her poem suggests that the production of a book of poetry is not the product of lone individuals or noble heritage, but rather it is a shared act of literary creation, and is one that a group of literary mothers are wholly capable of producing on their own.

Critical scholarship in the eighteenth-century tends to explore the masculine model of writing as labour, but Leapor's poems offers her reading public a feminine model for literary labour. The poems discussed in this section have shown how two women from two different classes can cowrite in a pocketbook and enjoy it. But also, these poems show that the female writers' erotic play is not just gratuitous, that their textual intercourse achieves something; they produce a child, they give birth to literature together. Leapor's poetry ultimately argues that creative works are shaped and brought forth by several bodies and relationships, some intellectually intimate, others alienating, with each as indispensable to the creative process as the other for making the creation whole. Leapor's narrative of creation as a process that in part takes place outside of the

poets' body creates opportunity for poets not traditionally associated with literary markets and cultures to be adopted into them. Moreover, her subversion of classical mythology to expose the power of female procreativity and reveals a process of intellectual labour that constitutes a form of female empowerment. More importantly, Leapor's poems show is how women, regardless of class and rank, were developing deep and intimate relationships with each other and how objects like a pocketbook helped to facilitate and negotiate female literary communities. These women used the position of literature to play around with heteronormative roles and structures and found ways reclaim their agency as women. Ultimately, the erotic bonds between women not only helped them navigate their worlds circumscribed by phallic figures and postures, but with each other they learn they are more than capable of surviving and manipulating the patriarchal order of things and can do so on their own. In this way, Leapor's poems offers a proto-feminist model of cultural reproduction by showing how a community of females can exercise competitive forms of (re)productive power within a literary economy.

The traditional lines of authority, especially within a system of literary patronage were hierarchical or vertical, but what Leapor's poetry has revealed to us is that her literary community is not just made up of unidirectional power. Her female literary community is shown as a complex network of relationships where power moves in multiple directions. Leapor's being a part of a community of intimate same-sex relationships that encourage horizontal lines of movement has shown her how English literature can be carried into prosperity. In the next chapter, I look at the ways in which Leapor takes these same kinds of horizontal and multi-movement relations she learned

from her literary community and maps them onto her economic society. Using animals, Leapor sketches out a world with a shifting consumerism; a world flourishing with horizontal social connections built through collective use of resources and shared knowledge and are maintained by an awareness of meaningful social connections established through material trade and industry.

Chapter 3: Tasteful Animals, or Food Philosophers

Throughout the eighteenth century, the animal subject appeared in various forms and performed a number of different roles, appearing most often in the form of the Aesopian fable. The conventions of Aesopian fables, stories framed as useful to life and true to nature with moral and practical meaning, returned as a genre in the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries. Writers including Anne Finch, Bernard Mandeville, John Gay and Jonathan Swift adapted the Aesopian fable as a way of expressing sociopolitical concerns. Many individual writers employed the conventions of the fable in response to their own political and cultural moments (Loveridge 5). However, in a time when women were not easily accepted into the literary sphere, the fable tradition offered a platform for women to negotiate their position in society. Leapor is one of these writers who found the fable form to be capable of as much mischief as any other form of literary art in the period, and who discovered that verse fable, in particular, exhibits a “peculiar flexibility” that blends with and adapts to her changing cultural surroundings (Loveridge 5).

Although Leapor uses familiar figures from traditional moral fables, she inverts their literary authority by favouring the perspectives of rustic livestock. Her use of livestock animals—a pig, chickens, and bees—links them immediately with the economy and human use, a concept she correlates with the labouring class in her fables. This chapter analyses four of Leapor’s fables, “The Delicate Hen,” “The Fox and the Hen,” “The Sow and the Peacock,” and “Silvia and the Bee,” to show how the form of the fable permits Leapor to moralize in a number of spheres and convey her ability to confer aesthetic status on and therefore cultural significance to livestock animals. I argue that the fable form allows Leapor to find licence to discuss matters of taste and judgement, a field otherwise reserved for figures with cultural authority. More importantly, these fables evidence a labouring poet’s ability to reflect on and write about her world, to demonstrate her critical perspective, and to engage with important philosophical debates of her period.

Although animals had many important cultural and economic roles throughout the century, they took on more gendered and politically charged roles within the literatures of women and labouring-class poets. Many scholars, including Landry, Milne, and Jane Lewis, have argued that female labouring-class poets used culturally familiar animals to adopt subject positions between labour and poetry. According to Lewis, when writers adopted socially specific animal voices it represented “an ability to encode subterranean narratives that speak to and for politically disadvantaged groups” (9-10 Lewis). Paula Bakscheider and Lewis have found that women poets often reworked tradition by gendering their animals and reversing the perspective to that of women. Fables were increasingly used by women to punish class pretensions and to comment on gendered customs (Bakscheider 52). For example, in one of Elizabeth Hands’ poems she links a frantic heifer with the female poet in order to comment on the absurdity of the idea of a ‘leisured’ labouring poet. Similarly, as we will see shortly, Leapor’s poem “The Fox and the Hen” draws a comparison between a farm animal and the female labourer in order to legitimize the female labouring poet. Landry calls this practice “ventriloquism” where “verse ... ventriloquizes and thus challenges the verse forms and values of mainstream culture as a way of speaking out, and of altering social discourse” (Landry 23). When Leapor and Hands project their poetic voices into animals it sounds, according to Landry, like a “protest against class oppression and against the silencing and effacement of labour wrought by the pastoral tradition.” The subversiveness of the fable form was well-suited to the female poet for the “expression of gender and class” (53), and the animal voice allowed labouring-poets a poetic voice free of constraints (23).

Leapor's fables participated in her century's booming discourses of taste in witty and dynamic ways. Although the faculty of taste became an identifiable marker of class, it was a quality that could be learned, and several labouring-class poets acquainted themselves with the dominant principles of taste in order to participate in the literary arena. Leapor joins her period's discourses about taste as her animal poetry shows a playful engagement with the changing conceptions of taste and the roles it plays in social relations. However, Leapor's reorganization and centring of the meaning and value of animals presents an alternative cultural order of animals, one where animals lose their aesthetic value as they move into labouring class cultural utility. In *The Civilized Imagination*, Daniel Cottom explains that "aesthetic values are constructions of social order" and necessarily include the conflicts of society (202). Leapor's animal poetry reveals transformations in relations among aesthetics, literature and society taking place within the labouring class, but further shows that Leapor is aware of "the fears about the social disorder that would result if the lower classes were to emerge from their ideological imprisonment" (200). Leapor follows the form of fables by making critical commentary on the social conditions between classes; however, she differs from other writers of fables in her philosophical preoccupation: her animals have the ability to reflect on their positions within their worlds and display unique critical perspectives. Her farm animals have the capacity to speak a language that represents a different set of social and cultural values than are generally found in traditional Aesopian fables.

Over the past few decades, much valuable critical work has been done mapping sociohistorical contexts for eighteenth century labouring-class poets. Landry and Milne

have called attention to labouring-class culture, arguing there is great value in historicizing discussions of local culture. Both scholars situate their readings within a critical framework at the intersection of cultural materialism and ecocriticism to understand how local culture is reflected by eighteenth-century labouring poets. Situating Leapor's fables within a similar interpretive framework makes her participation in important economic and philosophical arguments about labour, taste and social class very visible. This approach to Leapor's animal poetry extends an understanding of Leapor's views beyond gender and class oppression to her broader perspectives of the world and provides a new direction of scholarly enquiry that focuses less on her contested literary identity and more on what emerges from her material position.

There is a large body of literary scholarship about the revival of the fable form in eighteenth-century England and the particular kinds of new life it was given in different social, cultural, and political arenas. For example, Milne, Lewis, and Backscheider share a similar theory that suggests the fable form reappeared as an antidote to emerging anxieties about authorship during the century's period of changing and increasingly unstable literary and print markets. These scholars have discussed at length women poets who reworked the fable tradition and they argue that the subversiveness of the fable form was well-suited to the female poet for the "expression of gender and class" (Backscheider 53). By gendering their animals and reversing the perspective to that of women, female writers could use the fable form to negotiate the terms of literary authority and to speak out against gender oppression. In all her fables Leapor genders her animal protagonist as

female, but by favouring the perspective of rustic livestock, Leapor also inverts the literary authority of traditional fable animals.

Through analyses of the economic, cultural, and aesthetic value of the animals represented in her fables, I argue we can see some examples of the kinds of things other than labour that make up a labouring-class subjectivity and I highlight ways the poem suggests what a labouring-class culture might consist of. In his discussion about the politics of shared life between agricultural animals and farmers/labourers in the eighteenth century, Carl Griffen states that “animals have some small freedom to express themselves in the farm or field, to impose their own agency within the confines of the captive, means that it could be argued that under agrarian capitalism animals are shown greater care than humans” (Griffen). Landry, Milne, and Griffen believe that the agrarian capitalist system thrust animals and humans together, allowing for the creation of intimate interspecies bonds, but also positioned animals as totemic symbols of rural workers degradation to the level of brute creation.

The order of Leapor’s fables is organised in this chapter in order to provide a trajectory that follows Leapor’s use of simple gustatory metaphors, such as using the language of food to make judgements about human character and quality, to her engagement with more complex theories of taste, such as her use of cultural symbols to describe the social and political power of taste. The aim of this chapter is to reveal how Leapor’s fable writing was a practice of cultivating subjectivity, and to show how these fables transmit a version of a labouring-class subjectivity. I argue that Leapor’s poetry reproduces the knowledge of a labouring-class subjectivity, even in the absence of a

semiotic system for thinking about such a subjectivity, and this provides an interesting examination of the arbitrariness of semiotic signs.

My section on “The Delicate Hen” shows how Leapor is cognizant not only of the changes in food and in the role of taste in social and economic relations, but also that she is keenly aware of the potential power and pervasiveness of taste in daily life and its resulting influence on culture. “The Fox and the Hen” focuses on the tensions a labouring-class poet like Leapor might have had with ideas of literary and cultural authority. Here, I show how this poem is a rewriting of Dryden’s “The Hen and the Fox” from the perspective of a hen who has until now occupied the margins of literary and cultural authority. These two poems serve to highlight how the food Leapor writes about is encoded with vast amounts of economic, social, and cultural information. By positioning these food objects within a web of representational possibilities, Leapor’s animal poetry demonstrates how important representations of food can be to representations of the labouring-female subject’s tasteful self in eighteenth-century poetry.

My section on “The Sow and the Peacock. A Fable” demonstrates how Leapor uses the fable form to join an emergent debate about labour, taste, and social class. This poem presents a dialogue between an animal representative of the labour economy and an animal converted to an ornament of the commercial economy. I show how her poem interrogates the ideological work of taste while making a philosophical case for modern labour value. My final section on “Silva and the Bee” brings the three previous sections together with this poem and illustrates how Leapor’s fables are evidence of the existence

of a labouring-class culture within eighteenth-century British society. By demonstrating that Leapor saw the farm and the pleasures of keeping and eating animals as a cultural field for the practice of higher thinking and philosophical enquiry, this chapter aims to show that Leapor identifies labouring individuals as part of a community whose experience is heavily organized socially around labour and argues that their lived experience has provided them with a particular identity and certain perspectives of the world.

Consuming Bodies and Tasting Thoughts

Leapor's fable "The Delicate Hen" revolves around a conversation between two farm hens while they forage in the garden of their proprietor. One hen, "Dame Partlet" complains about the awful condition of the "plat of vetches" they are made to feed on. These vetches do not taste good; they "are not mighty green" or freshly crisp, but are brown, "harsh, and dry." Not only do the vetches "taste insipid" but she must maneuver her beak around "thorns and thistles" just to peck at what few "blossoms [it] bore." Partlet explains to her friend that at one time she used to "like'em mighty well;/ but soon from that opinion fell" when she realized that it did not matter how vetches were prepared, "boil'd" or not, they "would eat amiss" because they have grown from "soil [that is] barren." A "list'ning dove" was nearby and overhears the "brace of Pullets" discussing their meal. The dove flies down to the chickens and interrupts their conversation to tell Partlet that she believes her statement to be untrue. The dove believes Partlet is acting "haughty" and "suspects" her of lying about the pleasure that eating vetches actually imparts on her; she is willing to bet "half a crown" that Partlet would "dine upon them, if

[she] durst.” The dove’s comment infuriates Partlet because she accuses Partlet of immoral behaviour, a judgement that she has made without knowing all the facts leading up to Partlet’s declaration that vetches are too “coarse” for her “delicate stomach.” Eating poor quality vetches has caused Partlet to develop a sensitive stomach that cannot properly digest them anymore. But, she does know what kinds of food she would fare better with: her stomach “can better relish wheat and rice:/ yet if these are not to be had,/ barley may do, if tis not bad:/ [but] no coarser food;--not vetch nor pea.” Partlet explains her taste preferences by making distinctions between rich and coarse types of food, explaining to the dove that she has been mistaken, Partlet is “not so keen of vetches as [the dove] supposes.” Yet, Partlet does not finish her rebuttal there; she is willing to go further than speech, she will demonstrate to the dove that she will not eat vetches anymore by launching a hunger strike, stating that “tho’ there [are] bushels [of vetches] in [her] way: for if no better [she] can find” she “vow[s] and swears, as [she’s] a sinner” she will “rather go without [her] dinner.”

Although Leapor’s fable is an original tale and not associated with any popular or conventional moral framework, Leapor allows us to see what kind of moral this fable would tell as part of the Aesopian tradition. For Leapor’s public readership could easily identify with and relate to her poem’s superficial moral about the potential for great loss for those who assume too much self-importance. The dove essentially reproaches Partlet for distinguishing herself from her species by the excellence of her diet and for valuing herself higher than other farm hens. Partlet imagines herself refined beyond both her station and her health, as her desire to refrain from eating vetches could potentially kill

her. Her rejection of vetches does not merely extend to a missed meal. Rather, her refusal to eat is a refusal to perform both her function in the farm and her social role in the ritualized form of eating “dinner.” Her job as a farm hen is to eat so that she will “fatten up” to provide her proprietor with eggs and eventually her body for meat. Starving herself in protest directly interferes with this role: neither a skinny, scrawny, unhealthy hen, nor a delicate, refined hen with expensive taste would have much utility on a farm. The hen’s taste for rich grains could result in the loss of her value as a farm chicken, and, potentially, the loss of her life. That the hen wishes to go without “dinner” is also her way of asserting a position outside of communal feasting and the shared experience of food with “the voracious crew”—those hen’s who eat vetches for the only reason that vetches are put in front of them. This causes an imbalance in the social equality of those who gather together and eat the same food and is what makes Partlet seem “haughty.” The superficial moral of Leapor’s fable then is one about a hen who values herself higher than her farmyard function and the precarious situation that she puts herself in when holds out for more tasteful things.

Although Leapor’s fable is embodied with a moral where a woman who overvalues herself is punished, there is another, completely different lesson that informs her fable: food has as powerful of an impact on moral thoughts and actions as do fables. Food is a crucial element to the hen’s survival in her world. But, her refusal to eat vetches and to use her body to impart her act of resistance should not be read as a refusal to eat *per se*; rather, it is a recognition that she does not need to eat vetches to survive in her world. She is aware that there are many other, better tasting and more nutritious foods on

the farm like “wheat” and “barley” that she is being denied access to. Important to discern here is the hen’s restricted access to food and the use of her body to combat this oppression. The hen lacks authority over the food that she puts into her body, and the regulation of her nutrition exposes the representation of power and authority inherent in eating food. Moreover, the hen’s desire to refrain from eating vetches demonstrates an impulse to align her feelings of not being taken seriously with the physical response of eating.

The diet of the farmyard hen in the eighteenth century was mainly comprised of vetches and is presented in the poem as common knowledge among the community of farm animals. According to Noel Chomel’s *The Family Dictionary* (1725),²⁴ “The country people gather the vetch...make no use of it in physick, and its no food for men, because of its hard digestion and binding; and consequently, being of such a nature and ill-tasted, it affords but bad, gross nourishment, and is apt to produce melancholic juices,” but vetches are “good for livestock and pigeons.” Chomel recognizes that livestock feeds off vetches, but he does not recognize it as human food, even though vetches were very much “an important constituent of the poor man’s meal” (106). Chomel is correct about the vetches physical qualities, and the point that they were toxic and could poison the human body, but he does not mention anything about the labourious and time-consuming refining process vetches must undergo to make them edible. In Leapor’s poem, the hen’s claim that “if vetches boil’d, would eat miss” is true to the refining process of vetches.

²⁴ This is a text that “contain[ed] the most experienced methods of improving estates and of preserving health, with many approved remedies for most distempers of the body of man, cattle and other creatures” (1).

Similar to Shaftsbury's 'evacuation' of rudeness, in order to detoxify the vetches, they have to be boiled and strained numerous times in order to be safe for human consumption.

When the dove overhears the hen's declaration that she will no longer eat vetches she is confronted with an experience that does not fit what she believes to be common sense. The dove is quick to accuse the hen of lying, a judgement that not only completely disregards the possibility of the hen's lived experiences with vetches, but also, in proposing a bet, she reinforces Partlet's regulated diet of vetches. The dove's offering of a sizeable fortune ("a half-crown" was at this time the market value of a chicken) is a tactic used by her that both reaffirms what she already believes about the hen and vetches and reinforces what the farmer has relegated as the hen's diet. By accusing the hen of lying, the dove dismisses the hen's effort to exercise her taste and establish herself as a tasteful hen. The dove disavows the embodied quality of the hen's knowledge or authority associated with her "good taste" much in the same way that taste theorists adopt the metaphor of literal tasting but ignore the physicality of eating. In her study of the literary history of taste, Gigante notes that eighteenth-century taste in the literary variety reflected a more "general taste of omnivorous consumption" (Gigante 11). She shows how several key Enlightenment philosophers took up the gustatory metaphor of taste to "dispose all rudeness from the paradigm of the tasteful self" (54). Taste was considered both a process of judgements and mental discriminations of what is good and proper, and a mode of perceiving that was separate from the material body. However, the mental faculty of taste was not something that just anyone could exercise; it was a mode of being that was constructed, organized, and regulated by the literary elite.

Addison and Hume believed that taste was “a capacity to relish and discern subtle qualities of fine things” (Addison 412). But in these writer’s discussions of taste, it is almost impossible to distinguish when they are employing gustatory meanings or aesthetic ones because, oftentimes, both are being invoked simultaneously. Addison famously equated aesthetic taste to the ability to identify individual ingredients within a blend of tea, and later Hume compared it to a kind of genetically determined ability where one could detect the slightest traces of leather and rust in a barrel of wine (Hume 222). Dominant taste theorists sought to use the mental faculty of taste to distinguish the polite from the vulgar. They argued that in order for one to conform to the standards of taste vulgar speech must be abandoned as well as any interests and behaviours that might link oneself to lower social orders. Shaftsbury proposed a “method of evacuation” (Shaftsbury 74) to aid in the production of a tasteful subject. He suggested a technique for the evacuation of products stimulated by consumption, and this was to purge all culturally accrued rudeness to emerge as a person of taste. In theory, according to Shaftsbury, the Man of Taste must purge himself in order to become clean, similarly, printed works that had not been properly purged of rudeness “provided bad and nauseating fare to a consuming public” (73). According to Gigante, the concept of taste was, by the mid-eighteenth century, completely disassociated from the material body and the palate was reinvented as an embodied mark of sophistication and refinement; eating and tasting was more about consuming words and intellectual bodies than it was about eating and taking food into the body. However, by having her hen stage a hunger strike in response to her feelings, Leapor puts the concept of mental taste back into the physical body, ultimately

revealing the material processes involved in the production of a tasteful self. For while the hen's actions undermine her health they also serve to undermine the control that the farmer has over her body as well as reclaim social agency that the dove has denied her.

In the same way that the hen's diet is regulated by her proprietor, dietary control of the labouring and lower classes was a way the wealthy and elite could exert control over the labourer's body: a malnourished, hungry, and weak labourer is much easier to govern than a healthy, satiated, alert and energized labouring body.²⁵ The labouring-poor did not eat nearly as much nor as often as those who could afford even the most basic victuals. Even then, most lower-class diets lacked variety and consisted mostly of bland and coarse foods, like vetches, peas, and barley, which are not "greatly pleasing" nor have high nutritional value to aid in the labouring body's regeneration; their bodies are literally too exhausted to attempt to move beyond their station and their minds' too tired to comprehend and resist their exploitation. Foods like wheat and rice, on the other hand, provide consumers with a feeling of fullness and hunger satisfaction, because these forms of food are high in calories and carbohydrates, are easily digestible, and much more valuable and, therefore, were generally only consumed by the wealthy. Interestingly, Leapor's poem about a hen's taste for finer grains reflects changing tastes within the labouring class. At the time Leapor is writing this poem dietary changes are occurring within the labouring classes, particularly that of the agricultural sector. Such a change in diet coincides with the emergence of a self-conscious and literate labouring class.

²⁵ For further reading about how food and eating affects cognitive development and performance see texts like Gazely's *Nutrition in the English Agricultural Labourers Household* (2013); Greg Muldrew's "Food, Energy and the Creation of Industriousness" (2011); and E. Griffin's "Diets, Hunger, and Living Standards During British Industrial Revolution" (2018.).

The period between 1720-1750 was not a socially and culturally stagnant time in England. It was an especially transformative time for agricultural labourers in terms of their diet, which was better than they had even been before because they were now eating wheat. A.H. John's research on eighteenth-century agrarian culture shows that this was a period when "buyers of grain or grain products benefited more than the producers" (20). Wheat has not always been one of the most important and widely consumed grain in Western diets. Until the early eighteenth-century, only the wealthy and elite could afford to eat wheat; wheat was therefore a luxury food item, and one that agricultural labourers had to laboriously tend to and cultivate on a daily basis but are not allowed to eat it. Similar to Leapor's hen who is aware of other parts of the farm have "healthful Downs" of rich grains but is mired in a plat of vetches. Leapor's life spanned this seemingly promising period for the agricultural labourer's diet. Born in 1722 and living until 1746, Leapor grew up in much more 'affluent' but tumultuous conditions than her predecessors. The very fact that a subscription of her poetry exists is testament to the idea of the cottage labourer's 'better life,' at least for a brief period in the eighteenth century. Indeed, this good life of the agricultural labourer was very short-lived, vanishing in the early 1750s at the onset of the agricultural revolution and industrialisation. More interestingly, however, is that the changing tastes of the labouring classes seemingly coincides with the emergence of the labouring-class writer. Wheat became a staple in a woman like Leapor's diet during the 1720's, and most eighteenth-century scholars agree that Stephen Duck's "The Thresher's Labour" and his subsequent social accent marks the advent of the category of literature we now call labouring-class. Today, there is a lot of scientific and

experimental psychology literature available on dietary influences in cognitive development, and therefore we are more willing to accept ideas that the food that we eat affects the way that we think and act. In this way, we more readily understand what Leapor is trying to say about food being central to the significance of materiality for the living body, both in the form of nutrients and sustenance and also in the manner in which eating food invokes the very physicality of being.

In the poem, the hen's acquisition of a cultivated palate, along with the fact that she chooses not to eat her dinner, enables the hen to assert her right to eat for pleasure rather than out of need. With such a performance the hen moves herself outside of the natural order thought to govern her species, appearing as though she has transcended her condition as a farm hen. In debates on taste, biological need quickly became secondary to aesthetics, as Jean-Louis Flandrin explains that gastronomic pleasure was sacrificed to visual aesthetics, especially at the aristocratic dinner table (Flandrin 288). Although the hen's refusal to eat vetches has potentially serious consequences for her health and livelihood, starving her body of sustenance is not a moral transgression but a necessary demonstration of moral action. The hen's body is at once a site of oppression by her environment and a site of personal agency as she can exert control over herself by denying her body food. The hen recognizes the significance of food and is willing to justify her moral and physical actions through her desire to stage a hunger strike to gain access to richer food that she has been denied. In Liz Eckermann's *Theorizing Self-Starvation*, she argues that for women "operating within a Cartesian framework of mind-body dualism and focusing on the rational reflexive mind as the site of human experience,

self-starvation [is] thus beyond the corporeal aspects of human experience” (220). In theory, the effects of starvation appear to move the hen beyond the confines of her body and liberate her mind. But this is not an act of transcendence, of separating her mind from her body. On the contrary, Leapor shows that the hen achieves moral transcendence attained through her body. By wilfully abstaining from eating, to the peril of her body, she reclaims her agency over one of the most basic chicken rights: the ability to nourish her own body.

In the midst of this fable that seems to be poking fun at a delicate hen for exercising taste above her station, we can also pull out a strain of actual critical consciousness. In the poem, Leapor’s hen speaks from the subject position of its species within a human economic system of exchange, but it does not speak directly about its condition as an object for human use and consumption. Economically, the chicken was not yet an animal that was consumed on a mass scale. At the time Leapor is writing, her agricultural economy was on the verge of becoming a capitalist trade aimed at increased production. Before the Agrarian Revolution, which covered the years 1750-1820 respectively, farming at the cottage was more for subsistence and communal need than it was about maximizing productivity (Hill 10). In Leapor’s world, a hen plays an important role in the household cottage economy. The hen’s economic function is to lay eggs, fatten her body, cultivate topsoil, and eventually give over her body for human consumption. Although, on occasion, chickens were endowed with aesthetic and ornamental value by the upper classes. In addition to their economic uses, sometimes chickens were used as a symbol of wealth and status (the more chickens wondering in the gardens of estate homes

was a symbol of the owner's wealth), and, at other times, a hen could be made into chicken-skin gloves, also known as "limericks," for men and women who believed chickens' skin could stop the human aging process and keep their skin looking young and healthy. Katherine Lester and Bess Oerke believe the upper classes use of chicken-gloves to keep their hands "plump, soft, and white" fostered "a taste for fine materials," because "before long, gloves were being made of the skin of unborn calves" (364).

In the course of the hen making her arguably misguided case for her refined taste, she demonstrates a lot of knowledge about how material conditions influence and make things as they are. The hen says that she used to "like [vetches] mighty well" but she has come to the realization that these particular vetches are really not very tasty at all; rather, they are unpalatable, "their taste [is] insipid, harsh and dry." Instead of being "mighty green" and amassed with "blossom[s]" like those that grow in "healthful [...] fields and gardens," these vetches are brown and scrubby and marred by "thorns and thistles." Furthermore, these vetches are "rough to the palate, as the eye," as they lack nutritional value, her "thinking they were full of wind." By the poem's end, the hen comes to the realization that the vetches taste bad because of the ground that they come from. The hen's cognitive acuity reaches that of the poet's earlier observation of the aesthetics of the vetches. The poet describes the plot of wild vetches as "not greatly pleasing to the view" because "the soil was barren, so [...] its product was not mighty green." According to both the poet and hen, the vetches aesthetic and nutritional value is as barren as the land in which it grows. Their understanding that the quality of vetches cannot supersede the quality of the soil is a form of knowledge that represents a particularly labouring-class

way of understanding the world. Vetches are weeds that wildly grow in the fallow lands on the farm that requires no human work, in contrast to wheat, rice, and barley, which are forms of highly tilled, well-maintained, valuable and cultivated land on the farm²⁶. The poet is aware from the beginning of the poem that the quality of vetches is a direct result of the quality of the soil in which it grows. The dove remains seemingly unaware that soil quality dictates flavour principles; she relies on common knowledge that dictates that all hens eat vetches, so all hens must like eating them.

At what first seems to reflect Marxian notions of the rigidity of certain class conditions, it is not hard to hear in the hen's distinction between coarse and rich foods a categorical distinction between poets (hens), critics (dove), and canonized literature (vetches). It is only through the hen's awakening of taste (when it realizes how awful the vetches taste and questions why it has to eat them when it knows that there are better foods like wheat and rice available on the farm) that it is able to understand that vetches grow in certain conditions and that those conditions determine what quality the vetches are—but hens are not. In fact, we witness the hen actively searching beyond the limitations of what a farm chicken is capable of. In this way, the hen's refusal to eat vetches and only consume finer grains is her departure from the condition of the vetches themselves. Similarly, by situating her fable's moral in the hen's body, Leapor is able to comment critically on the literary diets imposed upon poets and the reading public by the

²⁶ According to a contributor in *The Gentleman's Magazine* in 1764, "vetches [...] with great success to prepare land for wheat; and by growing to a large cover, they will choak up a great number of weeds, that would otherwise cause immense damage" (283).

male-dominated literary establishment and cultural critics. In his *Spectator* essays, Addison “lay[s] down the rules [for] how [people] may know whether they are possessed of [taste], and how [they] may acquire that fine taste of writing, which is so much talked of among the Polite World” (409). Although taste became an identifiable marker of class, it was a quality that could be learned, and several labouring-class poets acquainted themselves with the dominant principles of taste in order to partake in the literary arena. However, following the dominant orders principles of taste is a restrictive diet, especially to women and other individuals from marginalized groups. In Leapor’s poem, the dove symbolizes literary critics who demonstrate a reluctance to open the traditional English canon to new forms of work. The vetches in the poem are texts made available for public consumption and conduct and are determined by a literary elite. According to Leapor, these texts do not offer her mind enough sustenance, a lot of what these texts have to say do not agree with her delicate body and mind, they taste “hard and dry.” Taste, as determined by the elite, is distinguished by discrimination, polite manners, and aesthetic appreciation. For these critics, literal taste is not considered to deliver a high degree of knowledge to the mind. Leapor, on the other hand, disagrees. For Leapor taste requires the workmanship of reason and judgement, creative labour, and the living body.

Leapor’s fable is not solely created to comment on gendered customs, to punish class pretensions, or to identify with the domesticated animal in the context of the “anxiety of authorship” (Milne 122). Leapor employs the fable tradition as a platform to negotiate her position and literary authority within labouring-class culture, rather than her position in society at large. Leapor’s fable is not one about maintaining social boundaries

by teaching young hens not to think beyond their means or to value themselves above their use and market values, despite that it is presented as the moral fable operating in the poem. Nor is her poem a fable that sets out to distinguish the poor man's pea from the rich man's white wheat, or about making distinctions between those who "live upon a healthful down" and those who live "in the garden of a clown." It is a tale about a plat of vetches, cultivation practices, and eating and tasting as much as it is about living a life in the labouring classes as a female subject with possibilities and choice. For the hen does not simply state that these particular vetches taste bad; the hen goes on to give a detailed analysis of why they taste bad, what other food options are available to her on a farm and enacts a call to moral action to change her current situation. Although the hen is aware of her limitations as a farm hen she opts for the best possible life within these limitations.

Leapor's poem about a cheeky and defiant hen reveals her intimate knowledge of the lives of farm animals—their daily habits, food they eat, sounds they make—but also shows her deep understanding of their lives as objects within a human system of economic exchange—how their daily habits and the food they consume are controlled by humans, what their market value is, and costs associated with keeping them alive and fed. Moreover, Leapor shows she is cognizant not only of the changes in food and in the role of taste in social relations, but also that she is keenly aware of the potential power and pervasiveness of taste in daily life and its resulting influence on culture. "The Delicate Hen" is thus a product of labouring-class knowledge, and therefore it should be read not merely as simplistic fantasy or complicated forms of human morality, but as a story that is about detailing what a female labourer—who lives off a patch of land—knows.

Taste theorists of the eighteenth century argued that the metaphorical understanding of taste could be developed through education and practice, Leapor seems to be saying that, yes, the metaphorical understanding of taste can be developed through education and practice (you can learn to enjoy classic texts that have already won the admiration of others). However, the metaphorical understanding of taste can also be developed through experiences with keeping and eating chickens. In this next poem I will be discussing, “The Fox and the Hen,” Leapor sets out to rewrite a popular fable, “The Cock and the Fox,” by John Dryden from the perspective of a hen.

“The Fox and the Hen” tells the story of a celebrated musical hen’s encounter with a “witty fox.” In the fable, the poet explains that there once was a hen who could “prate and cackle in a tune” so well that news of her remarkable voice “quickly spread” throughout the animal kingdom, and “birds and beasts” from all over came “to visit Partlet and her song.” One day, a fox “more smart than all the rest” was among the “promiscuous throng” of animals who came to hear the hen sing as she “[sat] perch’d upon a maple-tree.” The fox, believing himself to be quite the chicken connoisseur, turns to his “serious neighbor” and declares that although the hen’s “voice is pretty clear:/ yet without pausing [he] can tell, / in what much more she wou’d excel: [he] thinks she’d eat exceeding well.” The hen overhears the fox’s “proposal” and it “gall[s] her pride.” She tells the fox that he is “extremely right,” she is a tasteful object that will one day be consumed as food by another living being; however, she says, that being “is not such as [him].” Besides, the hen continues, how can he make value judgements about the excellence of her flesh if he has never tasted the actual flesh of “singing hens,” nor does

his current reality allow for it. The hen questions the fox on the logic of his statement, humiliating and denigrating him as she points out discrepancies in his logic along the way. She claims that, historically, “foxes have [always] been counted wise,” especially when it came to matters of eating chickens; yet, his current predicament renders him rather foolish as opposed to “clever.” How “will [he] come at her” in the tree if he “dare not mount [it],” if he has not “learn[ed] to fly,” or he has not had “wings made?” The hen continues to berate the fox in front of “the crew” of animals, telling him the only reason he has a taste for chickens in the first place is because he “robs hen-roosts in the night,” which she calls an immoral and “vulgar trade.” Instead of an animal who hunts and stalks his prey, the “wise” fox “sculk[s] and rob[s]” to “seize [his] prey.” In fact, says the hen, chickens “are [his] betters due”; chickens were not ordained to be foxes’ food. Her wings and ability to fly keeps her “pretty safe” from predatory animals like the fox. But, it is the invention of “hen-roosts” that has turned her and “her pullets” into easy prey; these human contraptions created the conditions that allowed foxes to easily acquire a type of food that had generally been kept out of their reach. The hen threatens the fox, stating that if she “had the keeping of [him],” she would “shut [him] up in cub with rusty chain” and make him “lick [his] lips in vain” as she would “take special care [that]/ no pullet shou’d come near [his] door.” The hen’s quick wit exposes the fox’s authority as a misguided sense of entitlement, and with that said she “ceases” her lecture and the “baffl’d beast/ march’d off without his promis’d feast.”

Leapor’s poem is more than likely a rewriting of John Dryden’s fable “The Cock and the Fox” (1700), an extended version of Chaucer’s tale “The Nun’s Priest” (1390),

which is loosely based on Aesop's fable "The Fox and the Crow." Aesop's fable is about a fox who flatters a crow into singing so that she will drop a piece of cheese she holds in her beak. Both Chaucer's and Dryden's texts are about a fox who flatters a cock (Chanticleer) into singing from the ground where he will be in a more vulnerable position for the fox to attack. However, the fox ends up falling victim to his own trickery, and both the cock and the fox learn similar moral lessons. The story of the vain cock and the cunning fox tells readers that ego deflation is necessary before one is ready to receive divine grace. The storyline of all three texts remain the same as does its moral outcome, a lesson about human pride and vanity. However, there are two key differences between Aesop's fable and Chaucer's and Dryden's later reworkings of it, other than the swapping of birds from crow to cock. The first is a change in the fable form from a short and simple text of facts and truth statements that provoke and facilitate unmediated philosophical pursuit into a longer form of literary discourse that is designed to control not just the facts but the interpretation of the facts as well. Second, Chaucer and Dryden specifically conflate their animals with human males and females and masculine and feminine attributes thereby gendering different forms of knowledge. Chaucer and in particular Dryden uses rhetoric as a device to undermine the sovereignty of philosophy in the fable, allowing for the reproduction of a masculine system of discourse that serves to police knowledge and organize fields of critical discourse.²⁷

²⁷ A 1st-century CE philosopher is recorded as having said about Aesop: "like those who dine well off the plainest dishes, he made use of humble incidents to teach great truths, and after serving up a story he adds to it the advice to do a thing or not to do it. Then, too, he was really more attached to truth than the poets are; for the latter do violence to their own stories in order to make them probable; but he by announcing a story which everyone knows not to be true, told the truth by the very fact that he did not claim to be relating real events (Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, Book V:14)

Aesop did not deliberately gender the animals in his fables or set up theoretical debates, unlike Dryden who concedes that cocks and men are alike in that they both “conclude all the world was made for him” (Dryden), and he sets up debates in his fable such as idealism over materialism, authority over experience, and husband over wife. Chaucer’s and Dryden’s philosophical misogyny is visible in the way they write the figure of the hen into a subordinated position and treat her as inferior. In their texts, the hen is more of a sexual partner to the cock than she is a hen noted for her production;²⁸ she is (just like women at the time) explicitly denied reason and autonomy, and essentially regarded as less than fully chicken. These authors’ allegorical uses of the hen serve to alienate women from mainstream discourse by labeling her a materialist and by calling attention to the deficiencies of female knowledge. Interestingly, however, the figure of the hen in both Chaucer’s and Dryden’s texts is so well-educated that she is presented as the cock’s equal in terms of scholarship. In her arguments with the cock about his dreams, the hen relies on her natural environment and her lived experience, telling the cock that some form of food must have disagreed with his body and caused him to have bad dreams. But she also cites authorities and theories like Cato and the Old Testament to back up her argument that dreams cannot predict reality. Yet, despite being a learned hen, her authority comes from citing male authorities and she is therefore portrayed as having the capacity to know but not being capable of producing new knowledge. Although the hen can gather knowledge she can never achieve higher forms

²⁸ “This gentlecock was a master in some measure/ of seven hens, all there to do his pleasure.” (215) He has seven lovers that exist only to do him pleasure. Another passage that exists to show how Chanticleer is dominant in his environment

of knowledge because, such is received directly from god, and only a male body has the capacity to receive such thoughts and ideas.

For centuries, male authors have endowed the cock with the power and authority to speak for all chickenkind. The cock's cultural authority gives it the ability to move beyond its farmyard function, escape its textual materiality, and operate within human realms, regulating action and social difference, a form of privilege and authority that has been denied to hens. At the time Leapor is writing fables featuring farmyard chickens, Chaucer and Dryden are the leading authorities presiding over the translation of chicken speech in the arena of literary discourse. As uncontested works, their texts together forge the only available source of 'chicken knowledge'. But, as Leapor notices, these male authors explicitly self-identify with the figure of the cock, and so their translations inevitably privilege "the crowing of the cock" (Dryden) over the "prat[ing] and cackl[ing]" of the hen (Leapor). Both Chaucer and Dryden devote significant time in their texts to exploring and articulating a vivid literary portrait of the cock's state of mind while largely ignoring the hen's speech as background noise. When it comes to translating the hen's speech into discourse, according to Leapor, these male authors have grossly mistranslated and underrepresented the hen's prates and cackles, and therefore their texts cannot possibly offer a complete picture of chicken knowledge because it, much like systems of human knowledge production, has been wholly generated by masculine modes of thought. It is only fair that a female author who self-identifies with a hen should be qualified to translate a hen's encounter with a fox and offer an account of the feminine influences on the life of the mind of a chicken, showing a different way of

knowing that perhaps will allow for a more accurate version of chicken knowledge, and by extension human knowledge.

It seems hens, as well as women, have always had a complicated and problematic relationship with language. Dryden's narrator, for example, denigrates the hen's voice, calling her speech "idle stuff" that "perverts" the minds of men (Dryden). Dryden moves the hen out of the fable and into the real world and represents women and Western masculine philosophical traditions that dismiss women and their voices as noise equivalent to that of cackling hens. But Leapor retrieves the hen—and women—and generates an alternative image, one of a prodigious and ever-watchful hen capable of reason and of making logical inferences. In "The Delicate Hen," a hen used her body to stage a hunger strike because she lacked authority over her diet. In this poem a hen uses her body to exercise taste in order to legitimize her cultural authority and to authorize the "prate[s] and cackle[s]" of all female chickens in literary discourse. In having her hen do so, Leapor brings to the foreground gendered ideas about the value of female thoughts and uses the fable form to introduce her own field of feminine epistemological discourse, one that she articulates through a language of taste, ultimately generating a female version of the philosopher.

Eighteenth-century writers tended to avoid conflating the physical palate with aesthetic taste, as most taste theorists did not consider food to be a true object of aesthetic appreciation (Korsmeyer 34). The same cannot be said for Leapor whose texts feature living food exercising their own taste, sometimes even about their own literal tastes. When Leapor is writing, male theorists like Addison and Hume believed that the

only way to understand the meaning of life is to transcend the physical body, but Leapor seems to be saying that the meaning of life does not exist as a subject worthy of philosophical pursuit without a physical body to contemplate the question. And without food, there is nothing to sustain the physical body, as much as Enlightenment thinkers would like to believe that they are above the necessity of eating food. As Leapor's discourse on taste shows, the material body is inherently connected to the environments in which the food they consume is grown, cultivated, produced, and presented, and that consuming food objects is the same as consuming tasteful knowledge—food, especially philosophising food, can lead to the exertion of the higher senses, theoretically leading to higher forms of knowledge.

Eating and tasting require taking substance into one's own body, but the practice of eating is also about obtaining the food or about who or what is providing the food. In the poem, the poet paints a literary portrait of the hen as a provider of sustenance to all the "birds and beasts" who have come to share in a kind of communal feasting on the hen's "tune." In detailing the landscape and the figure of the hen, the poet invites her readers to think about the concept of taste as aesthetic experience. With language that is created to please and move her readers, the poet transports her readership into a feminized arena where a "mix" of animals are consuming the hen's music. When her readers are introduced to the "singing hen" we are immediately made aware that she speaks from a position of authority. We are told that the hen's talent to "prate and cackle in a tune" achieved widespread fame and "birds and beasts" from all over came together to "visit Partlet and her song." The hen's singing gives her a measure of cultural authority

powerful enough to defy the natural order of the animal world by uniting predator and prey into one “promiscuous throng.” This kind of interspecies harmony is successful because these animals’ instinctual desire to eat each other is being sustained by a kind of communal feasting on the hen’s words and thoughts—they have a taste for chicken speech not chicken meat. The description of the hen “perch’d in the maple-tree” surrounded by “birds and beasts” who have come to “visit [her] and her song” is an apt image of the civilizing process that Shaftsbury and Addison assigned to taste in the early part of the century. These animals have come together to bring pleasure to their ears, not their palates. The hen’s singing impacts the animals’ perceptions and influences their behaviours, generating a communal identity and shared experience among the species. This image of the poet generates of a “crew” of animals taking knowledge into their minds by eating the hen’s words and tasting her thoughts provides an important model of the cultural consumption of feminine knowledge. The poet moves her readership out of the cultural realm that dismisses hen’s and women’s talk as noise and that silences her practices of knowledge, putting them instead in a feminized arena of discourse, and showing that what has been deemed by male authors as senseless chatter and idle gossip is not necessarily a useless form of discourse at all; in fact, Leapor’s poem proves that the feminine sounds traditionally disparaged as meaningless and inconsequential speech are conversations that are actually generating thoughts and ideas. Good ideas can come from very different modes of being or processes, particularly from that of a materially embedded position.

A hen's cackle might not be as effective as a cock's crow, but as Leapor's poems show, this does not mean these sounds are not worthy of provoking action or intellectual inquiry. In her study, Carolyn Korsmeyer explains how theories of taste throughout the century were directly correlated with the Cartesian epistemic figuration. She points out that in politics the "sphere of the male is public and abstract and female is domestic and associated with the body [...] this binary conceptual structure includes value judgements involved in ranking male things over female things and the comparative theoretical neglect of everything that is categorized with the inferior terms" (31). The rules of literature and masculine ownership of the field not only closed the doors to female participation but dismissed any potential theoretical advances that could come with different forms of knowledge and experience that women writers would bring to the tradition. In the latter half of the seventeenth century, Descartes very influentially reinstated the Platonic set of philosophical values with his articulation of a separation between the body and mind. He made the claim that the mind does transcend the material realm with his famous maxim 'I think therefore I am.' As we are beginning to see, Leapor offers her own twist on the Cartesian figuration, proposing a proverb that sounds more like 'I eat therefore I am,' and the speech of her living food animals extends the philosophy to 'I enable you to eat, therefore we are.' According to feminist scholars Lorraine Code and Karren Warren, Descartes's theory ushered in a masculine enthusiasm for the life of the mind throughout the eighteenth century and onwards. These critics argue that Western theories of knowledge follow a "dualistic ontology that privileged men and associated qualities and utilized a logic of domination which resulted

in the assumption that men were superior to women, and that knowledge and mind were superior to experience” (1996). The result for many epistemologies is that the rational knower is by default a male body, and we have seen this similar argument made in Chaucer’s and Dryden’s texts when they privilege the cock over the hen. This kind of thinking also changed the way writers were thinking about intellectual labour being conceived as completely separate from the physical body; this not only separated mental labour from manual labour but declared that intellectual labour belonged solely to the male body. Only the male body could transcend its material conditions and receive divine knowledge; female bodies, on the other hand, were grounded as a result of their material labours and subordinate position to man. Such beliefs carried with them a set of gendered ideas about the value of thoughts, particularly those of women but also of members of other marginalized social groups. It is for this reason that women, past and present, famously have been unable to transcend their embodiment, thereby marking women as unqualified to be philosophers. Leapor draws attention to this masculine philosophical bias against feminine forms of knowledge through the fox’s attempt to devour the hen’s body in front of an audience of animals as a way of trying to discredit her, to challenge her authority, and to point out her materiality. The image in the poem of the fox wanting to devour the hen’s body is also a potent image of what it might have felt like for a woman like Leapor to be a celebrated poet and continue to be marked by her embodiment. By virtue of her sex and class position she is incapable of achieving enough cultural authority to have her words consumed without her body always being in the picture and at risk of being devoured.

After Leapor's poet generates an image of the hen's intellectual body being "tasted" through a kind of aesthetic appreciation, this metaphorical tasting is shattered by a vision of literal tasting, of the hen's body being eaten by another animal. The fox appears in the narrative as a representative of the Enlightenment Man of Taste. He exercises the practice of discrimination and assumes the role of cultural critic. The fox interrupts the hen's performance as he begins to pronounce his judgements of her excellence. He engages his "serious neighbor" in a conversation about the quality of the hen's performance, but he speaks arrogantly and overpowers the conversation. He poses a question to the neighbor, "What do you think of Dame Partlet here?" and yet he proceeds to answer his own question before his neighbor has a chance to formulate a response. The fox's observation at first aligns him with neoclassical ideas of the aesthetics of taste primarily linked to the higher senses of hearing, giving the impression that he was moved by delight in the quality of her voice. However, the fox soon exposes his taste as grounded in the pleasures of his palate. He pronounces the hen's singing to be "pretty clear," but, he continues, the only way to fully appreciate her in her full-bodied flavor is to eat her body and taste her flesh. The fox's "proposal" is a violent and brutal one, and it signals a shift in the poem's representation of how the hen's body is consumed. Suddenly the image of a harmonious haven of "birds and beasts" tasting the hen's intellectual body vanishes and readers are confronted with an image of a fox devouring the body of the "singing hen." Readers now are invited to imagine what would happen if the fox seized upon the hen's body, sinking its teeth into her flesh, and savagely shredding her apart— mashing and churning her feathers, bones, and innards in into a

chunky pulp, working the material around in his mouth, judging the kinds of physical pleasure it brings to his palate before swallowing bits of the hen in order to conclude that she tastes “exceeding well.” The fox’s statement not only brings to the fore the violence involved in eating and tasting, but also it is symbolic of literary elites doing a violence through the acquisition of new knowledge by separating and containing certain kinds of tasteful texts for certain kinds of people. The threat of a fox attack is very real for a hen and so is the threat of cultural critics devouring the providers (“ill-formed rubbish” produced by lower class writers) and shutting down production. While the fox seems to understand very well the abstract notions of taste when he judges her voice, his experiences of her are filtered through his subjective appetite and the pleasure that eating imparts on him. Here, the fox presents a challenge to dominant understandings of the Man of Taste. Enlightenment philosophers of taste “energetically resisted” the idea that “human beings were propelled [...] by appetites that could not be civilized or distinguished from brutes” (Gigante 4). The fox embodies the anxiety and contempt taste theorists had for matters of food and the body. The fox is incapable of transcending his brute desire to devour the chicken. Even as an authorial figure, the fox cannot rid himself of his primitive appetite. As a matter of fact, it appears Leapor reverses the dominant theory of taste and shows how the fox’s mental capacity to taste, or external stimuli such as the hen’s voice, provokes the desire for literal tasting of food.

When the fox interrupts the hen’s performance to interject his pronouncements the audience of animals and the poet’s readers are at the same time abruptly cut off from the hen’s song and are snapped back to a reality that the musical hen is ultimately a material

body to be eaten by other animals. Here, the concept of taste as aesthetic experience is sharply contrasted with the concept of taste as physiological experience, and this is done to highlight taste's unbreakable bond to the material body. This sudden juxtaposition of two different ways of consuming the hen's body is specifically designed by Leapor to refuse her readers the possibility of conceiving taste purely as a metaphor. She restrains her readers from reaching for the literary fantasy that aspires to transcend the senses and ascend to purely intellectual realms. Like food, our experiences with consuming her text will involve embodied, textual responses. Contrary to taste theorists of the period who believed exercising taste was a disembodied activity separate from earthly matters of hunger and appetite, Leapor highlights taste's problematic link between the food that goes into our mouths and what we think of the food that goes into our mouth; she refuses to let her readers forget that they are listening to a living piece of meat. Leapor's theorizing on the mental faculty of taste is grounded in literal ways of tasting of food. She understands that taste cannot be separated from its materiality just like the mind cannot be separated from body, and thereby dismissing the possibility of taste achieving the level of pure metaphor, bringing into focus the problem with elevating the subjective palate into a credible tool of literary inquiry. By making taste a metaphor, writers were trying to achieve transcending the material existence of their lived experiences, when this is, Leapor seems to be saying, an impossible thing to do. Instead, she brings the physiological sense of taste back into the world of philosophy, but this time the embodied sense of taste presides over the production of tasteful subjects. And by putting the mental

faculty of taste back into the material body Leapor is, by extension, making a case for a recognition of the labouring body's capacity for intellectual and mental labours.

Although the poet tells her readers that the hen is famous and therefore has a certain degree of cultural authority, it is the hen's public response to the fox's disparaging comments that legitimizes her authority. When the fox interrupts her performance, the hen accommodates this sudden change and offers a more profound experience for her audience. The hen is very easily able to switch from musical hen to moralising hen. She is quite observant and aware of her surroundings; she can sing and "listen" at the same time, as the fox never speaks to her directly. Although the hen finds the fox's proposition to devour her body unpalatable, she does not disavow the truth of the fox's instinctual desire to devour her body, nor does she dispute the truth that he has a taste for chicken flesh, but she does contest who or what will consume her body. She tells him that he is "extremely right," her body is ultimately for eating and she probably does taste "exceeding well," but, she says, her body is not "fatted up for such as [him]." She is aware of her position in the larger scheme of things. She knows she is a part of a system greater than herself, and realizes that the purpose of humans feeding her, tending to her, caring for her, and protecting her is ultimately to eat her. The hen does however question the fox's logic: what is his great strategy to gratify his taste? "How will he come at her"? how does he know he likes the taste of chickens? and how has he come to know that he does? The hen then continues to explain where his taste for chickens came from, telling him that his desire or instinct to eat her is not immoral; rather, it is the craft: using his knowledge—information from his environment and his experience—to craft the practice of stealing.

The appearance of hen-roosts in the natural environment of the fox positioned him to dominate and benefit from a system of governance beyond his control, such as that of the human husbandry practice of keeping and eating chickens. The fox is situated much in the same way that men have been positioned to control and profit from patriarchy's keeping and consuming of women. This image of the hen taking a stance and renegotiating the terms of what is an acceptable form of the consumption of her body reflects the image of writers like Leapor taking a stance and renegotiating the terms of what is acceptable poetry. Leapor understands how and what it means to participate in the literary canon and she proves this with her deft handling of its conventions, genres, discourses, and authority figures.

By rewriting a classic fable and switching out gendered forms of a chicken, Leapor grants to a hen not only a narrative voice in which to describe her own lived experience, but also a moral authority vested in that voice. The poet uses her literary authority to legitimize the hen's cultural authority, and we are to recognize both the poet and the hen as authorial figures. In a similar way, Leapor understands that her poetry must be tied to prominent literary figures and cultural forms in order for her work to be accepted by the literary establishment and made accessible to a public readership, which is why the opening stanza of her poem is dedicated to providing this service. The poem opens more like a pastoral than a fable (the only true link to Aesop and his cultural authority as a teller of truths is by titling her poem "A fable") and is similar to Dryden's introduction to his fable. In true pastoral convention, Leapor transforms the chaotic, labourious, and foul-smelling activities of a rural farm into a "sweet" barnyard choir. The

poet declares her education and literary background and establishes her poetic talents and intellectual accomplishments by linking her poem to different literary authorities, conventional forms and genres, and symbolic meanings. However, after she establishes connections to all these different forms of authority the poet does something that seems counterintuitive to her efforts of situating her poem among those of literary greats: she decides to “wave this motley crew” and write a version that is “short and plain.” The poet immediately distances herself from Dryden’s fable and his literary authority as well as the fabled cock and his cultural significance. She takes a great risk separating herself from these powers, particularly given the literary and social climate in which she is writing. Her current literary establishment is controlled and organized by “guardians of taste” (Gigante 51). Neoclassical writers like Addison, Pope and Swift were great defenders of the literary enterprise, allowing only tasteful texts into the canon and regulating what kinds of people had material access to these texts and their subsequent discourse. Neoclassical writers strongly believed that ancient classical texts and authors must always remain the primary authority in determining the principles of good taste or useful knowledge. Therefore, when writers from socially marginalized groups began using taste metaphors and exercising their taste they produced texts that reflected preferences and gendered-and-classed identities. Bridget Keegan has argued at length about the way labouring-class poets limited their authority in their writing in order to remain uncontroversial. Labouring-class writers could not openly criticize the literary elite or claim authorial rights beyond their station so, when Leapor’s poet tells her readers that she is not interested in discerning the effectiveness of the “feather’d King[‘s]” crows, but

rather she “will sing” the “prates and cackles” of “the hen,” she quite explicitly rejects conventional standards of truth and order offered by tasteful texts, seemingly opening herself up to savage criticism and a potentially hard fall. But, in true Leaporian fashion, her poet is willing to take this risk for the hope of achieving something great. Her poet takes a risk deploying this discursive trick—entitling her poem a fable and appealing to Dryden’s literary authority and the figure of the cock—but, if properly executed, it allows her to co-opt enough literary and cultural authority so as to make her poem appear as if it belongs to a credible form recognized by literary elites. Indeed, Leapor’s poet does succeed in carving herself a direct path into the heart of the literary establishment undetected. And from there, she stages an occupation within a complex fable to challenge the foundations of literary and cultural authority from within the male-centered system itself.

Leapor’s poet invites her readers to trust her translation of the hen’s speech, guaranteeing us that these are the authentic unedited words of the hen, “believe [her] it is true.” While the poet makes sure to point out that her account is truthful, she at the same time limits the authority of the figure of the fabled fox by calling into question the text, authorship, the origins of Reynard, and the fable form itself. She challenges the fox’s literary heritage, stating that the fox traditionally “has been counted wise,” unless, she states, “record lies.” The fox’s authority along with the fable’s moral has been filtered through “a discontinuous history of translation and interpretation” (Lewis 122) and as such who can say for certain what the fox’s true literary heritage is and why it was created in the first place. How can we really know, Leapor’s poet seems to be asking,

who the original text and author was when what we know what we have heard from the disembodied voices of male authors. Nevertheless, the poet tells her readers that they can believe this story of the hen because, she is the authority and she is here right now in the text while other writers "from long ago," no one really knows whether their "records" might be "lie[s]." In this way, Leapor, the poet, and the hen work together to blur the boundaries of what a cultural authority figure is and who decides who is given that power. More significantly, her hen represents a female figure with authority enough to moralize in a public context.

Though Leapor does follow through with the fable's predetermined conclusion of a fox that "march'd off without his promised feast," there is one crucial detail here that marks her version as essentially different from the original and this is the fox's state of mind at the end of the poem. In Leapor's poem, the fox runs away "baffl'd" because, he does not understand why his "device" of flattery did not have its desired effect on the hen like it had when he used the same ploy on the cock. The fox's rhetorical strategy of flattery does not stroke the hen's ego, stimulate her pride, and cause her swelling head to explode like it does for the cock. Rather, flattery "galls" her pride; it immediately injures her dignity. Whereas the cock has agency and choice in a situation where his pride is injured. Pride in the eighteenth century was often understood as "expressions of certain disillusionment of man about himself" (Pope, "Essay on Man" 233). Pride to a writer like Pope was "the sin against the laws of order" and causes man to seek a higher place in "the scale of being" than belongs to him (234). For Pope, pride was not primarily the pride of an individual man but "the generic pride of man as such" (233), but perhaps his definition

of pride can be understood to apply only to the male body. Does man's fall from pride also describe woman's experience with pride, more specifically a labouring-class woman's experiences with pride? In Leapor's fable, pride is altogether a different experience for the hen/female. Leapor's hen does not follow the male model of pride because, unlike the cock, the hen can proudly solve her own problem without having to suffer a fall and seek divine help, or higher thinking. In a world where females are conditioned to feel guilty about self-assertion or self-worth, Leapor portrays her hen as a strong-willed female figure protesting her limitations; she has a strong sense of what it means to be a farm hen, a sense that profoundly affects how she thinks and acts, and how she wants to resolve her current predicament. In Dryden's text, the cock must rationalize his situation and spatial environment in order to understand his relation to his world so that he can protect himself from a fox attack, and still the cock requires divine intervention, or a sudden great idea to get himself out of a life-threatening situation. Leapor's hen, on the other hand, theorizes from her situated position in order to think through her current encounter with a fox. Pride to the hen is her self-respect or self-worth, a value that she has earned and merits herself. It takes a lot of hard work for the labouring female body to claim agency and authority, to learn the structures and languages of the patriarchal world that governs her movements, and to achieve a place on a public platform where she can demand her voice to be heard and have an audience respond to it with delight and pleasure. If the fox were "clever," "wise," and "exceeding[ly]" adept at manipulation he should have known to use a rhetoric that recognized the hen as female subject in her own right, then he might have had better luck flattering her pride and earning himself a meal.

At the end of her fable Leapor paints an image of a mentally defeated fox running away not out of fear, ignorance, or failure, but out of confusion. Leapor offers an alternative version of the fable by showcasing a fox that is incapable of reason and logical inference; he is not “counted wise,” “witty,” or “smarter than the rest,” rather he is “baffl’d.” A very knowledgeable and philosophical hen forces him to question his own logic, especially when it comes to his taste for chickens, and he comes to learn that his seemingly genetically engineered taste for chickens was artificially constructed. Leapor’s fox cannot comprehend the hen’s existential questioning of his life and is left confused and bewildered about what had just occurred with the hen, unlike the cock in previous versions of the fable. At the end of Chaucer and Dryden’s tales, both the cock and the fox have learned the same moral lesson about pride and flattery. But, their texts are about the history of human knowledge and the translation and reproduction of male-centred systems of knowing. In other words, in the end of their texts, two male characters mimic knowledge models and build parallel processes, which privilege a masculine model of knowledge production, rather than creating new processes. However, the fox’s conceptual schema for knowledge inherited from his forefathers cannot be put into practice in the literary landscape of Leapor’s fable; this is because here transformations, not translations, of male theories of knowledge are tested, deconstructed, and renegotiated from a materially embedded position.

The last image in the poem describes a domesticated fox, “shut up in cub” and chained to his material conditions and challenges the mind/body hierarchy of the enlightenment by bringing the body to the front and center of knowledge production. This

is a vivid image of a caged fox sums up one of the poem's main arguments, which is all beings, animals and humans are tethered to their material conditions. The fox is described as very much tied to his materiality, and this is an idea that is repeatedly reinforced throughout the poem. The fox does not have wings, so he cannot fly, nor can he climb trees. Further, the hen is presented as having a higher status than the fox spatially, culturally, intellectually, and on the animal hierarchy. By privileging the "crowing of the cock" (Dryden) over the "prating and cackling" (Leapor) of the hen, Chaucer's and Dryden's texts serve as a masculine system of discourse designed to silence and mark female bodies, a mechanism that upholds the process of patriarchal reproduction by silencing practices of female knowledge production. In response to the depreciation of woman's mental faculty in texts like Dryden's, Leapor's poem clearly dethrones the cock and the fox from their former exalted positions. And by making the literary hen's cackles intelligible to a dominant reading public the inarticulate labourers sounds are also made intelligible to readers outside of her class, and in this way the hen becomes a symbol or authority figure for the emerging literate labouring class. Even though she is marked by her embodiment, it does not mean that she does not understand what that mark means, how it operates in different social and cultural spaces, or how she can creatively the constructs of her embodiment. Leapor's creative freedom as a poet is bound within the limits of the tradition fable, the authority of great male authors, and by her gendered and classed position. Her readership will know that a chicken will escape by tricking the fox in the same way that the chicken himself was tricked. Although her readership would have the foreknowledge in that they know how the fable will end, their knowledge is

incomplete since they do not know how Leapor will bring them to that conclusion.

Leapor has the power to change the details of the story, and it is in the details where we can find Leapor's literary and cultural authority. Leapor's poem generates an image of the hen as a legitimate holder of knowledge not only capable of discovering truth and reality but of disseminating those beliefs from a public platform as well. Leapor draws from Aesop's cultural authority and Dryden's literary authority in order to form a new account of the literary hen; however, she is an authority of taste by her own right. By making her hen a philosophizing hen elevates farm animals to the status of the fine arts, but her hen is literally living food "judicial language and concern with philosophical principles" that defined contemporary discourses of taste; in this way, she also elevates food to the status of tasteful literature. Moreover, it also shows the elevation of the speech of a labouring-class woman (who has been regarded as less than fully human) to the status of philosophical discourse.

Leapor's poem is not so much a fable as it is a poem that explores the sense of taste's significance to knowledge production in the eighteenth century. Yet, she is not remarking on the metaphorical state of taste and its tendency to shift in meaning from day to day, person to person, or from text to text like so many contemporaneous theorists of taste. She is, rather, making a claim about taste's materiality and putting forth a theory of taste as a form of embodied knowledge. Leapor's poem ultimately demonstrates that it is entirely possible that a labouring-class woman writer can take all kinds of "vulgar" forms of discourse—fable form, farmyard animals, notions of the materiality of taste, and the

female and socially marginalized voice—and use them to make important philosophical contributions to the history of human knowledge and ideas.

The Work of Taste

Leapor's "The Sow and the Peacock" moves away from the theme of taste in literary authority and literature's role in the reproduction culture, to a demonstration of her intellectual engagement with her century's changing conceptions of taste. This poem reflects Leapor at her most refined. With her sharp skills, Leapor generates a poem in which she offers a conceptualization of the work of taste by showing how taste operates in daily life, giving position, influence and political power. Leapor uses familiar figures from moral fables in this poem, but inverts their authority by favoring a pig's perspective, endowing it with sound judgement, cultural knowledge, and exquisite manners style. In this fable, Leapor employs a "homely rural Swine" (35) as a representative of the labouring class, and a "glitt'ring Peacock" (34) symbolic of the aristocracy. The socially recognized hierarchy of animals corresponds to the social hierarchy of the classes and is expressed in Leapor's poem as the aesthetic problem of the taste for utility versus the taste for luxury. The pig shows off her language and broad cultural knowledge, engaging with current economic issues, social and cultural distinctions, matters of agricultural concerns, and conversations about art, use-value and aesthetic rituals. These two cultural symbols collide in the poem as a peacock, symbolic of aristocratic culture, enters the rural environment of a pig. The pig proceeds to lecture the peacock about the authority of taste, and in the process makes a philosophical case for modern labour value. As a cottage labourer, Leapor was much in tune with the path of progressive change and recognizing

that aristocratic taste restrains both economic and cultural progression, she employs the form of the fable to argue for a practical taste that is more beneficial to society. Leapor's deployment of domesticated animals in her fables reflect not only her social position, but also allows her to "exhibit a double capacity that both shatters and works with various dualisms of discourse and readership" (Loveridge 39).

The use of a peacock for its beauty in fables was not new. Aesop had written many that delivered moral messages against pride and superficial beauty. But commissioning the peacock to represent nobility was rather novel in the eighteenth century. John Gay employs a peacock in "The Peacock, the Turkey, and the Goose," as not only an example of the envy of beauty, but also an allegorical mandate not to cross class boundaries (Loveridge 224). Patrick Delaney's peacock, in "The Pheasant and the Lark," is declared as a "fair emblem of monarch's guise" who "princely rules" many regions. In Jonathan Swift's response to Delaney's fable, he warns about the dangers of endorsing the peacock with social superiority over his species based on his external beauty. In Jonathan Swift's response to Delaney's fable, he warns about the dangers of endowing the peacock with social superiority over his species based on his external beauty. Swift cautions his friend that, like the peacock's beauty, the external worth of a nobleman does not necessarily correspond to his moral worth.

The pig, on the other hand, is not as common as the peacock is in fables, and when it does appear, it represents a different set of values, being conveyed as ugly, dirty and unintelligent. Gay's fable, "The Gardener and the Hog," associates the pig with stupidity to further illuminate his maxim that class lines should not be crossed. Thomas Bewick's

adaptation of Aesop's fable "The Piglet, the Sheep and the Goat" shows a pig that is captured and carried to the market while a sheep and goat upbraid him for his annoying squeals. The pig cries because he knows he is to be killed; he knows his life is ultimately for human use, a concept Leapor correlates with the labouring class in her fable. Unlike Gay's mock reversal of classes, Leapor does not reverse established social positions with her animals, but rather, she uses them to lay bare the hard truths of the role of human judgement in economic and cultural behavior. Leapor's pig shows characteristics that have been attributed to the pig for centuries: she smells, is lazy and dirty, and sleeps on "Dunghil[s] soft and warm" (15). But her pig is not stupid. In fact, her pig takes on the traditional literary role of the 'moral doctor.' Leapor's representation of the pig has its origins in classical antiquity. Aesop employed the pig, in "The Ass and the Pig," to be symbolic of the distinction in practical philosophy between the immediate good and the ultimate good. Leapor uses this form of practical philosophy to appeal to her readers for a practical taste, instead of adopting and pursuing the dominant orders' tastes. According to her, a practical taste will result in the ultimate good for society and mankind in general.

The aesthetic value of animals used as markers of class in fables reflects how political power in eighteenth-century Britain was being managed as a matter of aesthetics, a theory later explored by Bourdieu in *Distinction*. For Bourdieu, taste, not monetary wealth, functions as an indicator of class. He believes that taste becomes a "social weapon" that defines and distinguishes the high from the low, the good from the bad, and the "legitimate" from the "illegitimate" (Bourdieu 6). Bourdieu's theory arises out of the explosion of the market in the eighteenth century. The influx of imported commodities

turned Britain into a consumer culture that slowly eroded pre-established forms of social and political power. Growing commodification generated new forms of wealth in all classes below the aristocracy, and it was now possible to purchase upper-class status. The objects of consumer choice reflect a symbolic hierarchy that is determined and maintained by the socially dominant, allowing them to distance or distinguish themselves from other classes of society (Allen 70). For Bourdieu, it is not money that differentiates the classes, but differing tastes. He claims environment, upbringing, and education are what determine a subject's taste: "social subjects distinguish themselves by the distinctions they make, between the beautiful and the ugly, the distinguished and the vulgar" (6). Accordingly, the aristocracy has a taste for luxury (expensive things), and the lower class has a taste for utility (practical things). However, it is the dominant class' tastes that function like external authorities for the society. Like an "invisible hand," taste directs individuals toward their stereotypical significations of class difference without any reflection on their part, because they are unaware that it is through the use of particular objects that these significations are produced (Bourdieu 3). Yet, Leapor does reflect on her tastes as well as the elite's, and dares to express herself in a cascade of witticisms. Her sharply crafted verse demonstrates her awareness that "art and culture consumption fulfil a social function of legitimating social differences" (7).

In her fable, the pig is an object of utility that contributes to both the economic and cultural progression of society. The peacock, on the other hand, is an object of art and only really contributes culturally to the social elite. The hierarchy between pig and peacock is defined by an ideal of cleanliness and, therefore, is aesthetically determined.

The pig sees a peacock “so fair and nice” (25) for the first time, and is “dazzl’d” (22) by his beauty and instantly feels compelled to imitate his grandeur. “In a trice” (26) she runs to wash and prune herself in a “stinking Wave ... then rubb’d her Sides against a Tree” to be “as clean as Hogs can be” (28-32). The pig instinctively believes she is not as beautiful as the peacock because she is dirty, but she thinks she can wash herself and emulate his splendor and be mutually pleasing. However, the pig soon learns her efforts are to no avail, not only does the peacock reject her offer of hospitality but also refuses to acknowledge her as an equal:

“You’re very civil, Mrs Sow:
But I am very clean, d’ye see?
Your Sty is not a Place for me.
Should I go through that narrow Door,
My Feathers might be soil’d or tore;
Or scented with unsav’ry Fumes:
And what am I without my Plumes?” (57-63)

The Peacock slights her gesture and claims if he enters her rural dwelling his feathers will soil and smell, thereby associating him with those who lack social grace. The peacock’s fear of filth brings to the fore an emergent aristocratic taste for cleanliness whereby a domestic ritual, such as the pig bathing, has extended beyond ordering the physical and has begun to order and classify people. The peacock is clean because of his elite position, polite manners and his right to aesthetic appreciation. In her brief reading of this poem, Paula Baschieder explains Leapor’s fable “exhibit[s] her sharp power of observation, her tart tongue and her unsparing theme” (Baschieder 52). As such, she views this poem as a class and gender commentary where the peacock offends the sow, who gives him a tart

answer and ceases to desire him (52). However, Leapor's 'sharp power of observation' does not end there but with providing the reason the sow ceases to desire the peacock.

The pig is obviously hurt and "much offended" by the peacock's response to her kind gesture, but she is more disconcerted with herself: "As for Myself—to think that I/ Shoul'd lead an Idiot to my Sty,/ Or strive to make an Oaf my Friend,/ Makes my bristles stand an end." The swine is most upset that she wasted her labour on a useless pursuit. According to major labour theorists of the period, John Locke and Adam Smith, the use value of an object, that is the material quality of possessions in hand is determined by labour. They believe the actual value of a commodity is the labour required to obtain it. So, when the pig "wonder[s] and adore[s]" the peacock's beauty and alters her appearance for him, she exerts both mental and physical labour which results in her adding value to something that ultimately does not have utility for her. The peacock's purpose is to inhabit noble gardens, and as an object of art that "sparkl'[s] like the starry Plain," he does not have use value (32). His role does not aid economic progression. Therefore, when the pig transfers her labour into the peacock, by default her labour becomes useless. Her realisation of this "mortifi[es] her Pride" (7), for she believed in "Philosophy she had great store" (9). The pig's effort toward the prospect of friendship and an intelligent conversation was a gamble that did not pay off. Rather, the peacock effortlessly consumes her labour, and looks for more. He demands of the pig "d'ye see?" calling attention to his feathers, insisting she look at him and wonder at his beauty. As an object of art, the peacock demands to be admired rather than offer the work of interpretation. Because the Peacock's sole responsibility is to be perceived as beautiful he

lacks the workmanship of reason and judgement demonstrated by the pig. The work of taste, as determined by the elite in the eighteenth century, is distinguished by discrimination, polite manners, and aesthetic appreciation. Yet for Leapor, it seems taste requires skill and experience, not just creative labour. The idea of working for ones' taste comes to fruition in the latter half of the century when with the practical application of taste people became entrepreneurs of taste. Mathew Boulton, for example, was an entrepreneur of taste when it came to his pottery. He worked for his taste by understanding his consumer public, listening to criticisms, and wanting to improve on the latest fashions. In the poem, ironically it is the pig that does not hold immediate aesthetic value in the economy that has all the responsibility for perceiving and making distinctions between herself and things.

In terms of aesthetics, the pig is “poor” because of her notions of cleanliness, but as a representative of the labouring body, the pig is considered economically and culturally poor. The pig can never attain the peacock’s standards of purity; this is because of their different living conditions and environments that result in dissimilar ideals, much like the lower-class’ taste for utility and the aristocracy’s taste for luxury. Unlike the peacock, the pig has practical taste toward cleanliness. Her sty is “A little Hut as plain as [her]” and can “boast of nothing fair nor fine,” and her “fav’rite couch” was made of “Dunghil soft and warm.” The pig has learned to work with nature, using mud pits to bathe, trees to rub the dirt off her hide, and the sun “to dry her Carcase.” Conversely, the peacock employs nature to work for him. For example, he has only a superficial use for the sun which is to flaunt: “His Neck and Breast all Brilliant shine/ Against the Sun.” Not

only is the pig more practical than the peacock in the animal world, in the human world she has a very high use value, contributing both economically and culturally.

Economically, the pig is a principle part of Britain's provisions. Every class in society would be accustomed to pork, whereas, the peacock's meat is considered a delicacy and only a select few will benefit from its nutrition. In debates on taste, biological need quickly became secondary to aesthetics. Jean-Louis Flandrin explains that gastronomic pleasure was sacrificed to visual aesthetics, especially at the aristocratic dinner table (Flandrin 288). The pig's trough appears in the poem as a site of social communion and carries great symbolic power. The pig tells the peacock that "fair and fine" spaces and pleasant food are not necessarily a requirement for intellectual and aesthetic experiences. However, the elite used the dinner table to exhibit their fine taste, and as they did, the table became a platform for sociopolitical and cultural power. Yet, the fact that a peacock wanders itself into a pig's sty is an indication that it is not performing its aesthetic function in the aristocratic world, which also strongly infers the decay of aristocratic power. The peacock lost its function as an ornament, not meat, on display at the aristocratic dinner table because their exotic feasts and elaborate food rituals were now being judged by the steadily growing middling classes as excessive and wasteful behaviour. When the peacock loses its aesthetic function, it ceases to have any use value, but the pig, even after its slaughter, continues to aid mankind after its death with the use of its bristles. After a hog is slaughtered for its meat, its bristles are scraped and used to make all kinds of brushes, paint brushes in particular. Her hide extends her use into the realm of cultural capital, as her bristles are used to paint the beauty the aristocracy deems

so superior. In addition to paint brushes, toothbrushes made of hog's hair were invented and mass produced in the eighteenth century by William Addis. Therefore, not only do pigs contribute more economically than peacocks, but also, they contribute more culturally and to the progression of mankind. The pig produces job opportunities and services for the society, contributes to the longevity of human life, and adds culturally by developing into products that aid in the creation of art. Worth noting is the irony that an animal deemed a dirty, disgusting beast would be responsible for a practice conducive to the preservation of health. The pig follows that use value is determined by social needs and not just individual needs. Nevertheless, the pig's contribution to society goes unseen because she does not have aesthetic value according to the dominant class' taste. This invisibility of the pig's role mirrors the labouring class whose undervalued skills and labour maintains the aristocracy's life of leisure.

Leapor shows that she is keenly aware of the potential power and pervasiveness of taste in daily life and its resulting influence on culture, and while she engages with the philosophies of taste, she dabbles with the necessary inverse of taste: disgust. The cultural symbols of pigs and dung in the poem distinguish a sociocultural disharmony between city labourers and those in the country. *In Hubbub: Filth, Noise, and Stench in England*, Emily Cockayne explores the cultural meaning of the urban pig. She finds that in the city, "a dunghill was a stinking morass of human and animal waste, rotten timber, carcasses, peelings, hucks...all in various states of decay" (Cockayne 188). The city sties and dung were "sources of offensive smells and their odours were even thought to tarnish and discolour linens" and spread disease and illnesses (18). This is not the same conception of

Leapor's pig. Not only is Leapor's pig more refined than what has been defined as the city pig, but her dunghill is romanticized, aestheticized and has life-giving/sustaining properties: "Upon her favourite Couch she lay:/Twas a round Dunghill soft and warm." In a way, Leapor recuperates pigs and dung by presenting an alternative cultural order, rearranging the way dominant society thinks pigs and dung fit together. This kind of distinction is interesting particularly because it highlights that a labouring-class poet understands there are boundaries of cultural order that exist between classes and communities, and that each is ordered in a particular way. Leapor takes material of general disgust and translates it into something reasonable for someone in a subject position like her own, and ultimately shows that taste and cultural values do not always flow downwards from the upper classes. Moreover, Leapor takes pigs and dung at a time of social abjection and gives them a new life in her poem, showing her readers that there is a lot of significance and meaning in pigs and manure when they are not enmeshed by their role in the city as symbols of diseased, stinking, squealing nuisances.

Leapor's pig is well versed in the language of practical sense, and she is quick to judge that the peacock does not have practical use in the world. She ridicules him, calling him a "fool" who will perish during the winter months because his feathers do not have a practical use even for him:

Sir, you're incorrigibly vain,
To value thus a shining Train;
For when the northern Wind shall blow,
And send us Hail, and Sleet, and Snow;
How will you save from such keen Weathers
Your Merit? –Sir, I mean your Feathers." (65-70)

A peacock without his feather's is useless in the human world—no one wants a bald peacock for a pet—but they are also useless when it comes to his very own survival in the elements of nature. The peacock only knows the superficial use of nature; he does not know how to work with nature to survive. The peacock is symbolic of the aristocracy whose life of ease induces an active distance from necessity and who now lack the skills to survive in culture. Further, the pig scorns the peacock for his lack of merit; he must earn his survival in the world, he cannot earn his worth being a spectacle; much like the aristocracy who does not know how to work to generate new wealth. One paradox in Leapor's moral fable is that the pig gives the peacock aesthetic value while simultaneously warning against "valu[ing] thus a shining Train." Leapor does this to show how the pig enables the peacock's conceit in order to advise on the precarious nature of the labouring and working classes who buy into the dominant habitus and adopt their tastes, because when they do, their labour sustains the aristocratic authority of taste.

Interestingly, the peacock is aware that his existence solely depends upon his feathers as is seen when he rhetorically asks the pig, "and what am I without my Plumes?" Without his plumes, the peacock holds no value in either animal or human realm. In the animal world, the female judges her potential mates based on how bright and full their plumage is. Therefore, if his feathers are "soil'd" and "tore" it would likely destroy his lineage. In the human world, without his feathers he would not hold any value, aesthetic or otherwise. Leapor uses the peacock's ignorance about survival skills as allegorical of the aristocratic problem of cultural survival. She allows the peacock to be aware of his value as to advise the aristocracy to realize where their values and tastes stand within

society. The aristocracy also depends on the peacock's feathers to find their worth. When the peacock asks, "what am I without my plumes," it is like the aristocracy asking, 'what am I without my things.' Here, Leapor suggests that signs like plumage are no longer enough to ensure aristocratic signs of lineage. Until late, traditional lines of authority were according to vertical lineage, but Leapor argues that those kinds of lines do not hold society together, rather horizontal lines of connection will carry English society into prosperity. Through the pig, Leapor shows that there are many ways that society can establish these horizontal lines of connection, such that delineating the uses of the pig's body through British culture bridges different bodies and different classes: charting the horizontal line symbolically formed by the pig's body shows that the pig unites all social classes through material connections. Leapor's central message to the aristocratic class is they have no genuine use value for society, save for their taste for luxury that only adds to the cultural progression of a specific class, not to the generality of mankind. Leapor recognizes early that the taste for luxury is becoming irrelevant in a changing and shifting economic and social circumstance. Practical taste, she argues, will create shared values and generate collective identity and solidarity in culture and society.

In Leapor's fable, not only does an animal deemed incapable of instruction instruct, but a labourer, considered incapable of ideas above her station, educates society on matters of taste and judgement. Leapor recognized the fable could be applied to many new and different literary contexts as to make it clear that she saw "this as a form of 'use' in itself" (Loveridge 111). Leapor's pig is also her surrogate, and like the pig and the labouring body, she contributes both economically and culturally, as a labourer and as a

writer. However, she is only recognized for her labouring position. According to Baschieder, Anne Finch's Fable "The Pig, the lamb and the Goat," a reworking of the ominous position of the pig about to be slaughtered, reveals her frustrated desire into the mainstream contemporary literary culture. As other readers of Leapor have noticed, most of her poetry reveals her anxious self-consciousness about her position of authorship and authority. This poem is no different as Leapor's pig likewise contributes to culture by getting slaughtered but becomes a new lens for which to view a working-class poet's anxiety that her entrance into the debate about matters of taste and judgement might be considered an unwanted entry because of her position as a labourer. Her fable demonstrates her consciousness and conceptualization of taste as it gives position, influence and political power. In a time of cultural anxiety because of the mounting luxuriance and frivolous consumption that threatened to sweep away all decency and morality (McCracken 105), Leapor uses her fable to teach what a practical taste can accomplish as her fables are trans-class and reach a universal readership, not just an audience limited to her class.

The form of the fable permits Leapor to moralize in a number of spheres and conveys her ability to confer aesthetic status on familiar domestic and work animals. Most importantly, it allows her to find license to discuss matters of judgement, a field otherwise reserved for figures with cultural authority. Although scholars have argued that lower classes cannot convert 'economic capital' into 'cultural capital,' it is through an appeal to a practical taste that Leapor shows the labourer as capable of efficiently converting economic experience into cultural value. Leapor's pig is represented as

intelligent and aesthetically pleasing, which reverses the classical topoi defining the pig as dirty and unintelligible. Like the peacock who cannot mate without his feathers, the aristocratic class will become an injured body, one that is hardly recognizable as the all-powerful faction who once governed a kingdom. Because of their taste for luxury, the aristocracy will devalue themselves and impoverish their successors, and eventually destroy their noble pedigree. Meanwhile, Leapor sketches out a world with a shifting consumerism; a world flourishing with horizontal social connections built through collective use of resources and shared knowledge. Society, Leapor argues, cannot be maintained by a taste for luxury but rather must be maintained by an awareness of meaningful social connections established through material trade and industry.

The Culture of Bees and Labourers

Throughout the eighteenth century, the beehive was a popular metaphor that writers used to comment on society because it could be used indifferently for representations of both social and political aspects of society. Writers from all socioeconomic backgrounds could engage with metaphor because of its malleability. Joseph Warder employed the beehive as a symbol of monarchy in *The True Amazons* (1716), for example, while Bernard Mandeville's mock-epic "The Grumbling Hive" (1714), structures the beehive as a republic, and uses the society of bees as an analogy for human society and fosters a model for the division of labour. A short time later, Mary Collier employs the beehive as a symbol of industry in "The Woman Washer's Labour" (1739) in order to expose the social inequalities that the very metaphor imposes (Milne 50). Leapor's poem also participates in the period's socio-political conceptions of the

beehive, particularly the social structure of the hive and its reliance on the cooperation of its community for survival and prosperity. However, the use of the beehive metaphor was traditionally employed for instructive purposes, and in Leapor's poem the poet uses it to advise Silvia on matters of economic concern, particularly the treatment of labourers and the importance of use-value.

Studies of "Silvia and the Bee" have noted the ways in which the poem utilises humour to encourage moral judgement. In the poem, Silvia values herself upon her beauty and the poet teases her for this by exalting her beauty to the point of the divine. While Silvia leisurely strolls through her garden, the flora burst with intensity and aliveness. Some of the flowers wave at her, while some stretch their stems to get a better view, and others try to simulate her glow—all of which are images the poet uses to show an extended display of flattery that Silvia receives from young men who have been captivated by her physical beauty. But when the bee appears, like an unwanted male suitor, Silvia immediately squashes it for reinforcing the very ideal about her beauty. The poem ends with the poet's light reproach to Silvia for killing a fellow creature; though it is a didactic one, mocking Silvia's and the poet's complacency with flattery. So far, most attention to this poem has been devoted to Silvia and the poet and the different ways to approach the dialogue of the poem. In this way, Silvia and the poet have been in perpetual conversation since the poem's creation, while limited interest in the bee's role in the poem promises its continued silence. Rather than allowing Silvia's act to kill the bee, so that we never hear about it again, I show how Leapor uses the tension between Silvia and the poet in order to bring the bee subject into being. More specifically, through my

analysis of the bee and beehive symbols that appear in the poem, I show how the poem reveals a version of a labouring-class subjectivity even in the absence of a semiotic system for thinking about such a subjectivity.

At first glance, the poem's suggestion that a bee has a life and society of its own seems more humorous than meaningful. But if we focus more closely on this bee and its role, we find the implication that it has a life of its own central to our understanding of how the poem actively intervenes in the cultures and politics of this period. Leapor's poem participates in her contemporary conceptions of the beehive, using it as a metaphor for the social structure of society and as a model for the division of labour. However, when she isolates a single worker bee from the swarm and suggests its life has value outside of the garden in which it works, she completely imagines the bee subject in a much different way from her contemporaries. In the poem, Silvia's world confines the bee to rigid social boundaries and expectations, and thus adopts the beehive as an instructional metaphor for society's ideal labour force. Whereas Mary Collier's bees are unnaturally silent in their work, as they lack the sounds of humming (Milne 55), because they are afraid to make noise and disturb the order of things, Leapor's bee falls victim to this fear as it is silenced for disturbing the order of Silvia's world. As a worker in the garden, the bee is subject to the weather and flowers as well as a subject of its hive; yet, in this environment, it is ultimately subjected to human interests. The bee's job is quite labourious; He physically toils and flies from "Tree to Tree," and he must be meticulous when "op'ning the buds with Care" (13). The worker bee is tasked with foraging for food for the livelihood of his hive, and in doing so he pollinates Silvia's garden and produces

honey and wax for human consumption. Silvia's garden represents an economic system in which roles are tightly adhered to and clearly defined, and anything outside of these roles is non-negotiable. Therefore, when the bee sees

Silvia (finding none so fair)
Unwisely fix'd on thee.

Her Hand obedient to her Thought,
The Rover did destroy;
And the slain Insect dearly bought
Its momentary Joy.

Silvia can recognise the worker bee as a worker bee only when it is performing its particular function in the garden. When the bee steps outside its role, landing on Silvia, it causes a breakdown of the symbolic order within Silvia's world. The bee's violation is that it comes into contact with Silvia's body, and it is this social violation that exposes it to swift punishment regardless of its usefulness. Consequently, the worker bee's death is a result of its presence being felt but not yet recognised. Although Silvia's world here is founded on the principle of industry, the moment that Silvia instinctively kills the bee for violating a social boundary proves that her world ultimately is governed by violence—worker's lives are "lightly prized."

Curiously, the ecosystem of the worker bee's world also is characterised as an ideal image of a society that is highly organised and regulated, but it is a world that ultimately is governed by mutual love and respect. The world to which the bee belongs is represented as utopic in nature and seems to operate under a different value system than found in Silvia's world. This is seen when the poet reprimands Silvia:

But now too rash unthinking Maid,
Consider what you've done;

Perhaps you in the Dust have laid
A fair and hopeful Son.

Or from his Friends and Senate wise
Have swept a valu'd Peer;
Whose life, that you so lightly prize,
Was to his Country dear

When describing the bee's 'country' the poet explains to Silvia that the bee was an individual bee that was part of a larger structured and organised community of bees, and that her "unthinking" reaction to kill the bee robs the bee of its life and its hive of the provisions its labour could potentially have brought it. The bee's world is parallel to Silvia's in relation to a socioeconomic system; however, the poem shows the bee's world is based on a value system that is not solely defined by economic worth—it is a system in which lives are prized and valued.

The image created from these two distinct worlds bumping up against each other and resulting in violence has colonial and imperialistic undertones and raises an important uncertainty of the period, mainly, what does it mean when one country enters another and is not recognized or eliminated? When the English began to colonize the New World in America, they also began to colonize *their* new world—within England and with their own marginalized people—and used the beehive metaphor to categorize citizens and behavior. While the beehive metaphor in the poem mimics a conventional division of labour model, it is also simultaneously used as a representative of the labouring class as a whole. By yoking these two worlds together under the same metaphor Leapor projects a different image onto the bee and beehive and suggests that each class within English society is its own "country" with its own respected ranks. Rather than employ the bee

symbol to instruct society to be ‘busy as bee’s,’ when the poet advises Silvia that she should have respect for members of the lower orders of her world, the poem suggests that instead of the exploitation of one class by another, perhaps a more cosmopolitan approach should be taken to treat other classes with dignity and respect. By morphing the beehive metaphor from an instruction for society’s ideal labour force to an instruction for being a more informed and benevolent ruler within society, Leapor expands beehive discourse by changing focus from normative rules for socioeconomic functionality to issues of intercultural harmony and acceptance (Overton 111) and proposes that individual reflection is a key component for this kind of relationship.

The poem’s oscillation from the beehive as a model for the division of English labour to the beehive as a separate country with its own social systems underscores the existence of a labouring-class culture within English society. Leapor uses her periods changing conceptions of the beehive to blur the boundaries between social and cultural categories by using the bee to suggest that a labourer is a valued individual who is part of a separate culture made up of its own complex web of social and political relationships. Yet, the idea that an individual worker has cultural context outside of the economic system in which she works complicates traditional notions of what constitutes a labouring-class identity. Leapor is making a radical claim about labouring-class culture and identity, especially given that she was writing during a time when it was thought that the only subjects capable of being part of a full culture were Britain’s wealthy and elite.

As the idea of culture underwent transformation throughout the eighteenth century, questions arose about the extent to which different people could possess culture

and what, exactly, culture consisted of. In *Keywords*, Raymond Williams defines the etymology of the word 'culture' and explains that the word's meaning expanded in the eighteenth century to include the cultivation of the human mind, a "general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development" (Williams 52). Not referenced, however, is the eighteenth-century's obsession with the distinction between high and low culture and their discussions of the degree to which every human being participated in the 'general processes' of these embodied experiences. The philosophy of culture was a new social and intellectual movement resulting from trade and the rise of mercantilism. The aristocracy worked assiduously to preserve their power and privilege by disparaging those who had to work for survival while an emerging middle class emphasized the moral value of work and the virtue of innovation, embracing the ideas of science and progress. Not well documented however, is the existence of a labouring-class culture bumping up against other sections of society, hoping to mark out their own cultural beliefs and values. Unfortunately for the labouring classes and the aristocracy, the shifting economic circumstances favoured the emerging middle class, and paved the way for them to develop cultural power in their quest for a distinct class identity. The creation of cultural capital during this period provided a new way for people to transcend their social positions since it was now possible to buy upper-class status. Cultural capital was capital that even the lower classes could partake in the accumulation and exchange of. Nevertheless, a labouring individual, who needed to work in order to survive, was hardly recognized as being a part of a sophisticated culture. The cultural rules of the upper classes did not recognize labourers or members of the lower social orders as active

participants in culture and thus relegated a blossoming labouring-class culture once again to the margins of society where by the turn of the nineteenth century it gets folded into working-class identity.

The duality of her beehive metaphor extends the cultural meaning of the beehive by inventing a new kind of subjectivity for the worker bee. For instance, that Leapor's bee is described as a "fair" and "hopeful son" suggests the bee had a family and great promise in its future with the hive. That it is a "valu'd peer" shows it can navigate social and political networks and has a degree of importance within the hive. And, that it has "friends" shows it was capable of intersubjective bonds. All these characteristics of the bee exemplifies it has a governing system that sees it as a valued member of society, and ultimately suggests that its life is worth more than its labour value. Leapor's effort with linking the bee to the labouring subject resonates with other contemporary attempts to portray the bee as valuable; however, proposing that bees have social and cultural value which makes their life valuable, challenges eighteenth century depictions of the beehive. The poem asks its readers to not only see the bee as more than useful, but also to see that labourers are not just objects who perform a function in an economic system, and that they have a culture among themselves even though it is related to and defined by socioeconomic structures in which they have to be labouring classes.

Much recent scholarship has distinguished the animal in eighteenth-century writing as an inherent source of critical interest, specifically noting the period's increasing association of the bee with subjectivity. Leapor's poem is especially interesting because the poet recognises and asks Silvia to recognise the subjecthood of the bee, and the

possible rights that would accompany that recognition. This becomes clear when the poet tells Silvia that she “slew a simple Fly.” The “soft humming bee” from the beginning of the poem is no longer recognized as a bee by the end of the poem. The bee’s identity is transformed into a “simple Fly,” and this transformation essentially denies it its ‘beehood’. In the eighteenth century, it was not uncommon for landowners and the nobility to recognize the usefulness of a labourer so long as the person of the labourer remained out of sight. Sarah Jordan argues that discussions about and addressed to the labouring classes found in periodicals such as *The Gentleman’s Magazine* and other works of the period figuratively dismember the labouring-class body by “editing out the potentially repellent, inconvenient, or threatening aspects of the body” (Jordan 74). These kinds of writing metaphorically dismember the labouring body, because they effectively erase images of the tired, broken, dirty and hungry body for fear that sympathies may form for that labouring body. For the middle classes, empathy and concern for the hard conditions of the labouring body were not acceptable sentiments if they were to remain the comfortable classes whose life of ease depended on the toils of the labouring body. As such, these writings fashioned a reduction of the labouring body to its useful parts, mainly, ‘industrious hands.’ Denying the personhood of a labouring subject allows the dominant order to view labourers as unfeeling creatures that are easily disposable. Leapor’s use of the beehive metaphor moves toward translating the bee into a subject for Silvia, but this move ultimately indicates the metaphor’s own limitations. For instance, the poet calls the bee an “erring bee;” for the poet and Silvia to see the bee capable of error is to assume it is a subject who has the same expectations of reality as

they do; however, we know that the bee's error is contingent on human interpretation, and this points to a larger problem with the animal subject and the untranslatable component of animal subjectivity. While Leapor's oscillating metaphor is a desire to make subjecthood legible and understandable, it is in a way that is impossible to explain. But perhaps by imagining a radical subjectivity for bees, Leapor moves one step toward a broader consideration of the life and value of the animal subject where the political animal is not the end.

Nonetheless, the reworking of the bee and beehive symbols throughout the eighteenth century reflected major changes in social and economic behaviour. Perhaps by imparting subjectivity on the bee, Leapor creates a new subjectivity for the class and unconsciously articulates the very problem with a labouring subject's identity which is that the labouring class does not yet have a semiotic system that defines them as a distinct culture. For example, Silvia's instinctual action to squash the bee is her reaction to a threatened breakdown in meaning. But more importantly, it is because of the poem's slippage between these two tension-filled worlds that the bee subject is brought into being. The worker bee becomes a metaphor for the labouring individual when the poet isolates the bee from the swarm and suggests its life has more value than the labour it performs. That the poet defends the bee from being subsumed into a communal identity, presenting it as a kind of full subject that is a member of a family, and plays a role in social and political relationships, reveals that there was a desire to imagine a labouring-class consciousness, but in the absence of a language for which this could be fully conceived.

Leapor's extended beehive metaphor can be taken further to think about the worker bee as a labouring-class writer circumscribed by the mainstream literary market. Like the worker bee, a labouring-class poet had to stay within a specific set of boundaries and structures (patronage, polite verse, natural genius, work and labour, traditional conventions) delineated by literary consumers; anything outside these parameters would not be recognized as labouring-class poetry. Although forced to follow specific conventions within their writing, by the 1740's, these poets were self-conscious about themselves as a separate, specific literary group, speaking to one another as well as to voices of mainstream literature (Keegan xv). Labouring poets such as Robert Tattersal, James Eyre Weekes and Robert Dodsley wrote poetry that ranged from acknowledging and congratulating a fellow labouring poet's work, to criticizing and shaming another. Indeed, this group of writers were indebted to Stephen Duck, whose rise from thresher to court-poet had profound effects on literary culture and labouring-class poetry in particular (Christmas xiii). Many scholars have explored the various ways in which Duck's transition affected both him and literary culture, however, there has been little inquiry about how labouring-class poets might have resisted Duck's cultural power, or how they might have felt about Duck as a representative for a literary tradition and a class he no longer experiences. Duck's social ascent moves him not only geographically and financially, but also culturally. As his transition from labourer to patronized member of a different class disrupts power relations, it simultaneously displaces his identity as a labouring-class subject, and there is sufficient evidence to suggest that labouring-class

writers believed Duck could no longer write poetry or speak from the labouring poet subject position.

Duck left his agricultural environment but continued to hold cultural power within the arena of labouring-class writing and one male poet, Robert Tatarsal, openly criticizes Duck's role within the body of labouring-class writing. Tatarsal believes his works are inspired by his very own labour, whereas Duck no longer labours in the same way. He argues that Duck no longer possesses the tools of his trade that aid in the conception of a labouring poetry. He accuses Duck of leaving both his flail and his own intellectual environment for aristocratic membership, and now he can only "rack [his] Thoughts to be admir'd by Fools" (34) because he has access only to "superficial tools" (33).

Essentially, Tatarsal reproaches Duck's verses for lacking the cultural vitality of a labouring subject position and believes his verses should no longer set the standards for what a labouring subject poet writes. Tatarsal bemoans Duck's cultural value within the community of labouring-class poets: "all Mankind thy wond'rous Flail admire ... Thy Name shall sound to all Posterity" (38-9). Tatarsal's tone is sardonic and reveals his anxiety that all labouring poets will be categorized as descendants of Duck, fearing that their identities as labouring poet subjects will be subsumed under one common ancestor who is not even related to them anymore. Tatarsal's poetry alone represents a struggle within the community of labouring poets over what a labouring poet is and ultimately this kind of discourse illuminates the great pressure being exerted from outside of the community of labouring poets to be objectified by another class. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that Duck was being identified from within the labouring poet

community as someone who had been objectified as a curiosity, and therefore no longer a labouring poet subject because he has been transformed into a labouring poet object which serves a different class of consumers. In this way, Duck as a worker bee has been brought out of practicality and into the realm of the aesthetic, and as a result he is neutralized; he loses his stinger and can no longer be identified as a worker bee. Nevertheless, these arguments from within the labouring community depict a unique relationship among labouring poets and present them as a coherent body, organizing their social and cultural power to forge a literature in their own image.

In “Silvia and the Bee,” Leapor shakes up eighteenth-century sociopolitical conceptions of the beehive by isolating a single worker bee from the swarm and suggesting that its life has more value than just the work it performs. Her engagement with the beehive metaphor as a model for the division of labour is fundamentally different from that of Mandeville or Collier’s, whose primary concern is with industry. Leapor’s beehive mimics the conventional division of labour model while simultaneously suggesting that the labouring class makes up a separate world with its own cultural context. Leapor’s poem communicates the awareness that labourers are not just objects who perform a function in an economic system, and that they have a culture among themselves even though it is related to and defined by socioeconomic structures in which they have to be labouring classes. By subverting the cultural meaning of the beehive metaphor, Leapor calls attention to the assumptions people are making about the labouring class as a symbol of a sector of the economy, as a sign of illiteracy, low education, poverty, and underdeveloped artistic understanding. Leapor’s poetry highlights

the assumptions that are being made between seeing a member of the labouring class and what a labouring class is imagined to represent. This image of the labourer as a by-product of an economic system confirms labourers were a conceptually established social class within upper class consciousness and Leapor's poetry expresses the idea that since a labouring class has been established, the next step is to recognize that it has a culture. In the poem, the poet is tasked with showing people from outside her culture to recognize it as a full culture and not just a resource for labour, to show that a labouring class subject is able to reflect on the world—not just on the labour she does within that world—and does so without transcending her situated position. In this way, the poem provides an account of a labourer's world coupled with a critical, reflexive mediation on the practices that constitute that subject position, which is a conversation with the very idea of subjectivity.

Leapor stages an occupation within the fable form and slowly unravels its rules, roles, and truths in order to expose the fallibility of the traditional fable. Leapor shows how famous fables, authors, and truisms have all changed in meaning, shape, place, and direction throughout history. One of her examples that best illustrates this was her take on Aesop's fable about the fox and the hen. This narrative, its characters, its morals and knowledge of human behavior no longer has a cultural job; its moral and truisms are not relevant in eighteenth-century culture and society. But, as we seen with Leapor's "The Sow and the Peacock," she completely remakes the fable, reinventing it into something that is relevant to everyday life in the eighteenth century. My belief that Leapor did have cultural authority in the eighteenth-century is strengthened by the appearance of engraver Thomas Bewick's 1776 woodcut devoted entirely to her poem "The Sow and the

Peacock.” An illustration to compliment her fable by another figure with cultural authority at the time, legitimizes Leapor as a writer of modern fables and a teller of hard truths. Leapor elaborates the symbolic power of livestock animals to reflect on the role of human judgement in economic and cultural behavior by showing that symbolic orders of animals in a rural environment can be drastically different from those of the city and noble estates. Leapor uses her animals to accomplish many things, of which the most important is how her poems show that a labouring-class woman is capable not only of subjective experiences, but of conveying those experiences through her writing as well. Moreover, Leapor’s ability to write on the subject of taste in a language equivalent to the elite is not because of her knowledge of upper-class economies or because she was educated and cultivated to a certain extent by the elite, though her discussions of taste may very well be related to them. Rather, Leapor seems to be saying that the ability to invoke the language of taste to describe human experience is not determined by a person’s wealth or social status, because it is a subject in which everyone can be an expert.

Conclusion: The Enlightened Woman of Labour

The consensus among scholars of eighteenth-century labouring-class poets that I have discussed here is that these writers were often very skilled at manipulating conventional literary tropes and forms in ways that would allow them to negotiate the terms of literary authority and to speak out against gender and class oppression. While I do agree that Leapor is definitely an expert when it comes to manipulating and dismantling traditional literary conventions, I believe her writing aims beyond wanting to explore and expose the oppression and injustices she faced daily as a female labourer. These kinds of issues (domesticity, institution of marriage, social status, gender) are inherent to her material conditions, and speaking from a position within such constructions her writing will inevitably comment on gendered customs and will punish class pretensions. I do not mean to reduce the complexity of other labouring-class writers who also practiced with great skill and talent to subvert dominant literary forms and make their own social and ideological critiques from a lower-class perspective. What I am saying, and what I hope this dissertation has demonstrated, is that Leapor's poetry shows her as a writer and thinker who has already done the work of understanding how her body acts and is acted upon, and that Leapor uses her writing about the labour she performs in order to articulate her knowledge of how she is situated within her society and what kinds of things can come from that materially embedded position.

I began this dissertation with an exploration of the nail's categorical distinction between social classes based on physical wealth and how this reflected the emerging social class system. I also made the claim that the nail's narrative reflects the transformation of the labouring-class woman writer into a labouring poet subject, and that

this ultimately means that the same nail “of no more than common size” that was speaking to Mira is also telling that us we need to reimagine what we believe the labouring-class tradition to be. If we examine the origins of the categorical distinction between gold, silver, copper, and iron, we find the great poet Ovid and his *Metamorphoses*. Reference to this text tells us we are dealing with ideas about transformation of all kinds; but, the text is of particular interest to us when we take into account Leapor’s use of a story-telling nail as Ovid’s collection is also an accumulation of stories, some by animals and others by objects. In his text, Ovid wrote of the “Ages of Man,” or the stages of human existence on earth, which he symbolically links to precious metals in the same way that Leapor’s nail does. Ovid defined the four stages of the degradation of humanity as gold (the prelapsarian age), silver (the fall from paradise and onset of labour), bronze (hard work and daily toil), and iron, and divides human history into these stages to explore the meaning of human existence and whether or not there was a benevolent god operating in and governing the world.

Ovid’s text was still widely translated, imitated, and enjoyed by writers throughout the eighteenth-century. The use of metamorphosis held particular significance in Augustan poetry, with writers like Pope drawing on Ovid’s text for his fanciful productions such as “The Dunciad.” In 1717, Samuel Garth published “Metamorphoses,” a collection of texts by writers including Pope and Dryden. In the eighteenth-century version of *Metamorphoses*, each of these authors undertook and published their own respective translations of Ovid’s books and passages, creating stories of transformation and metamorphoses into one, reflecting the tumultuous social and economic

transformations of their period. The most interesting aspect to this kind of transformative literature is that in Ovid's account of the successive ages of humanity, he explains it as a progress from when humans enjoyed a nearly divine existence in a golden age to his current age of iron, and this stage is the age of the writer and philosopher who is sentenced to constantly think about the meaning of human existence. This provides us with a clue as to who the nail means when it says, "you poets." By drawing from Ovid's texts and his stages of humanity, we can see that it is not a category of labouring-class poets, it is a universal category of labouring poets. Leapor is not depreciating the value of her writing by equating its value to that of rusty nails'. She is, however, situating herself and her work among great literary figures and appropriating some of their cultural power. From this, we find that nail's use of precious metals also serves as a metaphor for the generation of an embodied, gendered critical subjectivity who knows things that others do not about how the world operates and is organized.

Leapor's writing demonstrates how she used things at her disposal, such as tools and everyday objects, to grapple with the question of whether humans are divinely created in the image of god and born with predetermined purpose, or if humans are artificially created, always being shaped and formed to fit into specific historical and cultural contexts. Such an approach to her poetry reveals that Leapor consciously identified as a kind of cultural materialist. The stories told by her objects and nonhuman animals show readers how individuals are shaped and influenced by their material conditions. As these objects traverse geographical and ideological borders, despite their lack of agency to choose the course of their own life, their life histories constantly change

as they physically move from one social space to the next, acquiring new purposes, meanings, and values. The objects Leapor writes about have their own histories and cultural identities, and the kind of self that these objects become through the process of relating their stories presents readers with a material model of a labouring subjectivity that is powerfully subjected as well as autonomous and resistant. Indeed, Leapor's poetry shows an inward mental activity or an active interior life that was not generally seen as a possibility among the labouring masses and demonstrates a notion of self-consciousness, of being self-made or self-actualized, while she assumes a certain responsibility for creating herself out of the raw materials and opportunities provided to her, interrogating and rejecting some roles, while trying on and individualizing others. As such, her poetry lends itself to a broader perspective on the world, and reflects how she, as a labouring subject, produces herself as not just a labourer or author, but as a full subject.

As many scholars of Leapor have noted, Leapor was content with her labour; she understood that she did not have to give up her labour for poetry, not seeing any conflict between a labouring body and a poet's body. Instead of using her cultural value as a labouring poet to escape her social position like Stephen Duck, Leapor bridges the two worlds. She does not posit subject conditions, nor does she propose a move from labourer to subject, but she does show a move from labourer to labouring subject. As a labouring subject, she has shown that she has achieved a level of subjectivity, writing about herself and the world she inhabits. But her labour is still connected to her, as it will always be linked to her subject position. Leapor was writing a poetry very different from Duck's; he was more interested in social mobility, while Leapor was more interested in advocating

for the labouring class, and to position writing about labour as a way to claim labouring class subjectivity. The general notion of labouring-class poetry is that it is poetry about labour that a class performs. However, Leapor's poetry is not just about labour, but rather it presents speech about labour in ways that allows her to enter a discourse about more than labour. To argue that Leapor's writing is not about transcending labour is to suggest a radical expansion of the definition of labouring-class poetry to poetry that encompasses everything—labour, subjectivity, spirituality, human understanding, social and cultural forms of representation, economic progression—from a labouring class perspective.

Leapor's talking objects and nonhuman animals tell us a lot about the anxiety and tension a woman like Leapor might have felt while trying to situate her own thoughts about herself as a poet and about authorship as a form of useful labour within the conventions of a literary establishment that distances itself from the very notion of labour that she means to discuss. Leapor was writing from within a culture that believed the only bodies capable of intellectual work and literary creation were idle, and most often male, bodies; and this is one of the reasons why her writing is of critical importance. At a time when a position of privilege was required in order to have the leisure of writing, reading literature, and achieving higher states of knowledge, Leapor shows that it is possible to do those from any subject position as she engages with key economic debates, leading scientific theories, theological doubts and important philosophical discussions of the period, and all interacting with some of the period's greatest thinkers including Descartes, Newton, Locke, and early engagement with ideas later theorized by Adam Smith. Leapor witnessed a proliferation of masculine enlightenment values, most of which bolstered a

gendered understanding of the Cartesian mind/body split. According to Korsmeyer, the result for many epistemologies is that “the rational knower is a male body, a hierarchy in accordance with the elevation of mind over body, of reason over sense, of man over beast” (30). This binary conceptual structure works to elevate the male body over the female body and with masculine traits over those designated as feminine, and therefore “a comparative theoretical neglect of everything that is categorized with the inferior terms” (31). Instead of reproducing this dualist ontology, Leapor challenges it by developing and disseminating an alternative model of knowledge production.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the upper-and-middle classes sought to distance themselves from hardships of productive labour as a conclusive sign of their social status. Generally, leisured individuals were people who did not need to labour in order to survive in their world. However, their anxiety to distinguish themselves from the lower classes became a desire to escape the materiality of their labour by wasting conspicuously both time and goods. Because of her gendered and classed position, Leapor is doubly marginalized. But her writing demonstrates that she had come to a certain understanding that her body is always already marked by her embodiment. Although this is a mark that designates her body as a passive receptacle for knowledge, incapable of high forms of intellectual engagement, Leapor also knows that such a mark is a social fallacy. For if she knows she is a labouring-class woman having grand ideas, following lofty philosophical pursuits, and she can write them down to construct new forms of literary discourse, then she is also aware that alternative epistemological strategies—particularly those with a feminine orientation toward the world—do exist, and they can be articulated and put into

practice. Leapor's wants us to "believe [her], it is true" (Leapor, "The Fox and the Hen" 19) when she claims that women and individuals of marginalized social groups can and do achieve higher modes of thinking and understanding, and they do so from materially embedded positions. Leapor's work demonstrates that she had the cultural scope necessary for knowledge formation and genuine epistemological frameworks, contrary to Enlightenment beliefs which favor masculine ways of knowing that are an effect of spiritual transcendence where one had to have a male body in order to gain knowledge and transcend the senses. For Leapor, knowledge is grounded in material things and their contexts. As her claim to a taste-based knowledge indicates, knowledge is not the product of biological differences between sexes, but just like taste demands that an actual self be engaged in the present material world, so too does knowledge have a real and distinct material presence. In fact, Leapor's poetry seems to be saying that knowledge is not simply acquired through thinking, but by action, by making, by movement, and most importantly, by the living body.

Leapor's material approach to forms of epistemology directly challenges the conventional orthodoxy that leisure, its forms and practices, can only be performed by idle bodies with free time. However, leisure is not just a matter of form and practice; it is a question of how those forms and practices (reading, writing, intellectual debate, garden strolls, commodity consumption) are represented in relation to power. In their effort to distance themselves from the lower classes, the elite classes distance themselves from manual labour and physical forms of work. These classes believed time, physical capital, and idle, generally male, bodies were necessary to produce high forms of poetry or other

forms of intellectual discourse. The belief that the idle male body is the source of knowledge is an image that has been represented throughout history. From our ideas of the first stoic Greek philosophers, to Issac Newton discovering gravity while sitting under an apple tree, and in art forms like Auguste Rodin sculpture entitled “The Thinker,” which is a statue of a man sitting on a rock deep in thought and it is commonly recognized as the image to represent philosophy. Connecting the idle male body to leisure also connected it to knowledge production, and thus the elite’s fantasy of the idle thinker is born out of an attempt to portray thinking as not labour. Although Leapor may not have the time and physical capital like the leisured classes believed was necessary to write high forms of poetry, she shows that her body does not need to be idle in order to have big thoughts and ideas. Whereas Leapor may require the freedom from her daily duties to engage in the manual labours of writing, she can think about and generate serious forms of poetry while she sweeps the floor, washes dishes, or darns linens. Her body can perform intellectual labours while engaging in manual ones, and arguably, this shows that she can generate the fruits of leisure while labouring. The literary elite have tried to define thinking as leisure, but according to Leapor, thinking is an intellectual labour, albeit a more refined form of labour. Leapor shows us that higher thought and all its pleasures is, in fact, still a kind of labour, and one that coexists happily with other kinds. The mind, like the body, is a working thing, and the subject is defined by their combined labours.

Recent studies of women and eighteenth-century consumer practices by scholars including Amanda Vickery and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace has linked the concept of

leisure to female practices of taste and consumption. Upper- and middle-class women were expected to perform their leisured position, and one way of doing this was to consume commodities and to adorn their bodies with materials proper to their class in a similar way that Leapor describes the figure of Clione in her poem “A Hymn to the Morning.” The social rules associated with leisure channeled leisure practices into the activity of consumption, but this ultimately suggests that leisure is, in fact, a form of work that involves the material body. The woman of leisure must consume material goods in order to perform her leisured lifestyle; moreover, she must accumulate, monitor, and continuously refine considerable amounts of emotional intelligence and expend significant emotional labour in the same way a woman of Leapor’s status would have to exert emotional labour in order to navigate the cultural spaces of the literary and social elite. The leisured female body that adopts practices and forms of leisure by way of consumption is in fact a labouring body, and therefore the embodiment of leisure is another form of labour that can be exploited and accounted for.

As the upper classes distanced themselves from the corporeal body and labour, leisure became the material basis for a separation between those who had to physically labour and did not have free time, choice, or much life satisfaction and those who needed to visually distinguish themselves from the low vulgar forms of society and people. However, the anxiety upper and middle classes faced with their desire to transcend materiality merely led to a new understanding of labour as leisure. By embracing practices of leisure these classes actually end up alienating themselves from their own forms of labour. The refusal to see their own labour results in their inability to recognize

the meaning and value of their labour, instead leaving them with insatiable urges to consume, not objects or commodities themselves, but the labourer's alienated labour embodied within them. One aspect Enlightenment thinkers have in common is that they seem perpetually unsatisfied and anxious, especially when it comes to discussions of materiality and labour. The all-knowing male body is afraid to embrace its own materiality and instead desires to rise above, to expand beyond the limited confines of the material self and into the idealized self instead. It is the rational male that is not content with his actual creaturely body, not the female labouring body. Leapor's poetry recognizes that masculine approaches to knowing undercut any potential theoretical advances that can come from different ways of knowing, particularly embodied forms of knowledge from those in marginalized social positions. In fact, Leapor's poetry is especially important to us right now as we negotiate our own shifting cultural and economic climate with the emergence of a knowledge-based economy.

A shift away from an industrial-based economy to a knowledge-based one will inevitably change the way value is converted into power, and literary texts like Leapor's anthology can play a central role in helping us negotiate these kinds of fundamental shifts within the academic institution by showing readers how to understand, claim, resist, and challenge the varying forms and values of their labours. Leapor's collection of poetry ultimately theorizes about human labour; it probes questions like what is labour, who or what labours, and how and what forms of labour can be measured and valued. Similar to the problem eighteenth-century discourses of taste encountered with regard to taste's capacity to encompass both subjective and collective responses, Leapor's philosophy of

labour seems to attempt to reconcile measurable forms of labour and value (generally in economic terms, a form that translates into profits or wages) with subjective forms of labour and value (literary labours, including affective and emotional labours like we saw between Jennens and Leapor). Whereas there are methods that provide empirical evidence for measurements of gustatory taste in the same way that we can measure and account for manual labours, there is no fundamental guideline or methodology that can be produced to refute or confirm some forms of labour. In chapter 2, I provided evidence of this, showing how Leapor is aware that she has a much vaster body of labour that serves entirely different interests and purposes than those of economic importance. The body of labour Leapor devotes to her workplace (as a domestic servant or as caretaker of her father's cottage) is different from the body of labour she devotes to herself and her writing, and her knowledge of her literary labours and its value is what allows her to resist her literary value from being extracted by the institution of English literature. In fact, Leapor shows how learning and knowledge construction are forms of labour, and in the process, she redefines what her period thought labour to be.

More recent scholarship by feminist scholars including Donna Haraway and Lisa Jean Moore has developed a focus on articulating alternative ways of knowing, particularly embodied forms of knowledge, that helps us to dismantle the academic hierarchy of value that claims a labouring-class woman's texts are not a form of serious poetry, and therefore do not contain useful knowledge. As I discussed in chapter 3, Leapor knew the power of literary discourse lies in its ability to provide legitimacy for certain kinds of knowledge while undermining others; and, she was also aware of its

ability to create subject positions and turn people into objects that can be controlled and regulated. Similarly, today literary discourse itself is turned into an object that is controlled by academic hierarchies of value that claim critical theory is where real intellectual work takes place. The belief that ancient classics must always remain the primary authority in determining which literary texts should be considered a true standard of excellence in English writing is a kind of academic attitude that generates distinct categories like the canon, and approach literary texts as objects to be studied, as an anthropological specimen waiting to be interpreted by those with the authority to have ideas. For example, prior to the end of the twentieth century, critics and academics, generally male, trained in works such as the classics argued that the kind of work that Pope produces is considered high quality while the kind of work that Leapor produces is drivel in comparison, when, as we now know, this definitely is not the case. But, as Leapor's writing teaches us, figures of literary and cultural authority panic when alternative forms of writing and of knowing appear, and in response they deploy hierarchies of value in an effort to preserve cultural capital, seen here as traditional ways of reading literature.

Leapor was theorizing about forms of situated knowledge over two hundred years before it entered academic discourse in the 20th century through feminist theories of embodied ways of knowing. The importance of this is not to raise Leapor up and argue that she should be in the literary canon, but it is a critical reading that calls into question the idea of certain writers writing in a way that is recognized as having value and others falling by the wayside. Leapor's authorial voice is not just part of a literary tradition but is

a voice emerging from a broader labouring-class culture defined by a particular gendered and critical consciousness. Furthermore, her poetry is not just an object that should be studied through a theoretical lens; it should be understood as a theory of situated knowledge itself transmitting ideas from its own materially embedded position, teaching us how to be proactive subjects and meaningful agents of change in not only the academic institution of English literature, but perhaps also toward creating a more equitable or humane economy than the preceding capital-based one. Leapor's poetry lives on as a labouring thing—changing, growing, and theorizing as living humans do—inviting its readers to contemplate the complex components of being an embodied thinker, and to reflect on high concepts such as taste, labour, subjectivity, epistemology, literary and cultural authority, patriarchy, morality, and (living) matter itself.

Appendix A

“The Ten Penny-Nail” (71)

'Twas past the Date of sav'ry Noon,
And downwards roll'd the radiant Sun,
When all (except us rhyming Sinners)
Had rosted, boil'd, and eat their Dinners;
In my great Chair I sat to pout,
And beat my weary Brains about;
About (what did not much avail)
Amanda's Riddle of the Nail * ;
When *Somnus* took me by Surprise,
And put his Finger in my Eyes:
'Twas He, for Poets never nod
Without the Influence of a God:
I dream'd of what—Why, you shall hear,
Good People all, I pray draw near,
Methought there lay before my Eyes
A Nail of more than common Size;
'Twas one that nails' our Garden Door,
And oft my Petticoat has tore:
When sudden (it is true, my Friend)
It rear'd itself, and stood an end,
And tho' no Mouth I cou'd descry,
It talk'd as fast as you or I:
And thus began—As I am told
' You Poets seldom deal in Gold;
' That's not the Price of empty Songs,
' But to Sir *Thrifty Gripe* belongs;
' Bright Silver is Sir *Wary's* Claim,
' And Copper for the lab'ring Dame;
' If so (that each may have their due)
' We rusty Nails' belong to you;
' I therefore ask as my Desert
' (I hope you bear a grateful Heart)
' You write my Life—and be it shown
' What strange Adventures I have known.

I must confess I was not made.
' So early quite as *Adam's* Spade;
' Yet many Ages I have known,
' And double with my Labours grown:
' I occupy'd, the first of all,
' A worthy Post at *Gloomy-Hall*,
' Where I, with seven hundred more,
' Were hammer'd in the spacious Door:

' And there had haply stuck till now,
' Had not old *Simon* broke his Plough;
' Who seeing none but us at hand,
' And knowing us a trusty Band,
' Me with the Pincers sore oppress'd,
' And drew me headlong from the rest:
' My lazy Life, alas! was done,
' And now I toil'd from Sun to Sun:
' None pity me, and none relieve,
' Till Fortune gave me a Reprieve:
' My Master broke his Plough again,
' And I from thence was dragg'd amain.
' To *Celia's* Chamber next I came,
' And bore a Glass with curious Frame;
' To whom the lovely Nymphs repair:
' There *Delia* spread her shining Hair;
' All smiling there was *Claudia* seen,
' And *Thalia* ty'd her Ribbands green.
' At last my Mistress drew too nigh,
' And some ill Genius standing by,
' Drove me directly in her Eye.
' Then I was banish'd from her Train,
' Hurl'd on a Dunghill with Disdain.

' But idle long I did not lie,
' For old Sir *Gripus* walking by,
' Who held it was a crying Sin,
' To trample o'er and slight a Pin.
' And that they well deserve a Jail,
' Who proudly scorn a rusty Nail,
' Carry'd me home, and made secure
' With me—a stately oaken Door.
' Through the strong Boards he made me go,
' To keep his Daughter from a Beau;
But she (what is't but Love can do?)
' With *Aqua-fortis* eat me through:
' A Cripple now, and useless quite,
' I'm banish'd from the chearful Light:
' And all folk despise me that behold;
' At last I to a Smith was sold,
' Who had Compassion on my Pain,
' And brought me to myself again.

' To *Jeff'ry Bouze* I next belong,

' Where sparkling Ale was clear and strong;
' One Vault, more precious than the rest,
' Was stow'd with Hogsheads of the best:
' And having lately lost the Key,
' He fast'ned up the Door with me:
' I stood a faithful Centry there,
' To guard the choice inspiring Beer
' From thirsty *Bacchanalian* Rage,
' Till his Son *Guzzle* was of Age:
' At length the Youth an Entrance found,
' Tho' stoutly I maintain'd my Ground;
' Yet all my Strength wou'd not avail,
' For how cou'd one poor single Nail
' Maintain a dang'rous Post (you know)
' Against whole Legions of the Foe;
' Who well consid'ring Life's a Bubble,
' And drinking is the Cure of Trouble,
' And more—that he again could brew
' Before the Date of Twenty two;
' While e'er that time the present Ale
' Might happen to be flat or stale;
' He came himself with fifty more,
' And wisely drank it out before.

' It wou'd be tedious now to tell
' What to your humble Slave befel,
' Amongst a rude mechanick Band,
' Till Fortune gave me to your Hand:
' Now if a proper Post I knew,
' I'd gladly be of use to you;
' But you resolve to hide no Pelf,
' And choose to walk abroad yourself:
' But, *Mira*, these are dang'rous Times,
' I'd have you fasten up your Rhymes;
' And 'tis the best thing you can do,
' To nail up Pens and Paper too:
' Do this and get thee gone to spinning,
' Or wisely dearn your Father's Linen."
This said—a Cart with rumbling Sound
Came by, and shook the trembling Ground;
The Vision vanish'd from her Sight,
And *Mira* waken'd in a Fright.

“The Inspir'd Quill. occasioned by a Present of Crow-Pens.” (63)

To you, dear Madam, I complain,
Where wretches never sigh in vain;
But always find, if not relief,
At least compassion for their grief.

But I shou'd make my woes appear,
Before I claim a gentle tear;
My tale is something odd, 'tis true;
Yet sure 'twill credit find with you.

The sage Pythagoras, you know,
Asserted many years ago,
That when or man or woman dies,
The soul to some new mansion flies?
If so, Belinda, now so fair
May range the woods a sullen bear:
Likewise the courtly Bellamour,
The lady's darling to be sure,
Tho' he in sparkling laces glow,
The pattern of a perfect beau;
When he puts off the human shape,
May strut a monkey or an ape.

For me who now to you indite,
Whose talent chiefly is to write;
What form it was, I do not know,
I wore two thousand years ago:
The being that I first remember,
Was a morning of December,
But not December last (I ween)
No—many years have past between;
I found myself a wealthy squire,
And seated by a parlour-fire,
A fine estate of mellow ground,
In cash full thirty thousand pound,
Two hundred oxen in a stall,
And ten lean servants at my call,
An ancient house well built but low,
Behind of oaks an ample row,
A court before—without much state,
And three gaunt mastiffs at the gate;
All these had I—a happy knave
As you may think—but with your leave

A wretched usurer was I,
With haggard jaw and eager eye,
That starv'd amidst unwieldy store,
And lost my life in search of more.

This Pluto saw, and bid me go
Into the carcase of a beau,
To taste of pleasure and of pains,
With slender purse and shallow brains,
My wig behind was smartly ty'd,
My silver box with snuff supply'd:
On books I seldom love to pore,
But sung and danc'd, and aptly swaore;
Where-e'er I came the ladies smil'd;
This call'd me Pug—and t'other Child:
To please and to address the fair,
Was all my business and my care;
But now gold began to fly,
And sure destruction hover'd nigh:
As last to limbo was I led,
From whence the struggling spirit fled.

Almeria's lap-dog next I grew,
And wore a coat of glossy hue,
Caress'd and courted ev'ry day,
At ev'ning by her side I lay:
Her smiles were always bent on me
(The happiest days that e'er I see)
But, Oh, as by a river-side,
I walk'd along with short-liv'd pride,
A cruel foot-boy threw me in,
And laugh'd as tho' it was no sin.

Once more to gain a human face,
I step'd into a Lawyer's case:
This station pleas'd me wond'rous well,
And in a trice I learn'd to spell,
Cou'd read old Coke with prying eyes,
Explain, distinguish, and advise,
Talk Latin to a good degree;
As Admittendo Custode,
Eject, Extendi: and my fee:
'Tis true I scorn'd to rob or kill,
But not to cheat or forge a will:

In jointures I cou'd split a hair,
And make it turn against the heir:
I spar'd no widow for her tears,
No orphan for his tender years:
My maxim was—'Get money, man,
get money, where and how you can:'
Thus through the stage of life I run,
(For ah! my race was quickly done)
And still preserv'd my ears and nose,
In spite of venial sins like those.

My next disguise too well you know,
Degraded to a simple crow;
Both cold and hunger doom'd to bear,
And hover in the limpid air,
Till on a day a spiteful hind,
With dreadful arms and bloody mind,
Vow's quick destruction to my head:
And in a moment shot me dead:
Then set my ghastly corse on high
To fright my fellows from his rye.

I now grew out of Pluto's favour,
Who grumbl'd at my late behaviour;
And vow'd (when thus his sentence ran)
I shou'd no more appear as man;
But that he wou'd confine me still
Within the compass of a quill.

My fate is hard, as you may guess,
Yet I cou'd bear it ne'er-the-less,
Wou'd you or fortune be so kind
To comfort an afflicted mind,
And take me from the hated cell,
Where yesterday you bid me dwell:
For oh, I guess—nay more I know it,
That my new mistress is a poet;
Then how shall I who still inherit,
A tincture of the lawyer's spirit;
How shall I bear from time to time
To scrawl unprofitable rhyme?
To live for years and ne'er behold
The presence of enchanting gold,
Yet scribble on—besides, alack,

I fear she'll quickly break my back.

Then since my pedigree you know:
(dear Madam) Ah some pity show,
And recommend me to a place;
For sure there's mercy in your face,
To some attorney let me go,
For there my talents suit (you know)
Heroicks I shall write but ill;
But I'm a doctor at a bill,
At flights of fancy very dull;
But I can form receipts at full.

The favour that I ask of you,
(Have pity when the wretched sue)
Is your good word or what is better,
A recommendatory letter?
And if I'm happy in your grace,
I think I need not doubt a place.

“The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy” (197)

AH! cruel fortune, fickle, Dame,
Alas! where am I now?
With me let Mortals curse thy name,
And shun they tempting brow.

Directed to a fairer dome,
From Lud's great town I came:
Contented left my native home,
To serve a gentle dame.

There fondly hoping to endure,
I blest the happy change,
And rested in her Smile secure:
For who would wish to range?

But she, alas! the cruel she!
Has cast me from her arms;
And not a hope remains for me,
And my degraded charms.

Was it for this the artist made
These shining robes for me,
In hopes to please some beauteous maid
Or nymph of high degree?

Must I forever here remain,
And in Oblivion sleep?
Some poet's God, oh! ease my pain,
Or give me eyes to weep!

Some friend in pity tear away
This robe of shining hue;
And like my fate, be my array,
A gown of dirty blue.

And thou, great Saturn, foe to rhyme!
Be thou a friend to me:
Preserve me in this dang'rous time:
From metre keep me free.

Should Mira stain my snowy page,
Do thou compose her head.
Let thy cold opium spoil her rage
And turn her pen to lead.

“The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa” (198)

Slaves will be heard, and so will I.
Tho' princes shun the hated cry;
Yet Parthenissa's gentle ear,
At least, will not refuse to hear.
Tho' I'm discarded from her train,
To grace the cottage of a swain;
In Darkness doom'd to curse my fate,
And serve a Mistress that I hate;
Yet no invectives will I throw
On you, whose bounty caus'd my woe.
I only ask—(and now you look aside)
The favour's great to me, 'tis true;
But sure it means no harm to you.
Dear Madam, only take your ink; and then
Move o'er my leaves your easy hand:
Then sprinkle on a little sand:
This done, return me when you please,

And I from hence will live at ease;
Nor once, repining at my cell,
With darkness, dirt, and Mira, dwell.

“Parthenissa’s Answer to the Pocket-Book’s Soliloquy. [Written in the same; and returned to Mrs. Leapor next day]” By Susanna Jennens (199)

Can Mira’s pen offend thy pride?
Insulting Varlet! come:
Then mine shall scall they swelling side,
And send thee raving home.

Yes, minion, since thou can’st declines
The honours of her hand,
And fawningly solict mine:
Enjoy thy wise demand.

Already would’st thou fly? But stay:
Not yet you pass my door.
‘Tis true I have not much to say;
Yet long to plague thee more.

How undeserved thy happy fate!
Till thou hast learnt to prize
True merit planted in a state
That blinds thy partial eyes.

Oh! spare your lead: it hurts my page.
Hold out, avenging pow’r!
Thou well deserv’st, if my rage
Should keep thee here this hour.

Dids’t thou not insolently dare
To spurn at Mira’s lays?
So may each despiser fare;
That envies her the bays!

To mortify thy foolish pride,
That stands so plain confess’d,
Take a friend’s word: thy gay outside
Is tinsel, at the best.

Then boast no more thy gaudy cloaths,
Nor once presume to think,

Thou can'st deserve, in verse or prose,
A drop of Mira's ink.

But go, and humbly sue thy peace:
Then, if she can forgive,
And deign to touch thy vacant leaves,
They may for ages live.

What better could thy fate decree,
What more ambition hope?
Know'st thou who 'twas accepted thee?
The successor of Pope.

The pitying muses, at his death,
The drooping world to cheer,
Reclaim'd his fleeting tuneful breath,
And kindly fix'd it here.

Who would have thought it? Let me go:
For pity let me pray.
So hasty friend?—Release me, oh!
'Tis cruel to delay.

“The Genius in Disguise” (74)

As I *Fidelia* and my Sire,
Sat musing o'er a smoky Fire,
We heard a Knocking at the Door,
Rise, something is the Matter sure.
The little Turret seem'd to quake, 5
The Shelves, the Chairs and Tables shake;
Fidelia cries, O, what's the Matter?
And *Mira's* Teeth began to chatter:
The frighted Door (as what could choose)
Flew open (pray believe the Muse) 10
A hollow Voice for Entrance calls,
And soon – Although the dirty Walls
Were stain'd with Ignorance and Sin
Yet *Mira's Genius* ventur'd in,
Not in a Cherub's Form enshrin'd, 15
Nor in the shape of human kind:
But Locks and Hinges round him glow,
In Figure like a neat Buroe;
Like Brambles in a thorny Gap

Stood *Mira*'s Hair beneath her Cap: 20
Her frightened Senses gone astray,
She bent her Knees in act to pray;
But the presuming Priest drew near
As void of Piety as Fear,
And by its Side undaunted stood, 25
And wou'd persuade us it was Wood:
With Rev'rence then we did presume
To place him in the little Room;
The Priest excluded with the rest,
The Stranger *Mira* thus address'd, 30
(Tho' shaking with Surprise and Fear)
'O say what Power sent thee here,
'Not Fortune, for I ne'er cou'd see
'As yet her Favours bent on me:
'Nor Chance although we often find 35
'She governs most of human kind;
'Or can, against the Maid's Desire,
'Throw Madam's Caudle in the Fire;
'Can light a Candle, or can miss,
'She never brought a thing like this. 40

This said, pale *Mira* gazing stood,
And thus reply'd the seeming Wood;
'Canst thou behold me and not find
'The Picture of the Giver's Mind?
'Behold the Lock and shining Key, 45
'That ne'er its Mistress shall betray,
'Not blemish'd with a Spot of Rust,
'And always faithful to its Trust.

'The rest may be to you consign'd,
'For in this narrow Space you'll find 50
'No Emblem large enough to fit
'Her Bounty, Judgment, and her Wit.

'But, *Mira*, since I have begun,
'The Thread of my Discourse shall run,
'Explaining how I am to you 55
'A Monitor and Table too.
'My hollow Spaces you may fill
'With all your Verses good and ill;
'One small one for your Wit may do,

‘But then your Faults will take up two. 60
‘And from the rest I pray exclude
‘One sacred Place for Gratitude:
‘And what our Patron yours and mine
‘Shall to my trusty Care consign,
‘For those lov’d Strangers I’ll secure 65
‘The Closest with its tiny Door.

‘And now I’ve prattl’d long, my Dear,
‘Yet you are list’ning still to hear,
‘Expecting that I shou’d supply 70
‘At once Advice and Prophecy;
‘But that’s not right for me nor you
‘To dive so deeply – tho’, ‘tis true,
‘Without Divining I can see
‘You’ll ne’er deserve the Gift of me: 75
‘More wou’d you know – why, may be then
‘Within these Mornings nine or ten,
‘Propitious Jet may trudge before,
‘And lead his Mistress to your Door;
‘And when the Sun (whose distant Wheels 80
‘But faintly warm the icy Fields)
‘Shall gild your Cot with brighter Ray,
‘I hope to see her ev’ry Day.

‘But turn away thy stedfast Eyes,
‘That stare so ghastly with Surprise: 85
‘Go seek your Pillow and be still,
‘And dream of me or what you will.

‘This said (which *Mira* hop’d was true)
‘The Lid shut up, and cries Adieu.”
Then gave a Crack, and spoke no more,
And all was silent as before.

“A Hymn to the Morning” (15)

See the lovely Morning rise,
See her Glories paint the Skies,
Half o’er the reviving Globe
Gaily spreads her Saffron Robe:
See the Hills with Flower’s crown’d

And the Valleys Laughing round.

Mira to Aurora sings,
Hi in Air—and tunes her Throat
To a soft and merry Note;
The Goldfinch and the Linnet join:
Hail Aurora, Nymph divine.

See Clione's gilded Car,
See it blazes from afar;
Here the fair One bends her Way,
Balmy Zephyrs round her play;
Now she lights upon the Vale,
Fond to meet the western Gale.

May this artless Praise be thine,
Soft Clione half divine.
See her snowy Hand she waves,
Silent stand her waiting Slaves;
And while they guard the Silver Reins,
She wanders lonely o'er the Plains.

See those Cheeks of beauteous Dye,
Lovely as the dawning Sky,
Innocence that ne'er beguiles
Lips that wear eternal Smiles:
Beauties to the rest unknown,
Shine in her and her alone.

Now the Rivers smoother flow,
Now the op'ning Roses glow,
The Woodbine twines her odorous Charms
Round the Oak's supporting Arms:
Lillies paint the dewy Ground,
And Ambrosia breathes around.

Come, ye Gales that fan the Spring;
Zephyr, with thy downy Wing,
Gently waft to Mira's Breast
Health, Content, and balmy Rest.
Far, O far from hence remain

Sorrow, Care and sickly Pain.

Thus sung Mira to her Lyre,
Till the idle Numbers tire:
Ah! Sappho sweeter sings, I cry,
And the spiteful Rocks reply,
(Responsive to the jarring Strings)
Sweeter—Sappho sweeter sings.

“The Muses Embassy” (215)

The Muses, as some Authors say,
Who found their Empire in much decay,
Since Prior’s Lute was stopp’d by Death,
And Pope resign’d his tuneful Breath,
Fair Iris call’d, and bid her go,
And search the busy World below:
But chief among the female Kind
They bid her look, if she could find
(Altho’ her Journey should be long)
The fruitful Parent of a Song.
The careful Goddess took her Round,
And Travel’d long: At last she found,
Beyond the very Skirts of Fame,
An humble, but a fertile Dame,
Who brought forth Infants, two and two;
But such no Creature ever knew:
With Scars and Botches blemish’d o’er;
Some hump’d behind, and some before;
And Cripples in the last Degree,
Some ne’er a Foot, and some had three.
The puzzled Goddess hardly knew,
Nor guess’d at what she’d best to do;
Or still on Earth to let them lie,
Or bear the Pygmies to the Sky,
To shame the wretched Parent more,
And set Parnassus in a Roar.
Thus stood Iris, full of Care,
Till came by a gentle Fair,
Who on the crippl’d Infants smil’d,

And pity'd each neglected Child.
The doubting Goddess lik'd the Dame;
Inquired of her Place and Name;
And did not scruple to declare,
She'd trust the Infants to her Care,
To form their Bodies, and their Minds,
Till they should flourish into Rhymes;
And for the Charge, she durst to say,
The Muses would be sure to pay.
This done, she bid a short Adieu,
And to her Hill the Goddess flew,
Where sat the Muses in a Ring,
And in the midst their laurel'd King.
In brief fair Iris told her Tale,
And what she found on yonder Vale;
But to conform them into Rule,
She set the wayward Brats to School.
'To whom?' the tuneful Virgins cry'd;
To Parthenissa, she reply'd.
Much Wonder thro' the Circle ran,
Till Thalia rose, and thus began:
To Parthenissa! cries the Dame;
I'm not a Stranger to her Name:
Nor had I sent, if you must know,
Swift Iris to the World below,
The drowsy Nation to explore,
But to enhance her Fame the more.
Now, to the World let it be known,
She has a Daughter of her own.
Then from Amaranthine Bowers,
Spangled with immortal Flowers,
She brought the Babe,—Polhymnia smil'd,
And each, by turns, salute the Child.
Hail! fair Mortal, cries the Ring:
Hail! replies their laurel'd King.
Welcome to our blissful Bowers,
Fields of ever-blooming Flowers!
Here for ever mayst thou shine,
Beauteous Darling of the Nine!

“The Delicate Hen” (212)

To a Lady who had told the Author, she thought her in Love with a certain Person, by her talking so much of him, tho not in his Commendation.

Not lately, but some Years ago,
When Aesop was alive (you know)
Each Pullet, Crow, and speckled Pye,
Could talk as well as you or I.
It was in this loquacious Age,
When Aesop wrote his moral Page,
That in the Garden of a Clown,
Who liv'd upon a healthful Down,
A Plat of Vetches wildly grew,
Not greatly pleasing to the View :
The Soil was barren (so, I ween,
Its Product was not mighty green) ;
And here and there a Blossom bore ;
But Thorns and Thirties many more.
It happen'd on a Summer's Day,
When Fields and Gardens all were gay,
A Brace of Pullets that were nigh,
(Pleas'd with the blue and chearful Sky)
O'er these lame Vetches took a Race,
And (like us Women) talk'd apace.
Dame Partlet bore the highest Strain;
She squeak'd, and cackled out amain :
The Subject of her Chat was this,
If Vetches boil'd, would eat amiss. wrong
Sometimes me lik'd 'em mighty well;
But foon from that Opinion fell,
And to the Negative inclin'd,
As thinking they were full of Wind;
Their Tafte insipid, harsh, and dry,
Rough to the Palate, as the Eye :
Besides, their Colour, it was dun :
And thus her Tongue at random run.
It chanc'd a list'ning Dove was near,
Who smartly answ'rd But, my Dear,
" Although you run the Vetches down,

I dare to forfeit half a Crown,
" (Nay, I suspected it at first)
" You'd dine upon them, if you durst."
She said, And Partlet made Reply,
(First turning up a sullen Eye)
Doves may be out, as well as Crows :
I'm not so keen as you suppose.
" 'Tis true, this Sort of Pulse may do
For some of the voracious Crew
But mine's a Stomach pretty nice,
" Can better relish Wheat and Rice :
" Yet if these are not to be had,
Barley may do, if 'tis not bad :
" No coarser Food ; not Vetch nor Pea,
Tho' there were Bushels in my Way :
For if no better I can find,
(Tho' you may blame my haughty Mind)
I vow and swear, as I'm a Sinner,
I'll rather go without my Dinner."

"The Fox and the Hen. A Fable." (56)

'Twas 'Twas on a fair and healthy Plain,
There liv'd a poor but honest Swain,
Had to his Lot a little Ground,
Defended by a quick-set Mound:
'Twas there he milk'd his brindled Kine,
And there he fed his harmless Swine:
His Pigeons flutter'd to and fro,
And bask'd his Poultry in a Row:
Much we might say of each of these,
As how his Pigs in Consort wheeze;
How the sweet Hay his Heifers chew,
And how the Pigeons softly coo:
But we shall wave this motley Strain,
And keep to one that's short and plain:
Nor paint the Dunghill's feather'd King,
For of the Hen we mean to sing.

A Hen there was, a strange one too,

Cou'd sing (believe me, it is true)
Or rather (as you may presume)
Wou'd prate and cackle in a Tune:
This quickly spread the Pullet's Fame,
And Birds and Beasts together came:
All mixt in one promiscuous Throng,
To visit Partlet and her Song.
It chanc'd there came amongst the Crew,
Of witty Foxes not a few:
But one more smart than all the rest,
His serious Neighbour thus address:
' What think you of this Partlet here?
' 'Tis true her Voice is pretty clear:
' Yet without pausing I can tell,
' In what much more she wou'd excel:
' Methinks she'd eat exceeding well.
This heard the list'ning Hen, as she
Sat perch'd upon a Maple-tree.

The shrewd Proposal gall'd her Pride,
And thus to *Reynard* she reply'd:
' Sir, you're extremely right I vow,
' But how will you come at me now?
' You dare not mount this lofty Tree,
' So there I'm pretty safe, you see.
' From long ago, (or Record lies)
' You Foxes have been counted wise:
' But sure this Story don't agree
' With your Device of eating me.
' For you, Dame Fortune still intends
' Some coarser Food than singing Hens:
' Besides e'er you can reach so high,
' Remember you must learn to fly.
' I own 'tis but a scurvy way,
' You have as yet to seize your Prey,
' By sculking from the Beams of Light,
' And robbing Hen-roosts in the Night:
' Yet you must keep this vulgar Trade
' Of thieving till your Wings are made.

' Had I the keeping of you tho',
' I'd make your subtle Worship know,
' We Chickens are your Betters due,
' Not fatted up for such as you:
' Shut up in Cub with rusty Chain,

' I'd make you lick your Lips in vain:
' And take a special Care, be sure,
' No Pullet shou'd come near your Door:
' But try if you cou'd feed or no,
' Upon a Kite or Carrion Crow.'
Here ceas'd the Hen. The baffl'd Beast
March'd off without his promis'd Feast.

“The Sow and the Peacock. A Fable.” (100)

IN Days of Yore, as Authors tell,
When Beasts and Birds cou'd read and spell,
(No matter where, in Town or City,)
There liv'd a Swine exceeding witty,
And for the Beauties of her Mind,
Excelling all her bristl'd Kind:
But yet to mortify her Pride,
She found at last her failing Side.

Philosophy she had good Store,
Had ponder'd *Seneca* all o'er;
Yet all Precautions useless prove
Against the Pow'r of mighty Love.
It happen'd on a sultry Day,
Upon her fav'rite Couch she lay:
'Twas a round Dunghil soft and warm,
O'er-shadow'd by a neighb'ring Barn,
When lo, her winking Eyes behold
A Creature with a Neck of Gold,
With painted Wings and gorgeous Train,
That sparkl'd like the starry Plain:
His Neck and Breast all brilliant shine
Against the Sun: The dazzl'd Swine,
Who never saw the like before,
Began to wonder and adore;
But seeing him so fair and nice,
She left her Dunghil in a trice,
And (fond to please) the grunting Elf
Began to wash and prune herself,

And from the stinking Wave she run
To dry her Carcase in the Sun:
Then rubb'd her Sides against a Tree,
And now as clean as Hogs can be,
With cautious Air and doubtful Breast,
The glitt'ring *Peacock* thus address:

' Sir; I, a homely rural Swine,
' Can boast of nothing fair nor fine,
' No Dainties in our Troughts appear,
' But as you seem a Stranger here,
' Be pleas'd to walk into my Sty,
' A little Hut as plain as I;
' Pray venture through the humble Door;
' And tho' your Entertainment's poor,
' With me you shall be sure to find
' An open Heart and honest Mind;
' And that's a Dainty seldom found
' On Cedar Flow'rs and City Ground.

Thus far the Sow had preach'd by rule,
She preach'd, alas! but to a Fool;
For this same Peacock (you must know)
Had he been Man, had been a Beau:
And had (like them) but mighty little
To say: So squirted out his Spittle.
And with an Air that testified,
He'd got at least his share of Pride,
He thus began: 'Why, truly now,
' You're very civil Mrs. *Sow*:
' But I am very clean, d'ye see?
' Your Sty is not a Place for me.
' Shou'd I go through that narrow Door,
' My Feathers might be soil'd or tore;
' Or scented with unsav'ry Fumes:
' And what am I without my Plumes?

The much offended Sow replies,
(And turns a-squint her narrow Eyes)
' Sir, you're incorrigibly vain,

' To value thus a shining Train;
' For when the northern Wind shall blow,
' And send us Hail, and Sleet, and Snow;
' How will you save from such keen Weathers
' Your Merit?—Sir, I mean your Feathers:
' As for myself:—to think that I
' Shou'd lead an Idiot to my Sty,
' Or strive to make an Oaf my Friend,
' It makes my Bristles stand an end:
' But for the future when I see
' A Bird that much resembles thee,
' I'll ever take it as a Rule,
' The shining Case contains a Fool.

“*Silvia and the Bee*” (148)

AS *Silvia* in her Garden stray'd,
Where each officious Rose,
To welcome the approaching Maid,
With fairer Beauty glows.

Transported from their dewy Beds,
The new blown Lilies rise:
Gay Tulips wave their shining Heads,
To please her brighter Eyes.

A Bee that sought the sweetest Flow'r,
To this fair Quarter came:
Soft humming round the fatal Bow'r,
That held the smiling Dame.

He search'd the op'ning Buds with Care,
And flew from Tree to Tree:
But *Silvia* (finding none so fair)
Unwisely fix'd on thee.

Her Hand obedient to her Thought,
The River did destroy;
And the slain Insect dearly bought
Its momentary Joy.

But now too rash unthinking Maid,
Consider what you've done;
Perhaps you in the Dust have laid
A fair and hopeful Son.

Or from his Friends and Senate wise
Have swept a valu'd Peer;
Whose life, that you so lightly prize,
Was to his Country dear,

Then, *Silvia*, cease your Anger now,
To this your guiltless Foe;
And smooth again that gentle Brow,
Where lasting Lilies blow.

Soft *Cynthio* vows when you depart,
The Sun withdraws its Ray,
That Nature trembles like his Heart,
And Storms eclipse the Day.

Amintor swears a Morning Sun's
Less brilliant than your Eyes;
And tho' his Tongue at random runs,
You seldom think he lyes.

They tell you, those soft Lips may vie
With Pinks at op'ning Day;
And yet you slew a simple Fly,
For proving what they say.

Believe me, not a Bud like thee
In this fair Garden blows;
Then blame no more the erring Bee,
Who took you for the Rose.

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