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Material and Textual Spaces in the Poetry of Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson

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Material and Textual Spaces in the Poetry of Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson

by

Jessica Lauren Cook

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a concentration in Literature
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
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ABSTRACT

Women Poets and Place in Eighteenth-Century Poetry considers how four women poets of the long eighteenth century—Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Leapor, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Mary Robinson—construct various places in their poetry, whether the London social milieu or provincial England. I argue that the act of place making, or investing a location with meaning, through poetry is also a way of writing a place for themselves in the literary public sphere and in literary history. Despite the fact that more women wrote poetry than in any other genre in the period, women poets remain a relatively understudied area in eighteenth-century scholarship. My research is informed by place theory as defined by the fields of Human Geography and Ecocriticism; I consider how the poem reproduces material space and the nonhuman environment, as well as how place effectively shapes the individual. These four poets represent the gamut of career choices in this era, participating in manuscript and print culture, writing for hire and for leisure, publishing by subscription and through metropolitan booksellers. Each of these textual spaces serves as an illustration of how the poet's place, both geographically and socially speaking, influences the medium of circulation for the poetic text and the authorial persona she constructs in the process. By charting how each of these four poets approaches place—whether as the subject of their poetry or the poetic space itself—I argue that they offer us a way to destabilize and diversify the literary landscape of eighteenth-century poetry.

INTRODUCTION

At Chawton Cottage in Hampshire, the house Jane Austen lived in for the last eight years of her life, a small writing table sits by the window in the front sitting room. At this table, crowded by other furniture and the daily routines of domestic life, Austen wrote *Mansfield Park*, *Persuasion*, *Emma*, and revised *Pride and Prejudice* for publication (Byrne, *Jane Austen* 258). Almost a century later, Virginia Woolf marveled that Austen, and other women like her, managed to write anything at all without “a room of one’s own.” Woolf points out, “If a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room” where she was “always interrupted” in her work by the everyday traffic of the house—servants, family members, visitors (66). Woolf observes that such an atmosphere is bound to influence the work of the woman writer: “Her sensibility had been educated for centuries by the influences of the common sitting-room. People’s feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. Therefore, when the middle-class woman took to writing, she naturally wrote novels” (67). For Woolf, the middle-class woman’s sense of place, represented by the sitting room, directly correlates to the type of textual space she creates for herself: the novel, and specifically the domestic novel.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf draws attention to the relationship between material and textual space in women’s writing, the way one informs the other. This dissertation is similarly concerned with the way material and textual space interconnect in the poetry of four women poets of the long eighteenth century: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Mary Leapor, Anna Letitia Barbauld, and Mary Robinson. I argue that the act of place making, or investing a location with

meaning, through poetry is also a way of writing a place for themselves in the literary public sphere and in literary history.

While I focus on women poets in this dissertation, it is not my intent to separate them from their male counterparts in their own contemporary literary sphere or literary history in general. In his review of recent literature in *Studies in English Literature*, Claude Rawson argues that scholarly work on women writers “is now in danger of ghetto-izing itself through a degree of overassertive separatism” (724). I agree that more effort needs to be made to study women poets alongside their male contemporaries, but I would also suggest that this cannot be achieved without first establishing a better understanding of their own poetry. In *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry*, Paula Backscheider points out that more women wrote poetry than any other genre in the era, and yet our understanding of that poetry falls far behind studies of women dramatists and novelists (xvii). Women poets still remain a relatively understudied group in comparison to other eighteenth-century writers, both male and female, and one aim of this dissertation is to respond to that gap. Likewise, in their introduction to *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century*, Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia draw attention to the “persistent need to document the history of women’s poetic expression during the long eighteenth century and to rewrite the literary history of that period, a history from which women have been largely excluded or, in effect ghettoized” (xxviii). They suggest that in order to “rewrite literary history,” to examine the work of women poets alongside their male counterparts, we must first “document” their “poetic expression” itself.

Thus, my larger purpose is to explore how Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson add to our understanding of eighteenth century poetics and how we might rewrite literary history; in other words, I consider them as representative poets of the period, and not just as

representative *women* poets. While I do consider how gender influences both their poetry and their perceptions of themselves as agents in the literary public sphere, this is not a study of gender per se. Instead, gender is one factor among many that I consider, including class, economic viability, geographical location, religion, political affiliation, social networks, friendships, and education. This dissertation is at its foundation a study of eighteenth-century poetics, and how the poetry of the period is simultaneously interested in and shaped by England as a place.

Though Woolf would not have put it in these terms, she is talking about place, a term human geographers use to differentiate from space. The geographer Tim Cresswell explains that space is a material fact of life, the physical dimensions in which we live; once human beings invest a particular space with meaning and become attached to it then it becomes a place (10). In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau compares space to a blank page; by writing on the page, we create a text and, by extension, meaning (134). In a similar manner, space is the empty realm in which people “write” through their everyday practices—their conversations, actions, movements, behaviors, and social interactions. These practices create meaning for the space; place is, simply put, “a meaningful location” (Cresswell 7).

The four poets featured in this dissertation participate in constructing meaning for their respective locations: Montagu in London’s fashionable West End, Leapor in the market town of Brackley in Northamptonshire, Barbauld at Warrington Academy in Lancashire, and Robinson in London at the turn of the century. I have deliberately chosen four poets who offer a wide range of experiences in place, as both a physical location and as a way of being. Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson write about an assortment of public and private spaces: the coffee houses, shops, parks, theatres, and streets of London as well as provincial towns, country houses,

and schools. However, as Cresswell explains further, “place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world” (11). Place influences everything from our physical movements to our social behaviors to our sense of identity. To that end, I have also focused on four poets who offer diverse experiences in place as a way of being: Montagu as an aristocratic member of the beau monde, Leapor as a provincial kitchen maid, Barbauld as a middle-class Dissenter, and Robinson as an urban celebrity turned professional writer. Each poet’s sense of place, the way she understands the world, is influenced by a variety of factors: her social station, economic stability, political or religious affiliations, and social networks. These factors influence her perceptions of the world, including the way she views herself interacting with the literary public sphere and the authorial persona she constructs for herself there.

In this sense, place is not just something that these poets help to construct in the public imagination; place is also something that creates them. Woolf suggests that the sitting room is not just a material space, but also a way of being for the woman writer—it profoundly influences what she writes, in terms of both content and form. Cresswell makes a similar observation: “[P]lace is not simply something to be observed, researched and written about but is itself part of the way we see, research and write” (15). Another aim of this dissertation, then, is not just to consider place as the subject of poetry, but also to examine how the poet’s experience in place influences the textual space of the poem. In each chapter, I seek to answer two questions: how is material space or place represented in this poem? how does the poet’s experience of place (as both a physical location and a way of being) influence the textual space of the poem?

I use the term “textual space” to refer to two aspects of the poetic text: its poetic form and its medium of publication/circulation. Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson write in some of the eighteenth century and the Romantic period’s major poetic forms, including the eclogue,

the verse epistle, the country house poem, religious verse, blank verse, the sonnet, and the lyric poem. In each chapter, I consider what poetic forms the poet uses, and how her conception of material space influences her adoption of that form. For instance, I argue that both Leapor's reworking of the country house poem and her frequent use of the verse epistle reinforces her conceptualization of material space as a meeting place for a diverse group of people. Different poetic forms offer distinctive ways of conceptualizing material space, such as the way the verse epistle collapses physical or social distance between friends.

I have found it useful to limit my discussion of each poet to a specific textual product within their literary oeuvres: Montagu's *Town Eclogues* (1715-1716), Leapor's *Poems upon Several Occasions* (1748-51), Barbauld's *Poems* (1773), and Robinson's poems published in the *Morning Post* (1795-1800). Focusing on a single text allows me to locate each poet in a specific place at a particular moment in time in order to more fully explore the effect of that place on the poet's writing. For instance, Montagu's experience in London in 1714-1716 situates her in a specific social and literary milieu that she then reconstructs in her *Town Eclogues*. This period is the height of her friendship with the Scriblerians, in particular Alexander Pope and John Gay; this social context is crucial to understanding her eclogues, in reference to both their content and their form. One of the major themes of this dissertation is that places are always in a state of flux, constantly changing over time; likewise, the poetic text itself undergoes changes, such as the multiple re-printings of *Town Eclogues* throughout the eighteenth century or Barbauld's changes to the second edition of *Poems* in 1792.

Focusing on a specific text also allows me to consider the influence of place on the poet's preferred method for the distribution of the poetic text. One's place can matter in practical ways, such as the difference residing in the metropolis versus the provinces makes for providing access

to booksellers and printers. Place also influences the type of professional and social networks available to the poet, which can also influence her attitudes toward different media. The texts included in this study represent the various options available for the publication and circulation of literature during the eighteenth century.

Thus, the second aspect of textual space that I discuss is the medium of publication. The lives of the four poets featured in this dissertation span the entirety of the long eighteenth century, illustrating the range of ways one could participate in their era's constantly evolving literary culture. They participate in manuscript and print culture, writing for hire and for leisure, publishing by subscription and through metropolitan booksellers. Montagu's *Town Eclogues* are originally circulated by manuscript until they are pirated by Grub Street booksellers and sold as unauthorized print editions, illustrating the clash between early eighteenth-century print culture and a still thriving manuscript culture. Montagu's aristocratic status makes courtly manuscript culture an attractive choice for her, but the laboring class poet Leapor also appreciates the sociability inherent in coterie writing. When Leapor does publish *Poems upon Several Occasions*, she does so by subscription, a way for her to navigate the different pressures associated with both the patronage system and the free marketplace. Barbauld's literary debut later in the eighteenth century represents a growing trend toward professionalization. *Poems* is a single-author print collection that illustrates Barbauld's construction of her early public image as an intellectual and a voice of religious Dissent. Robinson even more fully embraces the role of professional writer, which is based on her everyday labor of writing and editing poetry for London's periodicals. Robinson is the only example in this dissertation of a woman who actually makes a living from her pen, even if it is often an inconsistent and insufficient living. Each of these textual spaces—whether manuscript or print, book or periodical, sold by subscription or

metropolitan booksellers—serves as an illustration of how the poet’s place, both geographically and socially, influences the medium of circulation for the poetic text and the authorial persona she constructs in the process.

These four poets offer a wide range of experiences, including their geographical location, social station, choice of poetic form, and medium of circulation. This selection of poets also allows me to highlight different moments of the long eighteenth century in order to consider how its literary culture develops and evolves over the period. The dissertation begins with Montagu in the early eighteenth century, and then moves to Leapor at the mid-century mark. Barbauld’s literary debut occurs in the late eighteenth century, and Robinson is a transitional figure between the late eighteenth century and the Romantic period. It is my aim to offer as much diversity in this study as possible in order to avoid any kind of totalizing assumptions about what it means to be a woman poet in the eighteenth century. What all four poets illustrate is that there is no monolithic female poetic culture in this era; indeed, there is as much difference between these women as there is between Alexander Pope and Thomas Gray. The principal argument of this dissertation is that by exploring how material and textual space are represented in women’s poetry we also can explore what kind of space they are creating for themselves within their own contemporary literary sphere and within literary history itself. The diversity in these poets, then, is also a way to argue for the both the expansion and the destabilization of yet another kind of place—literary history.

To that end, I draw on theories of place from human geography and ecocriticism in order to argue that the way we think of material space and the non-human world has a direct impact on the kinds of places we imagine ourselves and others occupying. My approach is most directly influenced by feminist geography. Gillian Rose argues that her discipline’s impulse for

knowability and totality are a masculine myth that “denies the possibility of different spaces being known by other subjects” (40). She maintains that the kind of space that can be associated with feminism is “multidimensional, shifting and contingent” (140). In a similar manner, Doreen Massey argues that places do not have “single, essential identities” (152), but rather “multiple identities” that “can either be a source of richness or a source of conflict, or both” (153). This is a view of place that is “marked by openness and change rather than boundedness and permanence” (Cresswell 39). Throughout this dissertation, I consider how place might be constructed as marked by “openness and change,” with important implications for the woman poet and the textual space of literary history.

I also incorporate aspects of ecocriticism, an approach to literature that focuses on representations of the nonhuman environment. I am interested in how the four poets featured in this study relate to one another without also erasing their differences; this entails avoiding a notion of community based solely on gender, or indeed any concept of community that relies upon imagining it as a homogenous, closed totality. Ecocritical approaches to literature tend to emphasize the interconnection of all living things while also recognizing their diversity, and that they are often in competition and conflict with one another. This way of thinking acknowledges individuality while also reinforcing the idea that “all organisms and environments are essentially interdependent” (Kroeber 23). Each poet and poetic text discussed in this dissertation exists both independently and interdependently, as Karl Kroeber argues: “[N]o experience, even that of the poem’s composition, is isolated or isolating, even though each experience is distinctively singular—as is the poem itself” (55). Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson all exhibit a consciousness that they are not writing in a vacuum but in a place that includes other writers, other ways of thinking, other ways of being.

Backscheider argues that our understanding of the role women played in creating eighteenth-century poetic culture remains relatively limited, due in part, to our continued reliance on “the paradigms of old literary history” (xxi). Of her own study, she admits, “Even had I wanted to, I could not force women into existing paradigms and systems from which they were excluded and whose values they continually questioned and still question. It was not enough to create a ‘landscape’ that somehow mapped women onto it, as if they were tourist sites” (xxi). Backscheider calls for “a better-charted landscape, with sharper details, than is currently available” (xiv), phrasing which is suggestive of literary history as place. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf suggests there is something limiting or constricting about the sitting room as a material space; the problem is not necessarily the space itself but rather the meaning it is given and the way of being it dictates: a drawing in of boundaries. Though Woolf argues Austen wrote great novels from this bounded space, she nonetheless argues that its restriction has serious implications for women’s ability to write a place for themselves within the literary public sphere and within literary history.

However, the meaning of any particular place can also be challenged by the people who inhabit it. In his chapter on “Walking in the City,” Certeau argues that pedestrians can overwrite “the planned and readable” city through their movements that subvert existing pathways, until a “migrational, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text” of the already mapped city (93). Like Backscheider’s landscape analogy, we can view the “paradigms of old literary history” as Certeau’s “planned and readable city.” Instead of giving into the impulse to map women poets onto this existing city of literature like landmarks (“here is the female Alexander Pope,” “there the female William Wordsworth”), their poetry offers up an entirely different place for us to view—a different way to “walk the city” of literary history, so to speak. In fact, we can view

Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson as mapping a new city that includes them in it. In that sense, my aim is not to give women a place of their own, separating them from their own literary culture in which they saw themselves as active and engaged participants. Instead, I want to ask what happens when we conceptualize literary history itself as a place, and one that is marked by “openness and change.”

Chapter One begins in the early eighteenth century with Montagu’s *Town Eclogues*, set in the fashionable West End of London. In this chapter, I argue that Montagu acts as a travel guide who charts the movements of the beau monde through the city, providing a material and social map of early eighteenth-century London as a place. This chapter establishes the fundamental aspects of place that will be discussed throughout this dissertation: place as a physical location and as a phenomenological way of being. Chapter Two moves to the Northamptonshire countryside and the laboring class poet Leapor’s *Poems upon Several Occasions*. I argue that Leapor’s habitual and physical movements in place—both as a servant in the country house and as a poet—influence her conceptualization of textual space as a meeting place between the poet and her readers. Chapter Three remains in provincial England as I explore Barbauld’s perception of the permeability and flexibility of place boundaries in her religious verses, formed in part by her experience as a middle-class Lancashire Dissenter. This chapter also illustrates a cultural shift in perceptions of the woman author as a professional. Chapter Four concludes the dissertation with a return to the metropolis at the close of the eighteenth century. In this chapter, I consider how Robinson’s late urban poems for the *Morning Post* reflect the newspaper’s ever-shifting textual space, as she portrays London as a place that changes daily based on the practices of its residents. Each chapter explores a different aspect of both material and textual space,

considering how the poetry of place might offer a different way of thinking about the place of women's poetry in the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER ONE: LADY MARY WORTLEY MONTAGU AND THE POEM AS CITY GUIDE

In January 1715, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu left the house she had been temporarily renting in Yorkshire in order to rejoin her husband, Edward Wortley Montagu, in London. The Montagus had formerly lived in Catherine Street in the Strand, close to the theatres and the city's shopping district (Grundy, *LMWM* 58), but Edward acquired new lodgings for them in Duke Street, east of St. James's Park in Westminster (*LMWM* 80). The relocation was not far in terms of geographical distance, but it was "a world away in proximity to centres of power"—to parliament and the court (*LMWM* 87). The Montagus' new residence placed them in an area known for its great wealth, political power, and social prestige. They now lived in the most fashionable area of London: the enclave of the beau monde, or the "ton," an exclusive group of individuals, usually titled and incredibly wealthy, who ruled the world of fashion. At the same time she was social climbing at court, Montagu became friends with Alexander Pope and John Gay, and was introduced to their own intellectual circle. It was during this period that Montagu composed her first major poetic work, *Town Eclogues* (1715-1716), a satire that captures the convergence of her two social networks. She takes as her subject the affairs of the beau monde, while her choice of poetic form reflects her status as "almost a Scriblerian," a phrase used by Valerie Rumbold to describe Montagu's relationship with the literary Scriblerus Club, whose members included Pope, Gay, Jonathan Swift, and John Arbuthnot (134).

The eclogues were composed over a relatively short but intense period of social and literary activity, for Montagu only lived at the Duke Street house for a little over a year before

she and her husband relocated again. However, this time the move really was a world away—to Turkey, where Edward had been appointed the British ambassador. Montagu is probably best known today for her *Turkish Embassy Letters* (1763), which describe her voyage to Turkey and her residence there.¹ Montagu’s social life and her early literary career thus share a similar trait: mobility. Whether she is moving between her aristocratic or literary social circles in London, or traveling beyond England’s borders to a foreign country, Montagu tends to portray herself as constantly on the move, as a traveler. In a letter from October 1710, she informs her future husband Edward, “Was I to follow entirely my own Inclinations it would be to travel, my first and cheifest wish” (I: 61). Though Montagu traveled far more extensively than the average person in the eighteenth century, her mobility is itself a trait of the age. Roy Porter characterizes the Georgians as “mobile, valuing the freedom money gave for activity, and enjoying being out of doors and on the move. ‘Home sweet home’ is basically a nineteenth-century sentiment” (225). Likewise, in her study of the eighteenth-century beau monde, Hannah Greig claims, “migration and social movement was a defining feature of the world of fashion” (24). Montagu’s authorial persona is based on that of the traveler, but it is an image she began constructing well before her famous voyage to Turkey; and as Porter and Greig both suggest, mobility can imply crossing the street or the city just as well as a country or continent.

In this chapter, I argue that Montagu uses her persona as a traveler to chart a map of the beau monde in *Town Eclogues*, tracing their movements through London. She acts as a travel guide through this dense city, providing a map of its most exclusive places: from the court at St. James’s Palace to the gendered social spaces of the coffee house and the tea table; from the

¹ Though written in 1716-1718 and circulated in manuscript after Montagu’s return to England, the *Turkish Embassy Letters* were not published as a print collection until a year after Montagu’s death in 1762 (Staves 212).

fashionable shops along the Strand to the theatres in Covent Garden and the Ring in Hyde Park. Montagu not only provides a material and social snapshot of early eighteenth-century London, but also creates a strong sense of the city as a place. As a form of travel writing, the *Turkish Embassy Letters* are obviously concerned with this idea of place, which is first and foremost a site with distinctive material features that distinguish it from other locations in the world (Cresswell 7). Montagu engages in an act of “place making” in her *Turkish Embassy Letters* by textually reconstructing that country for her readers in England, investing it with (her) meaning and influencing the way others then “read” Turkey as a place. Montagu engages in a similar act of place making in her *Town Eclogues*, though she has not received nearly as much scholarly attention for that text, or for her own role in constructing the urban milieu of the early eighteenth century, especially when compared to her contemporaries Pope and Gay. In her eclogues, Montagu confirms her status as “almost a Scriblerian,” revealing what happens when the satirical mock eclogue meets the preoccupations of fashion, when the literary elite meets the “ton,” and courtly manuscript culture encounters Grub Street.

Mapping the *Town Eclogues*: “the art of living in London”

In his history of eighteenth-century London, Jerry White claims that the metropolis exerted a powerful hold in the public’s imagination during this period. Its sheer size alone acted as “a gravitational pull on the nation, through wonderment and curiosity and tales retold” (White 3). People flocked to the city in droves, as many as 8,000 migrants each year (White 90); by the end of the century, the population had nearly doubled (White 80). London could be difficult for newcomers to navigate, in terms of its layout, traffic, and social cues; consequently, there quickly grew a “ready market for pocket maps, guides and other handy advice on ‘the art of

living in London” (White 117). Maps could assist the new Londoners in locating themselves in an unfamiliar place, but White also acknowledges that the non-native (and sometimes the native) required something more—instruction on ‘the art of living in London.’ This phrase is indicative of another aspect of place as a meaningful location: it is also a way of being. The ‘art of living in London’ suggests there is more to being “in place” than merely recognizing a location’s material features and landmarks, or being able to find one’s way through its streets. In a similar manner, Tim Cresswell explains, “Place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world” (11). This is the phenomenological aspect of place, or place “as an idea, concept and way of being-in-the-world” (Cresswell 20). In other words, the relationship between human beings and place is reciprocal; we invest locations with meaning, effectively shaping their identities, but the places where we live, work, and travel also influence and shape us. The 8,000 migrants pouring into London each year indelibly changed the city, but it also changed them. London was not just a place to live—it was a *way* to live.

Another reason for the proliferation of maps and guides to the city was its relative “newness” (White 4). The Great Fire of 1666 destroyed three-fifths of the City of London, the name given to the area east of Temple Bar and west of the Tower, known as “the heart of trade, manufacturing and the manipulation of money” (White 4). While much of the City had been rebuilt in the late seventeenth century, some of London’s “most marked expansion” occurred not in the City but in the northwest section known as “the town,” and later in the nineteenth century more commonly referred to as the “West End” (Greig 8). From 1700 onward, there was constant construction of fashionable houses around squares that become known as the addresses of the elite: St. James’s Square, Hanover Square, Cavendish Square, and Grosvenor Square, among others (Greig 9). The “town” or West End was the home of the beau monde, “an elite with an

elite, a subsection of the most elevated social ranks who successfully combined the securities of title and wealth with urban-based social and cultural authority” (Greig 4). Belonging to this exclusive group may have involved having an address in one of the fashionable Georgian squares of the West End, but it above all meant being “in place” there—privilege and fashion as a way of being.

Thus, the ‘art of living in London’ could mean one thing in the City, and something else entirely in “the town.” London did not have one fixed, stable identity, but “multiple identities,” a quality of all places according to Doreen Massey (153). In a similar manner, Alan Pred defines place as “what takes place ceaselessly, what contributes to history in a specific context through the creation and utilization of a physical setting” (279). All places are subject to constant change—to their geographical features, population, history, and relationship to the wider world. Cresswell insists, “[P]laces are never complete, finished or bounded but are always becoming—in process” (37). In *Town Eclogues*, Montagu focuses on one of London’s many identities—the world of fashion—through the eclogue, a classical and fashionable poetic form that introduces another identity for the city: the center of the literary elite, typified by the Scriblerians, who popularized the refashioning of the pastoral into a satiric mode. Montagu’s *Town Eclogues* illustrate her awareness of how pastoral forms were being refashioned for the corrupt modern city, which may have stemmed out of her social connection to the Scriblerians. Likewise, the eclogues’ circulation in both manuscript and print is illustrative of yet another meeting, or perhaps clashing, of identities between courtly manuscript culture and the often anarchic print culture of the Grub Street booksellers. Thus, the *Town Eclogues* do not just provide a social and material map of the beau monde; they act as a wider city guide that illustrates the complex network of early eighteenth-century London’s multiple identities intersecting—as a city of low

and high culture, of commerce and court—and the mobility that made such connections and clashes possible.

Montagu composed the *Town Eclogues*, a pastoral cycle of six poems named for each day of the working week, over the course of roughly one year in 1715-1716. Each eclogue takes the form of either a monologue from a single speaker or a dialogue between two or more characters, all supposedly based on real people in Montagu's social circle. The reader is allowed to eavesdrop as the various characters complain about unfaithful lovers, exchange stories of seduction and loss, and gossip about London's elite. The classical eclogue was a short pastoral poem often in the form of a monologue or dialogue between shepherds, but in the eighteenth century, the form was refashioned into the mock eclogue, with the innocent, rural shepherds of antiquity displaced into the modern, urban world. Drawing on Virgil's *Eclogues* as a guide, the form's potential for satire was explored by Scriblerians such as Swift in "Description of a City Shower" (1710) and Gay in his own eclogue cycle, *Shepherd's Week* (1714). While there is disagreement over the exact nature of either Pope or Gay's influence on Montagu's eclogues, what is clear is the cultural immediacy of the poems.² They are obviously "of the moment;" entrenched in a highly specific social and cultural milieu. Montagu's eclogues wear their sense of time and place in both their subject and form, documenting not only the people and places of

² While critics such as Paula Backscheider have pointed out similarities between Montagu's *Town Eclogues* and both Gay's *Shepherd's Week* and Pope's *The Rape of the Lock* (86), Grundy typically insists that neither poet was directly involved except to encourage Montagu to develop the first eclogue "Monday" (originally titled "Roxana") into an eclogue week (*LMWM* 93-94). Though Montagu's "Friday. The Toilette" is remarkably similar to Gay's "The Toilette" in his *Shepherd's Week*, both Grundy and Ann Messenger conclude that Montagu's "really amounts to a different poem" (Grundy and Halsband 182). See Grundy, "Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Six Town Eclogues and Other Poems" in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry* (Ed. Christine Gerrard. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006. 184-196) and Messenger, *His and Hers: Essays in Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Literature* (Lexington: UP of Kentucky, 1986).

early eighteenth-century London, but also representing the era's interest in the flexibility of classical pastoral as a vehicle for satire.

If the *Town Eclogues* represent a meeting of the literary elite and the fashionable beau monde in terms of subject and form, then as a manuscript and print collection they reveal an even more dramatic encounter between the town and the City, and between the literary elite and Grub Street. The competing script and print editions of the eclogues are a vivid illustration of Margaret Ezell's call for a revised literary history of the Restoration and early eighteenth century that acknowledges the "thriving amateur, social literary culture" that coexists with the emergence of the "professional author and the increasing popularity of commercial genres" (25). While Montagu did not intend to publish *Town Eclogues*, her choice of manuscript circulation is nonetheless a "public" and social medium. Ezell explains that manuscript is "a 'private' mode that, by its very nature, is permeated by 'public' moments of readership, when the text is circulated and copied. The text, although not universally available to any purchasing reader, nevertheless engages in a 'social' function" (38-39). Montagu's *Town Eclogues* were circulated extensively by manuscript and recopied by readers such as Pope; they were also pirated by the bookseller Edmund Curll in 1716, and published again in 1747 as a cohesive collection by Horace Walpole. Each of these texts act as different "editions" of Montagu's eclogues, revealing the complicated network involved in the dissemination of the early eighteenth-century text.

Montagu maintained complicated feelings about publication for her entire life, and manuscript likely appealed to her for multiple reasons.³ Her aristocratic status and involvement in court culture at the time meant that manuscript circulation was more in keeping with the

³ For a detailed analysis of Montagu's complex feelings about print publication over the course of her life, see Isobel Grundy's "The Politics of Female Authorship: Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's Reaction to the Printing of Her Poems" (*The Book Collector* 31.1 [1982]: 19-37. v-xxi).

customs of her social position. The ability to control the readership of the text would also have been appealing considering their potentially incendiary subject matter—they are often a biting indictment of the beau monde, and the characters all represent actual individuals known by Montagu. Her audience also knew who the characters represented—they were members of their social circle, personal acquaintances and friends. The insider quality of manuscript circulation reinforces the sense that the *Town Eclogues* are “in-texts for readers in the know,” a select and privileged readership (Grundy, “Theatrical Eclogue” 64). Manuscript was particularly suited both to Montagu’s persona as an author and to the subject matter itself, tracking the beau monde’s social movements around town.

The manuscript text illustrates the fluidity and mobility of London’s social networks as it travels from reader to reader and from place to place; and in the case of the eclogues, from Westminster, down the Strand, to Fleet Street—up and down the social scale in the process. John Oldmixon, an author who worked for Curll, is likely the source who passed some of Montagu’s eclogues on to the bookseller, who published “Monday,” “Thursday,” and “Friday,” as *Court Poems* in March 1716.⁴ This first print edition of the eclogues offers a dramatic example of the collision between different cultures—the social and literary elite of the town with the low culture and commercial interests of Grub Street.

As Pat Rogers argues, Grub Street itself is both an actual place and a powerful cultural signifier. Throughout the eighteenth century, the term “Grub Street” was used to refer to hack writers and the ephemeral print text while drawing on the actual Grub Street’s reputation for being “noisy, squalid and crowded” (Rogers, *Hacks* 1). Its geographical meaning was translated into a moral, social, and cultural meaning; satirists such as Pope created a link between “vice and

⁴ Curll published these poems under the titles “The Drawing Room,” “The Basset-Table. An Eclogue,” and “The Toilet,” respectively.

squalor with the sewerage of the town” (Rogers, *Hacks* 24). Grub Street, much like the “town,” was not just a place, but a way of being in the public imagination. The actual street itself was located on the northern edge of the City, not far from the heart of London’s publishing industry in and around Paternoster Row and St. Paul’s Cathedral, and extending through Fleet Street and Temple Bar (White 262). Curll, one of the most infamous denizens of Grub Street, had moved his own shop to the south side of Fleet Street in 1709 (Rogers, “Edmund Curll” 221). *Court Poems* acts as a material remnant of the voyage Montagu’s eclogues made from Westminster to Fleet Street, effectively providing a map of London’s clashing identities: between different social stratifications, the literary elite and “low” popular culture, and manuscript culture with the profit-driven commercial marketplace.

This convergence of cultures is most vividly illustrated in the book’s title page and advertisement, evidence of Curll’s mastery of marketing to boost sales. The title page of *Court Poems* claims the poems “were found in a Pocket-Book taken up in Westminster-Hall, the Last Day of Lord Winton’s Tryal.” Curll indicates these poems were meant for a private and elite audience by identifying them in the political heart of the town, at Westminster Hall on the final day of the much-publicized trial against George Seton, Earl of Winton, for his role in the 1715 Jacobite uprising.⁵ The Advertisement that follows builds upon the excitement and sense of scandal by speculating on the poems’ authorship: “Upon reading them over at St. James’s Coffee-House, they were attributed by the General Voice to be the Productions of a Lady of Quality. When I produc’d them at Button’s, the Poetical Jury there brought in a different Verdict; and the Foreman strenuously insisted upon it, that Mr. Gay was the Man.” Curll describes taking

⁵ In 1715 some of the leading Tories led a brief but ultimately failed rebellion against the Hanoverian monarchy in favor of the deposed James II’s son, known as the Pretender. Montagu’s brother-in-law, the Earl of Mar, was one of the leading figures of the rebellion, raising the Jacobite standard at Braemar in September 1715 (O’Gorman 65-68).

the poems to audiences at two different coffee houses—St. James’s, associated with the political and social elite, and Button’s, the home of the literati (Ellis, *Coffee House* 190, 155). The beau monde of St. James’s attributes them to one of their own, Montagu, while the literary-minded crowd at Button’s claims them for Gay, a fellow member of the intelligentsia. However, a “Gentleman of distinguish’d Merit” who resides in Chelsea (deliberately suggesting Joseph Addison), insists, “Sir, Depend upon it, these Lines could come from no other Hand, than the Judicious Translator of Homer,” i.e. Pope. Curll also maps the places frequented by the elite, as each location he pinpoints—Westminster Hall, St. James’s Coffee-House, Button’s—offers a different social meaning. The implication to the readers is that they too get to participate in the dramas of the elite, and Curll concludes the Advertisement by encouraging them to form their own opinions about the authorship: “[E]very Body is at Liberty to bestow the Laurel as they please.” Curll extends an invitation to the reader to enter into the coffee house culture through participating in this authorship debate, which he has now placed in the commercial marketplace.

Both the manuscript copies circulated at court and the print edition issued by Curll draw attention to the exclusivity of the places Montagu textually reconstructs in *Town Eclogues*. However, neither medium can ultimately control either the readership or their reaction. In early 1716, Montagu found her “career as courtier was set back” when a copy of “Monday” made its way to Princess Caroline, who was not amused by her appearance in the poem despite the fact that she was not its object of satire (*LMWM* 103). Likewise, Curll’s *Court Poems* “did real damage to Gay, who was still hoping for court employment” (*LMWM* 110). The incident spurred even more gossip when Pope set himself up as the defender of both Gay and Montagu by trying to convince Curll not to publish the eclogues. When the bookseller published *Court Poems* anyway, Pope enacted his famous revenge by slipping Curll an emetic that he then vividly

described in various print publications (Grundy, *LMWM* 110-111). The undeterred Curll responded by continuing to republish *Court Poems* as Pope's up until 1736 (*LMWM* 111). The publication of *Court Poems* thus drags Montagu and the court culture of the eclogues into the dirtier dealings of print publication, suggesting the distance between St. James's Square and Grub Street was perhaps not so great after all.

The manuscript and print versions of *Town Eclogues* would continue to coexist throughout the eighteenth century. Horace Walpole arranged for their publication as *Six Town Eclogues with some other Poems* in 1747 after Montagu shared her own manuscripts with him in Italy. Walpole's edition marks both the first appearance of all six poems in print as a complete eclogue cycle and Montagu's acknowledgment as the author. By presenting all six eclogues together and with their day markers, Walpole encourages reading the cycle as one cohesive unit, with each eclogue carrying on similar themes that build upon one another. Like Curll, Walpole also constructs the eclogues as a place by emphasizing their scandalous nature. Instead of mimicking Curll's blatant marketing ploy, Walpole more subtly perpetuates the theme of gossip and scandal among the beau monde through the other poems included in the collection, such as "Epistle from Arthur Grey the Footman," about the much-publicized 1721 trial of Arthur Grey, who allegedly attempted to rape Montagu's friend Griselda Murray.

The manuscript editions likewise perpetuate the idea of the eclogues as representing a certain kind of place. Pope preserved his own autograph copy with the title *Court Eclogs*. He describes the "respect" he has paid to the eclogues in a letter to Montagu written in autumn 1717: "They lie inclosed in a Monument of Red Turkey, written in my fairest hand; the gilded Leaves are open'd with no less veneration than the Pages of the Sybils; like them, lock'd up & conceal'd from all prophane eyes: None but my own have beheld these sacred Remains of yourself and I

should think it as great a wickedness to divulge them, as to Scatter abroad the Ashes of my Ancestors" (I: 441). Pope gives the eclogues a place that reflects their value and elegance (and those of their author). He also suggests that he has wrested the poems out of the "prophane eyes" of the public marketplace, and returned them back to the safekeeping of the literary elite (i.e. himself). Both Pope and later Montagu would loan out the handsome manuscript to friends, ensuring that *Town Eclogues* continued to have a thriving manuscript audience up until Montagu's death.

Thus, the long and winding history of *Town Eclogues* in both script and print reflects the complex social network of early eighteenth-century London, itself a "sprawling, opaque and densely interwoven city" (White 9). In the map these editions provide, we can view the world of the beau monde intersecting with the literary concerns of the Scriblerians, and see both thrust into a confrontation with the booksellers and printers of Grub Street. The multiple identities of London connect and clash, but nonetheless coexist alongside one another. Montagu's eclogue week serves as a city guide, as each location she visits in her eclogue week, her characters offer a portrait of the "art of living in London" according to the beau monde, and we briefly occupy these places along with them—our own temporary entry in the early eighteenth-century world of fashion.

The Court: Social Politics

The beau monde's movements were intertwined with the political life of the metropolis. After the Glorious Revolution, when James II was ousted in favor of his daughter Mary and her husband William of Orange, newly adopted constitutional measures required an annual meeting of the Houses of Parliament (Greig 4). These yearly sessions "lured the titled and wealthy to the

metropolis,” instituting what came to be known as the social “season” (Greig 6). Each fall, the West End of London would come alive with activity as the peerage and their households descended upon the town for both politics and society. Fittingly, the beau monde lived close to the center of political power (the court at St. James’s Palace and Parliament in Westminster), creating a geographically dense consolidation of wealth, social prestige, and political power (Greig 11).

The court itself was not one central location but split between multiple sites, which Greig argues actually “integrated the court more substantially into the London landscape” (106). After a fire destroyed Whitehall Palace in 1698, the residence of the monarch and his family was split between Kensington Palace, St. James’s Palace, and the Queen’s House (later Buckingham Palace) (Greig 104). This reorganization opened up the Georgian court in a geographical sense, underscored by the fact that all the palaces were surrounded by public parks that were open to the general public (Greig 106). This openness was reflected in the court’s sociable identity as “one of London’s numerous extra-parliamentary spheres of political activity, and home to the type of ‘social politics’ now widely identified with the coffee house, theatre, private residence, and other venues” (Greig 106). In the “town,” the social is the political, and it is in this atmosphere that Montagu opens the *Town Eclogues* with “Monday. Roxana, Or the Drawing-room.”

The eclogue features the dissatisfied courtier, Roxana, based on the Duchess of Roxburghe who was known for being both “a Tory and a prude” (Grundy and Halsband 182). In her monologue, Roxana gives vent to her frustrated ambitions after she has been passed over as a Lady of the Bedchamber to Caroline of Ansbach, then Princess of Wales and later queen consort to George II. The drawing room of the title is both a place—a room for social gatherings at

court—and an event. “Drawing rooms” was the term used for court gatherings of men and women where formal presentations to the king and other members of the royal family would occur (Greig 109). Newspapers would advertise when drawing rooms would be kept each season, such as the *Original Weekly Journal*’s report on 23 November 1717: “A With-drawing Room is order’d to be kept at Court every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday Night, during the Winter.” In “Monday,” Roxana attends a drawing room for Princess Caroline, the member of the royal family whom she has singled out to receive her attentions in hope of a promotion.

The eclogue begins as she is departing in her chair from one of these events at St. James’s Palace. Montagu immediately indicates that Roxana is the object of satire in this eclogue with a joke about her weight: “Such heavy thoughts lay brooding in her Breast / Not her own Chairmen with more weight oppress’d” (3-4). Montagu’s acerbic couplet neatly undercuts any seriousness that might be attributed to Roxana’s weighty thoughts. The cause of her distress is her failure to advance as a courtier; her attempts to ingratiate herself to Princess Caroline have all come to nothing. Roxana perceives herself as having protected her virtue in her youth, only to compromise it in her middle age in her scrambling to secure a position at court: “Ah cruel Princess! for thy sake I’ve lost / That Reputation which so dear had cost. / I, who avoided every Public place / When Bloom, and Beauty bid me shew my Face” (27-30). Roxana associates her loss of reputation with her appearance in public places, such as the theatre where “filthy Plays” and “Double Entendres shock’d my tender Ear” (16-17). She specifically identifies Gay’s play *The What D’Ye Call It*, with its sexually suggestive title, which the Prince and Princess of Wales attended in Drury-Lane Theatre in February 1715 (Halsband 64 n.4). The play, a farcical reinterpretation of the blank verse tragedy, was a hit. Pope records that the first three nights of the play “were distinguished by very full audiences of the first quality,” and that the “Court in

general has in a very particular manner come into the jest” (I: 283). Pope’s report of the audience’s appreciation of the play suggests that Roxana’s shock puts her in the minority, and that she is being more faithful to the “Dutys of a Prude” than she thinks.

Roxana also believes her loyalty to Princess Caroline has gone unappreciated. She accusingly notes, “Oft had your drawing room been sadly thin / And Merchants’ Wives close by the Chair had been / Had not I amply fill’d the empty Space / And sav’d your Highness from the dire Disgrace” (35-38). Montagu delivers another fat joke, but also draws attention to the social hierarchy of the drawing room. Greig notes that drawing rooms were “a major component of the beau monde’s metropolitan routine” (110), and were often crowded and uncomfortable affairs (113). The rooms themselves were “remarkably compact,” even at the comparatively spacious St. James’s Palace (113), making them surprisingly intimate affairs (114). Drawing rooms also were not limited to members of the aristocracy. Formal dress alone could obtain entrance to St. James Palace, and the gentry, merchants, and the professional class often attended as well (Greig 111). Once entering the palace, each individual passed through a series of rooms maintained by guards and high-ranking court officials, who “acted as watchful gatekeepers, ejecting those without rank or connection enough to progress” (Greig 113). The spatial restriction of the drawing room is emblematic of its social restriction, though not quite enough for Roxana, who is horrified by the merchants’ wives so close to the royal body. She suggests they are taking up space that should be occupied by their superiors, and yet Montagu plays a similar joke on Roxana, whose girth means that she also takes up more space than she should. In this sense, Roxana’s ample figure serves as a metaphor for her own inflated sense of worth.

Roxana's complaints about both the lack of morality and quality in Princess Caroline's court unite when she turns her attention to her rival, the woman Princess Caroline has promoted over herself—the licentious, foreign courtier Coquetilla:

Yet Coquetilla's Artifice prevails
When all my Merit and my Duty fails,
That Coquetilla, whose deluding airs
Corrupts our Virgins, and our Youth ensares:
So sunk her Character, so lost her Fame,
Scarce visited before your Highness came,
Yet for the Bed chamber, 'tis her you chuse,
When Zeal, and fame, and virtue you refuse. (39-46)

Coquetilla was Adelaide Roffeni, Duchess of Shrewsbury, and the Italian wife of Charles Talbot, Duke of Shrewsbury (Grundy and Halsband 184). She had a reputation for being vivacious and gregarious, “attracting attention, and not a little censure, for her exuberant manner” (Greig 134). The Duchess of Shrewsbury was often the subject of courtly gossip for her behavior, so Roxana would certainly not have been alone in disliking or disapproving of her. She snidely observes that Coquetilla was “[s]carce visited” by the elite before Princess Caroline made her favor known. Roxana presents her censure of her rival's behavior as a moral concern for Princess Caroline, but her obvious jealousy over Coquetilla's promotion draws attention to her own political ambition. As with the rest of Roxana's monologue, her complaints only serve to put a spotlight on her own ambition, jealousy, and hypocrisy.

Roxana's desire to be named Lady of the Bedchamber underscores the political importance of occupying the innermost spaces that surround the Princess of Wales. Just as the

drawing room is a privileged space that allows access to and intimacy with royalty, the position of Lady of the Bedchamber represents access to an even more elite space—the physical space reflects one’s social “place.” The eclogue actually enacts a similar scenario; just as the wealthy merchants’ wives infiltrate the drawing room, Montagu allows the reader into an elite space, giving access both to Roxana’s innermost thoughts and the innermost spaces of courtly life.

Drawing rooms and other courtly events are ultimately political in nature, though they may be thinly disguised as social occasions. For Roxana, each social event is a political opportunity, where every detail matters; she decks herself out in “Roses” and “new set my Jewells for my Hair” (8). Greig points out that the expensive court dress worn by the beau monde “was not just a means of displaying wealth,” but also served “a political function;” wearing new clothing or resetting jewelry was “interpreted as a sign of respect of the monarch” (119). Likewise, Roxana characterizes herself as the first to arrive at court—skipping her prayers so that she might be “dress’d by noon” (12)—and the last to retire, as the eclogue’s opening line conveys: “Roxana from the Court returning late.” Montagu illustrates how the seemingly minor details of court dress and regular attendance serve as important social cues, in which Roxana hopes her “merit” and her “duty” can be read.

In “Monday,” Montagu reveals the difficulty in reading and misreading the social and political scene. Montagu found herself on the wrong side of the court when a copy of the poem made its way to Princess Caroline, who “was unequal to decoding the poem’s double turn and reading Roxana’s condemnation as a compliment” (Grundy, *LMWM* 103). Her misreading of the poem reenacts Roxana’s own misreading of Gay’s *The What D’Ye Call It*. In Pope’s description of the initial reaction to the play, he admits that many first failed to grasp the play was a send-up of the conventions of tragedy, and not actually a tragedy itself: “The common people of the pit

and gallery received it at first with great gravity and sedateness, some few with tears; but after the third day they also took the hint, and have ever since been very loud in their clapps” (I: 283). Roxana accurately reads the bawdiness of the play’s title, which she cannot get past in order to discern its satirical humor.

What Princess Caroline failed to read in “Monday” is that the object of satire is Roxana’s overzealous prudery—she expresses shock over amusements that others find harmless, a way to reinforce her own sense of moral superiority. Roxana inadvertently reveals her own hypocrisy when she characterizes herself as sacrificing the “Reputation which so dear had cost” for the sake of political ambition (28). What matters is that *Roxana* perceives her reputation has been compromised, not that others feel the same; she effectively damns herself by admitting she has ignored her own moral scruples to vie for a position at court.

Just as the audience at the first performance of *The What D’Ye Call It* initially mistakes it for a tragedy, Roxana believes that she too occupies a tragic position; she misreads her own situation, failing to see she is actually in a farce, fat jokes included. Like many of the characters in *Town Eclogues*, Roxana suffers from a lack of self-awareness; her myopic focus renders her unable to see the absurdity of her position, a typical Scriblerian theme. But she is cannily aware of the significance of one kind of public display—political affiliation—and the social performance required to succeed in this competitive culture. The eclogues that follow likewise draw attention to the competitive nature of the beau monde’s social networks, and the strategizing required to find a place in the world of fashion. “Tuesday” and “Thursday” move from the mixed company of the court to the gendered, but no less competitive, social spaces of the coffee house and the tea table, masculine and feminine spaces respectively. Serving as a bridge between them is “Wednesday,” set in a private home and featuring a dialogue between

two lovers. In all three eclogues, Montagu explores the impossibility of connection when friends and lovers alike are viewed as competitors for social status or as mere objects to use in the social climbing atmosphere of the beau monde.

Coffee Houses and Tea Tables: Gendered Social Spaces

The geographical movement from “Monday” to “Tuesday” is slight; Montagu merely takes us across the street from the palace to the coffee house on the corner of St. James’s Street. Markman Ellis describes St. James’s as one of the most famous of the London coffee houses that were established across the city in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (*Coffee House* 189). Its proximity to the palace assured that it “thronged with courtiers, politicians and other assorted sycophants, and was a great source of news and court gossip” (189). The movement from the court to the coffee house is also a seamless social movement, and one that draws attention to the social networks of the beau monde. Like the court, the coffee house mixes politics and sociability, and features the same fierce competition for status among its habitués.

The location of St. James’s Coffee-House also identified it as a place of fashion, a favorite of the beau monde. In *The Censor* no. 61, Lewis Theobald’s Mr. Censor describes the “Assemblies of the beau Monde” that gather at “the Coffee-houses in Vogue” (210), where “the Members flock merely to see; and be seen” (211). This view of the coffee house—as a center for gossip and social parade—is a sharp contrast from the dominant historical view that portrays it as “a space of gentlemanly behavior and egalitarian openness,” and indicative of “a new kind of rational and critical debate that is characteristic of modern urban society” (Ellis, *General*

Introduction xxi).⁶ However, the coffee house of Montagu's "Tuesday" is hardly a space of "rational and critical debate." It more closely resembles the scene painted by Mr. Censor, which he claims provides "eternal Room for Satire and Correction of those Vices and Follies that, Hydra-like, sprout up the faster, and more numerous, for being lopp'd" (210). Montagu likewise finds plenty of satire in the fashionable duo of Patch and Silliander, who engage in a parodic version of the pastoral singing competition by arguing over which of them is more popular among the ladies. Their conversation bears more resemblance to the tea-table talk associated with women—characterized by idleness, superficiality, and above all, preoccupied with gossip and scandal.

Ellis points out that the coffee house has historically been presented as a public and masculine space, while the tea table represented the domestic and feminine (*General Introduction* xxii).⁷ As a spatial metaphor, the tea table could be representative of the "feminization" of polite society, but it also remained a morally suspect space precisely because of this association with women, as Ellis explains: "Furthermore, as a space gendered by its association with female manners, the tea-table is particularly associated with concerns about anti-social energies in female taste and manners, especially luxury consumption and gossip" (*General Introduction* xxii). In "Tuesday," Patch and Silliander offer a reversal of these gendered expectations, proving to be just as eager to consume luxury goods and gossip as the idle women portrayed in the writings of moralists and pamphleteers. Later in the eclogue cycle,

⁶ Ellis points out that the coffee house has often been given "a privileged role in eighteenth-century history," influenced by Jurgen Habermas's portrayal of the coffee house as the site where "men came together as equals to discuss topics that matter to them" (*General Introduction* xxi).

⁷ Though women did work in coffee houses, their patrons were predominantly men. Ellis points out that while tea consumption surpassed coffee in the eighteenth century, there was no "extended British culture of public tea-houses," which explains why "the dominant cultural formation associated with tea is the tea-table" (*General Introduction* xxi).

Montagu provides a mirror image of Patch and Silliander in Cardelia and Smilinda, two women engaged in their own competition in “Thursday. The Basset-Table.” Though the women are gathered around a basset-table, a space for gambling, it serves as a proxy tea table. While they wait for their tea, they argue over which of them has experienced the greater passion, and consequently the greater loss: Cardelia in her love for gambling or Smilinda for her lover Sharper. Montagu sets up an implicit comparison between the gendered social spaces of coffee house and the tea table, suggesting they are overwhelming alike as spaces for competition and consumption: for gossip, luxury goods, sexual conquest, and above all, triumph over social rivals.

“Tuesday” is set in the early evening, at the moment when London’s nightlife is about to begin. Though everyone else is preparing to attend the opera and “[n]o well dress’d Youth in Coffee house remain’d” (16), Silliander and Patch linger, suggesting that neither youth is quite as fashionable or popular as he later portrays himself. Silliander is thought to be John Campbell, who would become the fourth Duke of Argyll in 1761 (Hayton), and Patch was Algernon Seymour, Earl of Hertford until he became Duke of Somerset in 1748 (Cruikshanks). In 1715, both young men were Members of Parliament, but their conversation at St. James’s Coffee-House revolves around social gossip instead of political gossip. They are more eager to prove their access to the social networks of the beau monde, though as Montagu suggests in “Monday,” one’s social position could dictate one’s political position. Indeed, Patch and Silliander suggest the social space of the coffee house is just as competitive as the more overtly political spaces of court and parliament. Mr. Censor makes a similar observation when he compares the fashionable coffee house to “a sort of Drawing-rooms, where every distinguish’d Guest seems to keep his Levée” (212). Neither Patch nor Silliander seems to have acquired the social position that makes

them sought-out denizens of the coffee house, and their spirited competition over who has made more romantic conquests is a bid for dominance in their group of two. The competition is above all a performance, where truth matters less than one's ability to play the game.

The game of one-upmanship commences when Silliander first boasts that he knows "A Club of Ladies, where 'tis me they toast" (29). Patch retorts, "Toasting does seldom any favour prove, / Like us they never toast the Thing they love" (30-31). He points out that if any member of the group was actually in love with him, then Silliander would be the last to know it. In his eagerness to consume gossip that reinforces his own social and sexual value, Silliander has not considered its quality or veracity. He responds to Patch's challenge by offering material proof of his claim: "Ill fate persue me, may I never find / The dice propitious or the Ladys kind / If fair Miss Flippy's fan I did not tear, / And one from me she condescends to wear" (38-41).

Silliander's evidence is a material object—Miss Flippy is now seen about town with a fan gifted by him, proof of her affection. He sets up an implicit value system, in which the material object represents the woman's affection; by allowing herself to be seen around town with a fan gifted by Silliander, Miss Flippy makes their connection to one another publicly known. Material objects can be used as proof of one's access to a particular social network.

However, Patch turns Silliander's material proof against him, sneering, "Women are always ready to receive, / 'Tis then a favour when the Sex will give" (42-43). Patch then raises the stakes of the competition by increasing the social status of his own flirtation, and by making her the giver, and not the recipient, of affection: "A Lady (but she is too great to name, / Beauteous in Person, spotless in her Fame) / With gentle Strugglings let me force this Ring, / Another Day may give Another Thing" (44-47). Miss Flippy's name suggests she is not titled; in contrast, Patch boasts his "Lady" is "too great" for him to identify her by name, which would

also compromise her “spotless” reputation. Both her social status and her virtue add greater value to his conquest. Patch can also offer material proof of his success—the ring he now wears and uses bawdily to hint the Lady may eventually “give Another Thing.” Patch deliberately equates material and sexual favors; he claims the giving of a material object is a metaphor for giving the physical body. It is a suspect claim, but Patch appears to have already figured out that this a game of appearance and swagger—he is self-consciously creating an image as a lusty, but discriminating, man of taste for two different commodities: fashionable trinkets and beautiful women. In other words, he wants to be a fashionable beau, a word that in the eighteenth century could mean both a man who loved women and dress (*OED* def. 1-2)

Silliander is also a quick study of the game and rejoins, “I could say something—see this Billet doux— / And as for presents—look upon my shooe-- / These Buckles were not forc’d, and half a Theft, / But a young Countess fondly made the gift” (48-51). His rushed “I could say something” betrays his eagerness, but Silliander manages to stop himself before he is forced to read the letter, opting to show instead of tell. He presents further evidence in his shoe buckles, but clarifies they were “not forc’d, and halfe a Theft” like Patch’s ring. Silliander also shrewdly elevates the social position of his own unnamed lover to that of a Countess. Not to be outdone, Patch quickly retorts, “My Countess is more nice, more artfull too, / Affects to fly, that I may fierce persue” (52-53). Patch taunts Silliander with the snuff box, a fashionable male accessory used to hold snuff or scented tobacco. The snuff box often featured elaborate designs and reflected current style trends, and Patch is typically eager to show off his knowledge of fashion.

Even more importantly, the snuff box was won only after an erotic battle that highlights the connection he is making between material objects and the female body:

This Snuff box, while I begg'd she still deny'd,
And when I strove to snatch it, seem'd to hide,
She laugh'd, and fled, and as I sought to seize
With Affectation ramm'd it down her Stays:
Yet hoped she did not place it there unseen;
I press'd her Breasts, and pull'd it from between. (54-59)

Patch describes a woman who also treats their flirtation as a game, and one for whom he receives physical gratification instead of having to wait for “another day.” He once again raises the stakes by mentioning an additional material item—the Countess’s stays, an intimate item of clothing. Patch locates his material evidence ever closer to the female body—moving from the lady’s ring to the snuff box that the Countess stuff into her stays, from hand to breasts. The objects stand in for physical body parts, and possession of them stands in for intimate knowledge of the woman’s body.

Montagu’s entry into the male coffee house thus satirizes both the gendered language of gallantry and the coffee house itself as a masculine space of rational debate. Both men’s performance of the role of “beau” highlights the speciousness of their claims, which neither can actually prove. This is a competition that is based entirely on appearance, and one that has very little to do with their knowledge of any actual women of their circle. Silliander attempts to follow Patch’s lead with his own story of a woman willingly exposing her body to him, but he is not quite as bold as his friend: “With sudden art some secret did pretend, / Lean’d cross two chairs to whisper to a Freind, / While the stiff whalebone with the motion rose / And thousand Beauties to my sight expose” (64-67). Like Patch, he attempts to move metaphorically closer to the woman’s body by referencing her stays and breasts, but he does not offer any material proof

of the encounter. In general, he is not so eager as Patch to portray himself as the instigator in any of his scenarios. Silliander is notably more gallant in his language compared to Patch's lustier bawdiness. They both want to play the part of the beau, but Silliander is more representative of the polite version that grew more popular as the century progressed, while Patch's image is firmly rooted in the mold of the Restoration rake. But either role is just that—a performance that the other puts on for his friend.

Patch ultimately appears more conscious of the performative nature of this role, and each story he tells becomes more elaborate than the last. He finally trumps Silliander with the titillating anecdote of being “ask'd to come” to drink tea—making sure he identifies it as the fashionable “Bohea”—in Celia's dressing room, where she meets him “[wa]rm from her Bed, to me alone within” (68-69).⁸ The intimacy of the invitation is punctuated with the detail that Celia's nightgown was “fasten'd with a single Pin” (71), and that “[r]eaching the Kettle, made her Gown unpin, / She wore no Wastcoat, and her Shift was thin” (74-75). Patch again focuses on the female body by drawing attention to its physical adornment, in this case the loosely pinned nightgown. He brings Silliander, and us by extension, into the intimate space of Celia's dressing room, and even within the spaces of her nightgown, though he stops short at exposing her actual body. Patch excels at this game because it is one of words, and cannot be proven. The competition concludes with both men's realization of this point as Silliander demands, “What Colour does in Celia's stockings shine? / Reveal that secret and the Prize is thine” (84-85). Patch tellingly responds with a question of his own: “What are her Garters? Tell me if you can, / I'll freely own thee for the happy man” (86-87). He again raises the stakes by moving further up

⁸ In the eighteenth century, bohea was a darker type of tea that eventually replaced the greener varieties that at the time were more common in England. At this early period, bohea was still viewed as a “prestigious commodity” though it would become more ubiquitous as the century progressed (Coulton x).

Celia's leg, suggesting that he trumps Silliander in his knowledge of her body; but he also never responds to the first question to identify the color of her stockings. Neither man can offer the required material proof.

Both Patch and Silliander want to be perceived as men of fashion, which involves not just looking and acting the part in the coffee house, but in proving their social intimacy with other fashionable people. Greig argues that fashion "was defined more by its affiliation to particular people, and by extension to those people's possessions, than by the fundamental material characteristics or modishness of certain desirable products" (33). As Patch and Silliander illustrate, the stylishness or material value of the ring, the shoe buckles, and the snuff box are of minor importance. Instead, as Greig points out, "it was the life of an object after purchase—its application, use and attribution to particular owners—rather than just its allure at the point of sale, which denoted its relationship to fashion and its appeal to the beau monde" (36). Patch and Silliander are wholly concerned with the way material display communicates a message about their social prestige; they create vivid and eroticized lives for the material objects they flaunt in order to suggest they are eagerly sought after in the same manner the upper class woman pursues luxury goods. In a sense, then, they also make themselves objects of affection and possession in these dalliances—whether they are real or fantastical. Both men portray the beau monde as if it were entirely ruled by women, an idea Montagu also reinforces by featuring more female speakers in *Town Eclogues* than men.

Though "Thursday" echoes "Tuesday" in several key ways, Montagu separates the two eclogues with "Wednesday. The Tête à Tête," an interlude that at first seems remarkably different from the rest of the eclogues. Though this eclogue's subtitle suggests it is another dialogue poem, it reads more like a monologue. "Wednesday" features a lovers' quarrel between

Dancinda and Strephon, but the latter only manages to speak a few lines over the course of the poem. Dancinda dominates this “tête á tête,” to the point that the subtitle seems wholly ironic. The eclogue also includes hardly any references to the material aspects of place or the speakers, who are the only characters in the eclogues who have never been identified with any real-life counterparts. However, the poem’s conclusion offers a satiric turn that re-contextualizes the dialogue back within the social setting of the beau monde. Additionally, the three eclogues that make up the middle of the week are all concerned with the gendered use of social spaces, but “Wednesday” is the only poem that actually features a man and a woman in conversation with one another; it is revealing, then, that their dialogue is just as driven by competition as the homosocial spaces of the coffee house and tea table. The two lovers’ conversation is another kind of competition, in which each person fights to be heard.

“Wednesday” begins in the middle of a conversation with Strephon speaking, but Dancinda interrupts him, and she does not relinquish her control of the dialogue until the end of the poem. Dancinda voices the complaints of the women who remain silent or are ventriloquized by men. In fact, she could easily stand in for one of the women that Patch and Silliander boast about in “Tuesday.” Dancinda rails against both Strephon and society, pointing out the double standard that condemns women but acquits men for acting on their sexual desires. However, the poem is also a plea for platonic love and companionship, and she will later plaintively request of her would-be lover: “Has Love no pleasures free from Guilt or Fear? / Pleasures less feirce, more lasting, more sincere? / Thus let us gently kiss, and fondly Gaze, / Love is a Child, and like a Child he plays” (73-76). Dancinda draws attention to the materialistic and sexualized relationship between men and women in “Tuesday;” she requests of Strephon a love that is not overwhelmed by lust and competition for power.

While Patch and Silliander hold up trinkets as the material proof of their conquests, Dancinda offers the point of view of the woman who gives, asking Strephon, “What proofe of Love remains for me to grant?” (9). Just as Patch hints that his Lady’s offering of the ring suggests “[a]nother Day may give Another Thing,” Dancinda accuses of Strephon of expecting the same:

I shew you all my Heart, without Disguise:
But these are tender proofes that you despise—
I see too well what Wishes you persue . . .
And not content my Honor to subdue,
Now strive to triumph o’re my Virtue too. (25-27, 31-32)

Dancinda’s love for Strephon has not blinded her to the fact that he will not accept only the immaterial proof of her love shown through her affection. Instead, he desires the same material, i.e. sexual, proof that Patch and Silliander insinuate in their conflation of material objects and women’s bodies. Dancinda concludes her speech with the plea: “Oh Strephon! if you would continu Just, / If Love be something more than Brutal Lust; / Forbear to ask, what I must still deny” (77-79). She requests a love that is not about either material or sexual favors, or communicated through the elaborate series of social cues meant to signal desire, but is instead based on honest communication, equality, and even innocence. It is a love that seems entirely out of place in the world Montagu is constructing in the eclogues.

The first portion of “Wednesday” is difficult to place in Montagu’s city guide. The location is never identified, and the speakers themselves are curiously disembodied figures when compared to the other characters, such as the heavysset Roxana, foppish Patch and Silliander, or

later the preening Lydia in “Friday.” Dancinda and Strephon remain immaterial voices up until the final ten lines of the poem when the conversation momentarily ceases:

She paus'd; and fix'd her Eyes upon her Fan,
He took a pinch of snuff, and thus began,
Madam, if Love—but he could say no more
For Made'moiselle came rapping to the Door.
The dangerous Moments no Adieus afford,
Begone, she crys, I'm sure I hear my Lord.
The Lover starts from his unfinish'd Loves,
To snatch his Hat, and seek his scatter'd Gloves,
The sighing Dame to meet her Dear prepares;
While Strephon cursing slips down the back Stairs. (83-92)

Dancinda and Strephon are suddenly embodied in the modern world of fashion with their material accouterments: the fan, snuff box, hat, and gloves. The abrupt shift also introduces ambiguity and humor to their situation. These are not timeless lovers of antiquity, but a society wife indifferent to her husband and a fashionable beau who strategically exits through the servants' back stairs to avoid getting caught. The sudden appearance of these material signifiers introduces the satiric shift as Montagu draws attention to the artifice of their situation.

Dancinda's downward glance at her fan seems less like a sign of her disordered emotional state than it does a measured part of her performance. Likewise, Strephon's scrambling for his hat and gloves refigures him from a cold-hearted lover to a frightened beau escaping the wrath of the cuckolded husband.

Grundy argues that the sudden revelation that Dancinda is married should not be seen as undermining her request for platonic love, pointing out that we cannot assume she is happily married or that her husband was her own choice (“Six Town Eclogues” 187). Grundy rightfully observes that there is a sense that Montagu understands Dancinda’s position; however, the poem’s conclusion is obviously humorous. The entire eclogue cycle is satirical in nature, with Montagu focusing her sharp sense of humor on the artifice of the beau monde and their preoccupation with surfaces; there is no reason to assume “Wednesday” is any kind of exception. However, her satire is also not entirely devoid of moments of empathy, if not always sympathy. Thus, Dancinda’s plea for companionship does not need to be seen as entirely incompatible with her role as a woman of fashion, and an understandable situation can also be a comical one.

The eclogue’s conclusion also re-contextualizes Dancinda’s concerns about her reputation, and what she may lose by giving in to Strephon; she is not a virtuous virgin protecting her chastity, but she is a wife who has a social obligation to protect the family name (and bloodline) from the appearance of scandal, and even more importantly, an illegitimate child. In fact, the revelation of Dancinda’s marriage more fully illustrates just how much she actually has to lose in an illicit affair with Strephon. The ending also relocates what appears to be a private tête à tête back within the larger social world from which it initially appears to be so far removed. Just as “Monday” illustrates how the social is also the political, “Wednesday” reveals the “private” is also public.

Dancinda is taking a social risk, and in that sense, she anticipates the setting of “Thursday. The Bassette Table,” which returns us to the gendered social space first illustrated by “Tuesday.” Cardelia, as her name implies, is devoted to cards and gambling, while Smilinda has made a gamble of another kind in her affair with the charming Sharper. Cardelia is widely

considered to represent Elizabeth Hervey, Countess of Bristol, who had a reputation for gambling and a keen ear for political gossip that she passed along to her husband John Hervey, Earl of Bristol (Greig 145). She was slightly older than Montagu, who is thought to be Smilinda in the poem. The two women quarrel over “who suffers most, / By Cards’ ill usage, or by Lovers lost” (26-27), calling in their friend Loveit to serve as judge. The eclogue is set around a basset table, or a card table used for playing the game of basset, a popular card game at court and among the beau monde.⁹

The card table was large enough to fit four people comfortably, as opposed to the tea table, which was typically smaller and lighter in construction; however, the basset table here serves as a proxy tea table where the women prepare to take their tea. Like the tea table, the basset table is also a morally questionable social space for women. Ellis points out, “Just as the coffee-house was constructed as a market of rumour and misinformation, the tea-table was repeatedly figured as a locus for gossip and slander, reinforced by notions of tea as an enervating luxury in itself, and as a cause of insatiable desires for other corrupting luxuries” (*Introduction* xxxix). Indeed, Cardelia and Smilinda offer an example of these “insatiable desires,” the latter in her illicit affair with Sharper and the former in her love of gambling. Both the tea table and the basset table are the sites of competition and conspicuous consumption—of tea, food, fashionable china and porcelain tea services, gossip, and of course, money.

The discourse on women and gambling was similarly concerned with gaming’s potential to incite “insatiable desires” and unchecked consumption. Gillian Russell explains that eighteenth-century antigambling literature was even more horrified by gambling in women than

⁹ Basset arrived at the English court in the seventeenth century, by way of Italy and France (Munting 9). A simpler version called faro became enormously popular across social classes in the nineteenth century (Munting 9).

men: “Addiction to gambling was represented as profoundly unnatural for a woman, a betrayal not only of social responsibilities and public reputation as in the case of men, but of her body, her very femaleness” (484). Whereas the male gambler potentially risks his “family, friends, and property,” the female gambler’s “only ‘real’ property she had to risk was her body” (Russell 484-485). Thus, gambling for women was frequently portrayed as “a form of prostitution” (Russell 485). Patricia Meyer Spacks records a similar connection between the biblical characterization of gossip as having a “loose tongue” and the idea of sexual looseness: “Whorishness involves both indiscriminate giving and indiscriminate taking, on the metaphorical level an intercourse” (123). The basset table-cum-tea table of “Thursday” is doubly dangerous, then, as it encourages indiscriminate giving and taking on multiple levels.

In their descriptions of their passions, Cardelia and Smilinda reinforce the moralists’ worst fears. Grundy observes the two women echo one another: “Their tastes are very similar: gambling is presented erotically, and love as highly materialistic” (*LMWM* 104). Cardelia describes her passion for basset in the kind of highly-charged terms one would expect from the description of a lover, asking, “But of what Marble must that Breast be form’d / can gaze on Bassette and remain unwarm’d?” (76-77). In her words, gambling sounds remarkably like sexual passion: “Fir’d by the sight, all Reason I disdain, / My passions rise, and will not bear the Rein. / Look upon Bassette, you who reason boast, / And see if Reason may not there be lost!” (84-87). The description is suggestive of gambling as a form of prostitution, where Cardelia risks her physical body as much as her wealth. Smilinda responds to her friend’s description of her passion with similar proof of her own desire for Sharper:

What more than Marble must the Breast compose
That listens coldly to my Sharper’s vows?

Then, when he trembles, when his Blushes rise,
When Awfull Love seems melting in his Eyes!
With eager Beats, his Mechlin Cravat moves:
He loves! I whisper to my selfe, He loves! (88-93)

Smilinda offers a reversal of Patch and Silliander's objectification of the female body in her own attention to Sharper's blushes and trembling throat, suggesting she also exults in this proof of her own sexual desirability. Her focus on his physical reactions to her presence suggests the male body can be commodified as well.

Both Cardelia and Smilinda's mutual loves are ultimately about consumption, the sating of desires. Their friend Loveit recognizes their similarities, and, her patience worn out, she interrupts their competition:

Cease your Contention, which has been too long,
I grow impatient, and the Tea too strong,
Attend and Yeild to what I now Decide,
The Equipage shall grace Smilinda's side,
The Snuff Box to Cardelia I decree:
So, leave Complaining, and begin your Tea. (108-113)

Loveit is also implicated in this discussion of female consumption in her demand, "I want some Tea," making her a fitting member at the basset table (29). While Montagu appears to reinforce the moral concerns of her age, portraying gambling and sexual desire as risking the female body, what is noticeably absent is any moral condemnation. Like Patch and Silliander, Cardelia and Smilinda are mocked for their superficiality, materialism, and self-absorption. But all are objects of satire, not moral outrage.

In fact, Montagu delights in reversing gendered expectations of behavior, creating gossiping men more interested in the fashions of women than politics, and aggressive women who gamble on money and love. Even the displaced tête à tête between Dancinda and Strephon harkens back to the social milieu of the beau monde, where one's reputation is as much a performance of expectations than any certain reality. Each of these dialogues is a social performance dictated by the social space occupied by its speakers. The social space of the coffee house appears to be not terribly different from the space of the basset/tea table, and the province of men not so different from that of women. Both places are equally sites of consumption and competition, and both sexes eager to consume and compete.

All of the characters are also overwhelmingly concerned with material objects and what these items say about themselves; they prove not just their knowledge of fashion, but, more importantly, their access to the social networks of the beau monde. Material display is yet another important qualification of belonging to the beau monde, and knowledge of where to obtain these fashionable goods an essential part of the "art of living in London." In "Thursday," "Friday. The Toilette," and "Saturday. The Small Pox," Montagu takes us from the social spaces of the West End to journey down the Strand into the City's popular shopping districts. In each shop that she pinpoints in her city guide, Montagu explores how each woman views her relationship to both material goods and the shop owners who sell them. The kind of role each woman takes on in these places likewise reveals the way she thinks of her own purchasing power as a consumer of goods.

Shops and “Pen’norths:” Retail Space and Material Goods

Objects are littered throughout the *Town Eclogues*: Roxana laments the wasted jewels in her hair, Patch and Silliander show off their snuff boxes and shoe buckles, and Dancinda coquettishly glances at her fan. However, Cardelia and Smilinda provide our first glimpse at where these luxury goods are obtained: London’s shops. Several studies of the eighteenth century as a consumer society have pointed out the word “shopping” emerges for the first time in this era.¹⁰ The eighteenth-century consumer would purchase material objects not just for their usefulness, but also “as valuable indication of who and what they were” (Kowaleski-Wallace 6). Likewise, Greig points out that material display was a vital aspect of proving one’s membership in the world of fashion: “the right goods in your room, the right carriage at your door, and the right twist on your cravat” (20). When Smilinda eagerly notes Sharper’s trembling throat as an indication of his love, she is equally pleased to point out his cravat is made out of expensive and fashionable Mechlin lace from Flanders. It is at once an affirmation of his social status and financial worth, and Smilinda’s as well—she has a fashionable beau to flaunt in the same manner as a new fan.

Patch and Silliander also want to be perceived as men of fashion, and their knowledge of luxury goods is part of constructing that image. This knowledge even extends to women’s fashion. Their competition comes to a halt when Silliander spies Titiana on her way to St. James’s Park, and he abandons his potentially made-up lovers in order to pursue her. When he urges his friend to accompany him, Patch insists they follow Tintoretta, who he has just seen

¹⁰ See, for example, John Brewer and Roy Porter, *Consumption and the World of Goods* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2013); Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace, *Consuming Subjects: Women, Shopping, and Business in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia UP, 1997); Neil McKendrick, John Brewer and J.H. Plumb, *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1982).

headed to the opera. Both men mention the color of the women's mantuas—Titiana's green and Tintoretta's blue. The men of the coffee house appear to follow fashion as slavishly as the women. However, shopping was increasingly portrayed as a feminine activity in the eighteenth century (Kowaleski-Wallace 12). As with the gendered social space of the tea table and basset table, concerns about England's consumption habits tended to focus on the insatiable appetites of women over men (Kowaleski-Wallace 7). "Thursday" offers an example of this kind of multi-layered portrait of female consumption; the women gather around the basset table in order to gamble, where they also take tea and engage in "tea table chat" about the illicit expenditure of money and romantic affection. It is within this context that the women also discuss another kind of consumption: shopping.

The stakes in Cardelia and Smilinda's competition are an equipage and a snuff box, objects that reveal what each woman values. However, whereas Patch and Silliander focus largely on the symbolic nature of their material objects—the social networks to which the items provide access—the women of "Thursday," "Friday," and "Saturday" focus on the origin point of fashion. They are the ones who dictate style, and are interested in the "fundamental material characteristics or modishness" of their purchases as a reflection of their own social status (Greig 33). They also take pride in being the arbiters of fashion, with the power to designate what shop or designer or "brand" is the most stylish. Montagu suggests that women may not just be passive consumers with uncontrollable appetites for the latest item; instead, they also play an active role in the circulation of goods around London, and thus are an active part of its commercial identity. In their description of the two objects placed as collateral for their bet, Cardelia and Smilinda locate these items within London's fashionable shops, taking us on one of the eclogues' rare excursions outside of the "town" and into the City.

Cardelia bets an equipage, a small case that could be attached to women's garments and typically held objects such as thimbles, scissors, and pencils (Grundy and Halsband 195). The first feature she highlights is the object's designer, Charles Mather, who had a toyshop at Temple Bar in the City (Grundy and Halsband 195). Cardelia suggests the equipage's designer is the primary source of its value, namely his reputation as a fine craftsman, which she shows off by detailing the intricate engravings on the small items that make up the equipage:

See, on the Tooth pick Mars and Cupid strive,
And both the struggling Figures seem alive.
Upon the bottom, see the Queen's bright Face,
A Myrtle Foliage round the Thimble Case.
Jove, Jove himself does on the Scissars shine;
The Metal, and the Workmanship divine! (32-37)

Cardelia points out the quality of the work, as well as the engravings themselves. The objects reflect the neoclassical interest in Roman mythology, while the recently deceased Queen Anne adorns the thimble. Like the snuff box, an equipage was a fashionable accessory that simultaneously served a practical purpose. Its features could also be quite elaborate and reflect current trends. When the eclogue was written in 1715, Queen Anne had only been dead a year so the equipage is likely still a relatively new and valuable item.

The second feature Cardelia notes in her assessment of the object's value is the price she paid for it: "fifty Guineas (a great pen'north)" (31). Both the item's brand and its price act as mutually reinforcing values: the craftsmanship justifies the cost and the cost is evidence of the fine craftsmanship. Cardelia also qualifies this price as "a great pen'north," which Grundy and Halsband define as "a buyer's bargain" and one of Montagu's favorite words (195). The word is

likely a derivative spelling of “pennyworth,” which Samuel Johnson defines as “something advantageously bought; a purchase got for less than it is worth” (def. 3). By characterizing the equipage as a great bargain, Cardelia implies that it is “worth” far more than fifty guineas. Appropriately enough for a gambler, then, Cardelia focuses on the quality and cost of the item she bets. She sets clear stakes to the game that simultaneously act as proof of her confidence in her claim and illustrate her security in her own social and economic position; spending large sums of money at the city’s shops or its gaming tables is simply a way of life to her. Cardelia is a gambler, but she is also a shopper, and a savvy one at that.

Cardelia’s love of gambling is reflected in her shopping habits; her name-dropping is meant to reinforce the equipage’s material value in a very literal sense: how much money it is worth. Smilinda is similarly preoccupied with the modishness of the object she bets, but focuses instead on its social value as opposed to its monetary value. She does not identify the price of the snuff box because she did not actually purchase it. Instead, it is a gift from her former lover:

“This Snuff box once the Pledge of Sharper’s love / When Rival Beauties for the present strove, / (At Corticelli’s he the Raffle won, / There first his Passion was in Public shown” (38-41).

Whereas Cardelia appeals to relish her role as the independent and savvy shopper who has a good eye for both quality and a bargain, Smilinda takes pride in not having to buy her own “pen’north.”

She also offers an appraisal of the object she bets, but its value is not just as a sentimental token of Sharper’s love; the snuff box is also a reinforcement of her social and sexual value among the beau monde. Smilinda specifies that the snuff box was won at Corticelli’s, a fashionable Indian warehouse in Suffolk Street near Haymarket that Walpole points out was also known as a “redenzvous of gallantry” (Grundy and Halsband 195). Just as Cardelia references

Charles Mather to highlight the equipage's material value, Smilinda locates her prized object at a shop known for being both the fashionable haunt of lovers and one that caters to the beau monde's appetite for foreign goods. The location perhaps says more about Sharper's taste than Smilinda's, but she is enamored with him precisely because he is a man of fashion. However, she fails to realize that this same quality leads him to chase women in the same way he pursues the day's fashions. His name draws on the basset table as a space for gambling, and suggests he is a "cheat" and a "rogue" (*OED* def. 2). His name actually associates him with the other veteran gambler and shopper, Cardelia. Sharper chooses Smilinda from among the other women at Corticelli's as though he is selecting an item for purchase, though she appears to objectify him as a fashionable body as well. Both Sharper and Smilinda value each other in the same way they value his cravat and snuff box: as accessories that prove their status as fashionable people.

Smilinda also departs from Cardelia in that she does not provide any physical description of the snuff box itself, suggesting it is an example of Greig's claim that what matters the most is "the life of an object after purchase" and its representation of the social networks to which the individual belongs. For Smilinda, the snuff box's value is social—it signifies that she has been chosen as the desired object of affection over her other sexual rivals. She smugly points out that when Sharper gave her the snuff box, Hazardia, "blush'd and turn'd her Head aside, / A Rival's envy, all in vain, to hide" (42-43). The snuff box is proof of both Cardelia's sexual desirability and her social triumph; its value is as much about Hazardia's envy as it is about Sharper's love.

In a similar manner, Smilinda's current sorrow over Sharper's transferred affections is not just about the loss of the man himself; it is bound up in her own fear that she may have fallen in status as a fashionable commodity. Her new rival is Ombrelia, a former friend who was "[a]n aukard Thing when first she came to Town, / Her Shape unfashion'd, and her Face unkown" (60-

61). To be a member of the world of fashion is to be known; it is a status that relies upon visibility. Ombrelia's initial appearance as "unfashion'd" and "unknown" locates her outside of the beau monde. To Smilinda's regret, she introduces Ombrelia to this world by teaching her how to be "in fashion," unwittingly creating her own rival in the process:

. . . I taught her first to spread
Upon her sallow cheeks enlivening Red.
I introduced her to the Parks and Plays,
And by my Interest Cosins made her Stays.
Ungratefull Wretch! with Mimic airs grown pert,
She dares to steal my Fav'rite Lover's Heart. (62-67)

Ombrelia has learned the ways of fashion—to use cosmetics and the best stays by Cosins to present her face and figure in the most attractive way possible in the public places frequented by the beau monde. Lynn Sorge points out that an elegant and well-made pair of stays could be a costly item of apparel for women; distinctions in craftsmanship were reflected in gradations in their cost, and thus the class of the woman who purchased them (25-26). Most stay-makers were men, and the profession required "inviolable Secrecy in many Instances, where he is obliged by Art to mend a crooked Shape, to bolster up a fallen Hip, or distorted Shoulder. . . to him she reveals all her natural Deformity" (Campbell 224). To share the name of one's stay-maker is about more than letting a friend in on an excellent craftsman—it invites her into an elite club, potentially risking the secrets of one's "deformity" becoming known through shop gossip. Under Smilinda's tutelage, Ombrelia has learned to affiliate herself with the beau monde through material objects, which in turn transforms her into a fashionable object sought out by the roving Sharper.

Whereas Cardelia offers her equipage as an item of material value, one that represents her own purchasing power as a shopper and gambler, Smilinda is more focused on the snuff box as a reinforcement of her own social and sexual value among the beau monde. She reveals how keenly aware she is of the power of the objects to reinforce this value when she describes sharing her knowledge with Ombrelia, advice which largely pertains to objects that physically connect to the body, enhancing and improving it. Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace argues there is frequently a “metonymic displacement, whereby the female consumer becomes identified with the products she consumes” (95), and thus the woman shopper can transition from one who purchases commodities to “*woman herself* as commodity” (93). Patch and Silliander offer a crude example of exactly this kind of displacement; the objects they claim to have obtained from their various lovers act as metonymic representations of the women themselves. Montagu’s last two eclogues likewise highlight the easy association between material objects and the female body.

The final two eclogues also return to the monologue form. In “Friday. The Toilette,” the speaker Lydia angrily inveighs against her inconstant lover who has neglected her in favor of an unexpected rival for his affections: his own wife. Montagu again draws on beau monde gossip as her source of inspiration; Lydia was Mary Coke, whose husband was Vice-Chamberlain to Queen Anne and later George I. Her lover was widely known to be James, third Earl of Berkeley, whose wife was a much younger woman (Grundy and Halsband 199). Lydia is all too aware of herself as an aging beauty, whose own status as a fashionable object is fading: “No Lovers now her morning Hours molest / And catch her at her Toilette halfe undrest” (3-4). Lydia is pictured at her toilette in the eclogue, which serves as a place for a woman to have her hair done by a lady’s maid or to apply cosmetics. The toilette, like the tea table, basset table, and the shops, is a site of female consumption, of which Pope’s Belinda in *The Rape of the Lock* is a particularly

famous example. Belinda sits surrounded by the spoils of empire—the “various offerings of the world” (Pope 130)—but Montagu shows us Lydia actually shopping the empire.

After she laments that she is no longer “the fav’rite Toast” (12), Lydia’s first attempt to soothe her wounded ego is to shop:

Strait then I’ll dress and take my wonted Range,
Through India shops, to Motteux’s, or the Change,
Where the Tall Jar erects his stately Pride
With Antick Shapes in China’s Azure dy’d,
There careless lyes a rich Brocard unroll’d
Here shines a Cabinet with burnish’d Gold. (27-32)

Lydia eagerly catalogues the exotic furnishings to be found in the India shops and the New Exchange. Originally built in 1608 and modeled on the Royal Exchange, a popular mercantile center specializing in international goods (Adburgham 21), the New Exchange housed 128 shops known for their fine millinery by the early decades of the eighteenth century (White 190). The New Exchange was in the heart of London’s shopping district, “a long unbroken avenue of shops” along the Strand, Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, and into St. Paul’s Churchyard (White 187). While shops could be found in St. James’s and Covent Garden as well, the former largely catered to the interests of “fashionable gentlemen” due to its location near the coffee shops (Adburgham 31). Women tended to venture toward Covent Garden and the Strand, the latter of which was particularly known as “the undisputed locality for all the best silk mercers, woollen and linen merchants, lacemen, goldsmiths and jewellers” (Adburgham 38). Lydia also mentions Peter Motteux’s popular shop in Leadenhall Street, east of St. Paul’s Churchyard (Grundy and

Halsband 199). The area that comprises her “wonted range” is quite extensive, then, covering a significant amount of City ground and featuring the best luxury goods London could offer.

The New Exchange’s reputation for having a “clandestine character” also points to another dimension of the shopping experience (Adburgham 21): what White calls a “pleasure that faced two ways—looking and being looked at” (188). Lydia’s lingering description of the exotic goods on display is suggestive of the pleasure of “looking,” but her dismay returns when she realizes that she may not receive the double pleasure of “being looked at.” She no longer possesses her youthful beauty that ensures she is visible to the opposite sex, and thus may also be forced to walk away without anything: “But then, Alas! I must be forc’d to pay, / Or bring no Pen’norths, not a Fan away” (33-34). Lydia suggests that the loss of her sexual currency means a corresponding loss in financial currency. She shares traits with both of the women of “Thursday;” like Cardelia, she expresses interest in the quality and stylishness of the objects themselves, but like Smilinda, she also values them as reflections of her own self-worth. For Cardelia, a great “pen’north” is paying less than expected for an item of great value, whereas Smilinda and Lydia believe it means paying nothing at all; however, both women unexpectedly pay far more than they realize.

Their financial assets are also their physical assets, which in turn are their social assets. They effectively participate in their own commodification by so closely aligning their physical bodies with the material objects bestowed on them by men. Kowaleski-Wallace argues that the appearance of the female shopper within the shop, among the goods for sale, easily translates into the woman “as something ‘to be bought’” (93). Both Smilinda and Lydia present themselves as something to be bought at Corticelli’s and the New Exchange, and they either gloat or rail

against their desirability as commodities in London's retail space. Lydia discovers that basing her "worth" entirely on physical beauty is ultimately doomed.

Through both Smilinda and Lydia, Montagu reveals the impermanence of female power based on beauty, a similar theme she explores in "Saturday. The Small-Pox. Flavia." Smilinda finds her power shaken when her lover turns to a newer face to gratify his desires, and Lydia rages against her loss of power when she is no longer the fresh young beauty on the town scene. Flavia, however, experiences a far more sudden and violent loss of her beauty, which she similarly portrays as a source of power. "Saturday" introduces Flavia as she is recovering from small pox, which has disfigured her once beautiful features. Like Lydia, she is aware of her beauty as a form of capital, but she constructs her own role in commercial London as a far more active one: "Wittness oh Lilly! and thou Motteux tell! / How much Japan these Eyes have made you sell. . . . Now Beautie's Fled, and Presents are no more" (21-22, 27). Flavia also name-drops Motteux, one of the more well-known shop owners in London, and the perfumer Charles Lillie, whose shop was located in Beaufort Buildings in the Strand (Grundy and Halsband 201). Lillie's shop also served as one of the locations where one could purchase *The Spectator*, a role that identifies the importance of London's shops in circulating more than commercial goods.¹¹ They were also sources of news and information, places for business connections to be made, and spaces for romantic rendezvous. Flavia taps into all of these place identities by locating herself in the shop as a beautiful woman who draws attentions to the shopkeepers' goods by her presence there. Men flock to see her and subsequently purchase goods there; news then spreads, drawing in more customers seeking to shop at the places she has made fashionable. Flavia essentially

¹¹ Several issues of *The Spectator* from 1712 publish at the end of the document that copies are sold by A. Baldwin in Warwick Lane and "Charles Lillie, Perfumer, at Beauford-Buildings in the Strand" (see, for example, Issue CCCCXCII from Wednesday, September 24, 1712).

portrays herself as a kind of early model or spokeswoman, suggesting she plays an active—and significant—role in the circulation of goods across London.

While she does complain, “Presents are no more,” she primarily revels in her power to move the purchasing ability of London’s gallants, and not in the receipt of the objects themselves. In fact, the objects seem almost beside the point, as she gloats, “With what contempt you saw me oft despise / The humble Offer of the raffled Prize: / For at each raffle still the Prize I bore, / With Scorn rejected, or with Triumph wore” (23-26). Whereas Smilinda and Lydia smugly accept the gifts offered by besotted men, Flavia thrillingly remembers the power found in choosing to reject such prizes with “Scorn” or with “Triumph” accept the gift. She determines the value of the man and the gift instead of viewing both as a reflection of her own status. She later describes her loss of beauty as an “Empire lost!” (62), a metaphor that reinforces her sense of her own power; she portrays herself as a ruler surveying the territory she governs. For Flavia, the shops are an essential part of this territory, where her social power is evident in the shopkeepers’ receipts. Like Cardelia, she portrays herself as an independent agent, though not as the purchaser of goods; instead, she plays a role that is more similar to the shopkeeper—the active agent who drives the purchase of goods.

London’s shops, then, play a major role in the beau monde’s concretization of their status; they provide the objects used for the material display of wealth and prestige, but they also act as public spaces for those staged displays. For women, this display invariably comes down to beauty, though Greig clarifies, “‘beauty’ was not so much a subjective celebration of women’s physical allure but was rather intended as a more objective acknowledgment of their social status and public profile” (169). To be a fashionable woman was to be beautiful—it was impossible to be otherwise (169). To be beautiful is a part of fashionable display, as the elaborate and

expensive toilette furniture of the eighteenth century suggests. Greig points out that objects comprising the toilette “were regarded as essential accouterments and provide testimony to the value placed on this aspect of a fashionable woman’s routine. Demanding wealth, time, space, and the aid of servants and knowledgeable assistants, beauty routines were powerful forms of (and sites for) status display” (173). It can be easy to dismiss both Lydia and Flavia as merely vain, but they are both concerned about far more than a loss of physical beauty—they are worried about a loss of power and status in their world.

Lydia’s maid attempts to distract her from her anger and disappointment by claiming her beauty still exists for display: “How well this Riband’s Gloss becomes your Face, / She cries in Rapture! Then so sweet a Lace! / How charmingly you look! so bright! so fair!” (73-75). Flavia also happily recalls the hours spent at her toilette, “where oft I have sate, / While Hours unheeded pass’d in deep Debate, / How Curls should fall, or where a Patch to place, / If Blue or Scarlet best became my Face” (47-50). Both of these moments are as much about the power of display as they are about consumption of material goods; the goods only matter if the rest of the world of fashion sees them. Lydia responds to her maid’s flattery by returning to the social world: “Strait Lydia smil’d; the Comb adjusts her Locks / And at the Play House, Harry keeps her box” (77-78). Significantly, she departs for the theatre, an implicit acknowledgement of the staged aspect of beauty and the importance of public display. In contrast, Flavia fears that her loss of beauty means she is no longer fit to be seen in public. She covers her face with a mask and prepares herself to “bid the World Adieu” (84), suggesting that the loss of visibility on the urban stage is effectively a social death.

Parks and Theatres: The Urban Stage

Both “Friday” and “Saturday” feature the last stops on Montagu’s London city guide—the theatres and parks that equally serve as stages for the beau monde’s display—before we abandon the town for the country, the world of fashion for rural retirement. Greig points out that membership in the beau monde required participation in the “public” world of London’s social spaces: “[F]ashionable status was won through strategic public performances in a round of interconnected urban spaces including the court and parliament, pleasure gardens, theatres, and private homes” (20). As we have observed throughout *Town Eclogues*, these performances on the “metropolitan stage” could involve displays of political affiliation, access to social networks, triumph over social rivals, or material possessions (Greig 20). Likewise, Montagu’s characters themselves seem aware that they are putting on a performance for an audience: Roxana rails against her fate as though she is a tragic heroine, Patch cheekily plays the part of a rake from a Restoration comedy, Dancinda coyly employs her fan like a prop. The eclogues are peppered with such “theatrical” details, as Grundy puts it. Montagu does a great deal of scene setting, using “clothes, make-up, props . . . as well as the elements of disguise or role-playing, and of the gaze: displaying and being displayed to” (Grundy, “Theatrical Eclogue” 64). These members of the beau monde are accustomed to being watched by an audience; in fact, their very separation and distinction relies upon it. While nearly every social occasion, whether in public spaces or private homes, involve such performances, the parks and theatres of early eighteenth-century London offer particularly vivid examples of public display. They offer the largest and widest possible audience, including people from all social stations, and both were widely known as places to see and be seen, to enjoy the social parade of Londoners in their finest clothing.

Despite the fact that “routine visits to both the play and opera were pricey,” they nonetheless were a foundational aspect of the social life of the beau monde (Greig 85). They were places where all the fluctuations of the marriage market could be observed, from flirtations to unofficial announcements of engagements (Greig 90-91). They were a hotbed for rumor and gossip about extramarital affairs, political infighting, and social betrayal. To be present at the opera house or playhouse was to participate in the social life of the city in all its diversity; if one was absent there, then one may as well not be in society at all. In “Tuesday,” Montagu portrays the city’s residents preparing for an evening at the opera, capturing the different routines of various social groups:

The Opera Queens had finish’d half their Faces
And City Dames allready taken Places
Fops of all kinds to see the Lion run,
The Beauties wait till the first Act’s begun
And Beaux step home to put fresh Linnen on. (11-15)

The stars of the stage, women of the middle and merchant classes, and the men and women of fashion all prepare in their different ways for the pleasure of seeing and being seen. The moment anticipates Lydia at her toilette, similarly preparing for an evening at the theatre. “Friday” concludes with her vanity temporarily gratified so that she can resume her place “at the Play House” where “Harry keeps her Box” (78). The designation “play house” suggests that Lydia is going to a play and not the opera, which was staged at the King’s Theatre in Haymarket, built in 1705 and London’s first opera house (White 303). Instead, she is likely headed to either of the Theatres Royal in Covent Garden or Drury Lane.

Box seats at either the opera or the theatre were the most expensive seats one could buy, indicative of the “structural hierarchy” of the theatre auditorium (Greig 81). The theatre was comprised of seating areas with different price distinctions—boxes, pit, and galleries—resulting in “status-oriented divisions” in the audience (Greig 81). The boxes were claimed by the aristocracy and the gentry, the pit “attracted a mix of peers, gentry, merchants, artists, and others of the middling sort,” and the galleries contained “the most humble spectators” as they were the cheapest, and furthest, seats in the house (Greig 82). Thus, the “City Dames” in “Tuesday” would likely sit in the pit, while Lydia gravitates toward the boxes, which were the most visible seats in the house, and thus “most highly prized by the beau monde” (Greig 88). The boxes were “closest to the stage where the view of the performance was constrained but their view of the audience, and visibility to that audience, was maximized” (Greig 88). Lydia’s eagerness to resume her box at the theatre has far less to do with desiring to see the play than it does with being seen by the audience—and seeing who else is in attendance.

In fact, the play on the stage often seemed secondary to the vibrant social scene of the auditorium, as White explains: “The audience, all agreed, was a spectacle as fascinating as much of the action on stage, the theatres ‘glittering and gaudy, because our spectators love to be an exhibition themselves’. The house lights were undimmed throughout the performance for ease of observation” (308). This is exactly the attention that Lydia records missing earlier in the eclogue: “Nor shall side boxes watch my wand’ring Eyes, / And as they catch the Glance in rows arise / With humble Bows” (15-17). Lydia describes the scene as though she is also watching herself and thoroughly enjoying her performance. She notes the other spectators eagerly following her gaze to see what—or who—she looks at. Lydia is aware of the power of her own gaze, which can command men to rise and give her a responding bow when they sense they are the objects of

that gaze. Lydia's alarm that she may no longer attract the attention of "white Glov'd Beaux" is not just an expression of mortified vanity—it is horror that by losing her visibility, she may be losing her place in this world.

Flavia likewise panics over the sense she is losing her place in the world of fashion. Her great beauty was as much about her own social status as it was about her physical allure, as her lament over her once busy social calendar attests: "There was a Time, (Oh that I could forget!) / When Opera Tickets pour'd before my Feet, / And at the Ring where brightest Beauties shine, / The earliest Cherrys of the Park were mine" (17-20). Tickets to the opera were more expensive than those to the playhouses, and box seats were only available by season subscription (Greig 81). However, there was also a "widespread practice of lending tickets and sharing subscriptions," which could help to alleviate what was a very expensive habit for the beau monde (Greig 86). The opera house was an even more exclusive social space than the playhouse. The King's Theatre had a reputation for being "proudly aristocratic," and more closely approximated a "private club, exclusive in its membership and tightly controlled" than either Covent Garden or Drury Lane (Greig 82). Flavia is acknowledging her own considerable social cache when she claims that tickets "pour'd" before her feet, suggesting the tickets were either purchased for her or loaned to her by friends. She is also drawing on the opera's reputation for glamour and prestige, the same qualities she portrays herself as possessing. The opera is her "place"—where she belongs.

Flavia also points to another urban stage: London's parks. In her pairing of the opera and the park, Flavia draws attention to their similarity in providing opportunities for the public display that the beau monde's status depended on. She references the Ring at Hyde Park, a drive in the middle of the park that was frequently packed with coaches during the social season

(White 11). Flavia claims that she could outshine even the “brightest Beauties,” no small claim considering Hyde Park’s reputation for drawing large crowds of people decked out in their finest clothing. The park itself is located west of St. James’s Park, where Silliander views Titiana driving at the end of “Tuesday.” St. James’s was actually the most popular of London’s parks, at least in part because of its location next to St. James’s Palace (White 10). Hyde Park was an even newer establishment than St. James’s, created as part of Queen Caroline’s improvements to Kensington Palace (White 320). Thus, Flavia brings us squarely back into the heart of the beau monde, the “town.” In her catalogue of places she visits, Flavia consistently locates herself in the center of the world of fashion, staking her claim as one of its most visible and admired members. However, “Saturday” closes with Flavia making a dramatic exit from this world. Unlike Lydia, who shores up her confidence with new ribbons and lace, Flavia’s beauty cannot be restored. The typical eclogue cycle ends in a death, and appropriately enough, in the world of the beau monde, this means social death.

Conclusion: Bidding “Adieu” to London and the World of Fashion

In “Saturday,” the space of the poem acts as a stage for Flavia’s final performance, as she melodramatically addresses her audience with all the fervor of a star actress:

Adieu ye Parks, in some obscure recess,
Where Gentle streams will weep at my Distress . . .
There hide in shades this lost Inglorious Face.

Ye Operas, Circles, I no more must view!

My Toilette, Patches, all the World Adieu!” (89-90, 93-96)

Flavia bids “adieu” to, what is for her, “all the World:” the fashionable West End of London. She plans to relocate herself to the country—in the world of fashion, a fate only marginally better than death. Flavia is of course an object of satire; there is an undeniable superficiality and smallness to her world. However, as is true with Dancinda, there is an undercurrent of empathy in Montagu’s characterization of Flavia, who she readily admitted was a portrait of herself after her own near-fatal bout with small pox left her celebrated beauty forever altered. Nor is Flavia the sole object of satire here; all of the characters in *Town Eclogues* are products of the “town” and its myopic focus on itself as “all the world.”

Flavia’s self-imposed exile to the country is also reminiscent of the seasonal cycle of the beau monde’s movements. Since the London social season was tied to the seating of Parliament, the summer would also find the West End figuratively dead as the peers vacated the town for their country seats. The eclogues are steeped in the working week of the agricultural calendar, reinforcing the cyclical nature of the London social season and the beau monde itself, which as Greig points out, “was made and remade season by season” (19). Like Flavia, Montagu made her own strategic exit from the city around the same time as the publication of Curll’s *Court Poems*. After a year spent traveling in London’s elite social and literary circles, she departed England with her husband for Turkey, remaining in contact with friends such as Pope, who would give her news of the town while she shared stories from her journeys. Upon her return, Pope gifted her his handsome manuscript of her eclogues, which she kept the rest of her life, taking it to Italy with her in her later years and leaving it to her daughter Lady Bute upon her death.

The fluidity of manuscript offers its own kind of mobility, the poetic text subject to change in the same manner as the places it documents. Sometime after Montagu took possession of Pope’s autograph manuscript, she set about to altering it. She wrote her initials on its title

page, altered a line here, made an insertion there. The eclogue that received the most significant change was “Wednesday,” where she aggressively scratched out the entire ending and inserted a new one. One gets the sense that Montagu is repossessing her own body and the body of her work from Pope’s hands. She also added just one other poem to the collection, the verse epistle “Constantinople: To [William Feidling],” which she wrote from Turkey in 1717. The poem was written from the summer-house at the British palace in Pera, and addressed to her uncle in London. It is a Horatian verse epistle, and she draws on the sober voice of the mode to distance herself geographically and morally from the wicked city. Montagu placed “Constantinople” immediately after “Saturday” in the manuscript, and its first line acts as a sincere rewriting of Flavia’s miserable plea: “Give me, Great God (said I) a little Farm.” What Flavia can only see as an unwelcome alternative to the former prestige and power that her beauty once ensured in London society is presented in “Constantinople” as a retirement that has greatly been desired: a “retreat secure from Human kind” as Montagu puts it (100). However, what is interesting about this context of retirement is that the city is still in view; Montagu claims she can see the city of Constantinople as she writes her epistle from the summer house. Additionally, London is not far from her mind. She moves from town to country, but the boundaries separating the one from the other are far more permeable than they appear in *Town Eclogues*.

Similarly, just as the publishing history of *Town Eclogues* collapses the distance between the town and Grub Street, throughout the eclogues, the other denizens of London can always be located pressing in along the margins of the text: Roxana’s chairmen, the maids who wait on Dancinda and Lydia, the merchants’ wives at court and the opera, the shopkeepers Mathers, Motteux, and Lillie. Their material presence serves as a reminder of the ceaselessly intersecting identities of London. Montagu primarily focuses on the movements of the beau monde, but in the

process ends up providing a guide to the city that comprises far more than the elite spaces of the West End. Montagu's London is a city in a state of becoming; where traveling even a short distance can introduce one to an entirely different place with its own way of being. The "art of living in London," then, is learning to navigate these constantly shifting and intersecting identities: as a place of court and commerce, the Town and the City, Scriblerians and Grub Street. For Montagu, the role of poet is also that of the traveler; she provides guide to the city that allows the reader to enter the poetic text as though it is a place itself.

CHAPTER TWO: MARY LEAPOR AND THE POEM AS MEETING PLACE

In the library of Weston Hall in Northamptonshire, there are three sets of Mary Leapor's *Poems upon Several Occasions*, including one with the following annotation on its title page: "Once Kitchen maid at Weston" (Greene 10). Leapor is given an embodied form, one that labored within the country house that now holds her poetry. The handwriting on the page is a material reminder of the physical presence of both the book's owner and its author. Leapor, the daughter of a gardener, was a kitchen maid who worked for the local gentry, including the book's owner, Susanna Jennens, the poet's friend as well as her employer at Weston Hall. Jennens was one of the subscribers to both volumes of *Poems upon Several Occasions*, published posthumously in 1748 and 1751. Leapor was in the process of selecting poems to include in her first print publication, a subscription organized by her friend Bridget Freemantle, when she contracted measles and died at the age of twenty-four in 1746. Along with Freemantle, Jennens was one of the main supporters of Leapor's poetic ambitions, and Richard Greene suggests she gave her servant access to her library at Weston Hall (Greene 11, 170-183). In this sense, the annotation in the book also acts as a reminder that Leapor once occupied the same physical space that now holds her book.

Jennens occasionally wrote poetry herself, and Weston Hall's library includes a portfolio of verses written by her and other female friends (Greene 12). The library's manuscript collection also contains transcripts of both Lady Mary Wortley Montagu's and Mary Astell's

poems on the death of Eleanor Bowes.¹² Jennens was a friend of Montagu's sister Frances, Countess of Mar, who visited Jennens at Weston Hall in 1741, when Leapor was most likely employed there (Greene and Messenger xxi). Greene and Ann Messenger surmise it is possible that Leapor may have read one or both of these poems (xxi). Thus, Jennens allows us to locate Leapor within a network of literary women, in which the material links connecting Leapor to Montagu and Astell are both human (Lady Mar and Jennens) and textual (Montagu's and Astell's poems). Although Leapor's own role at Weston Hall was a subservient one, it nonetheless manages to be a place of connection for her, putting her into contact with people and texts that she might otherwise not have encountered. Weston Hall acts as a physical meeting place for female friends (Jennens and Mar/Leapor) and a metaphorical meeting place for poet and reader (Montagu/Astell and Leapor). The textual page itself becomes a space for the formation of a community of readers and writers.

In this chapter, I argue that Leapor conceptualizes the material poem as a meeting place for a diverse group of people. Her poetry exhibits a strong sense of place as both a physical location and as a way of being. Leapor frequently mentions the home she shared with her father, the country houses she worked in, Freemantle's house, her hometown of Brackley, and London. She is highly conscious of the materiality and practice of everyday life in these places, recording the clothing she wears, the food she eats, her few possessions, how she moves within these locations, and the people she encounters in them. Her poetic characters are given conventional pastoral names, but they also represent people she actually knew, such as Jennens and Freemantle (referred to as Parthenissa and Artemisia, respectively). Other characters most likely

¹² Eleanor Bowes died at the age of fourteen in 1724, only eleven weeks after her marriage; her death was met with speculation and gossip (Grundy, *Lady Mary Wortley Montagu* 241). Grundy suggests that Montagu and Astell wrote their poems at the same social gathering (240-241).

represent other people she knew, though their identities are long lost to us. Leapor herself appears as Mira, the persona she uses throughout her poetry. Her sense of place as a physical location in the world is specific and detailed, recording the habits of everyday life.

Leapor's attention to how places are inhabited, their lived-in quality, is also comparable to the phenomenological approach to human geography, or place as a way of being in the world. In Leapor's case, the circumstances of her own material existence are largely dictated by her class, her position as a servant in the social hierarchy of the eighteenth-century country house. To be employed in service is referred to as having a "place" and to lose one's position is to be "out of a place," phrases that mark employment for a servant as situated in a specific house, providing room and board in addition to a salary; but they are also suggestive of the phenomenological meaning of place. While servants are physically located in a fine house alongside the gentry, they are also expected to remember their "place," as evidenced by the era's numerous conduct books and pamphlets devoted to servants' behavior.¹³ But Leapor is not just a servant, she is also a poet, and one who constructs material places within the textual space of the poem.

Leapor thus imagines another way of being—the identity of poet—that challenges her subservient position as a servant; however, she also highlights a significant connection between both identities and their relationship to place. Both the servant and the poet contribute to the meaning of a place through the act of labor—the servant by materially caring for it, the poet by textually reproducing it in the space of the poem. Mira becomes intimately familiar with the country house she labors to maintain, her everyday movements within its physical spaces

¹³ For examples, see J. Jean Hecht, *The Domestic Servant Class in Eighteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1956); Bridget Hill, *Servants: English Domesticity in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); and Amanda Vickery, *Behind Closed Doors: At Home in Georgian England* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2009).

allowing her to feel “in place” there despite her status as a servant. In a similar manner, she becomes intimately familiar with poetic conventions by laboring within the textual space of poetry—by reading and writing. Both forms of labor are habitual, everyday practices, repetitive movements that make her intimately acquainted with the material contours of both place and poetry. She creates a poetic world in which houses and poems alike are populated with material objects and physical bodies. Just as the library of Weston Hall acts as a meeting place for Leapor, her poetry is also a material and sociable space that can house a community of readers.

Everyday Movement in Place: “Crumble Hall” as Place-Ballet

Leapor’s most famous poem, “Crumble Hall,” perhaps best illustrates how her everyday movements create both an intimate knowledge of place and a sense of belonging there, with implications for how this concept might be applied to her poetic practice. In this poem, which is also her most frequently studied text, Leapor suggests that living and laboring in the country house can foster a sense of belonging, even attachment, to a place and things that one cannot legally call his or her own.¹⁴ The fact that her persona Mira labors in the country house as a servant is not a deterrent to feeling “in-place” there; rather, it actually creates the conditions for that attachment. Ultimately, a similar model can be seen in how she conceptualizes herself as

¹⁴ See, for instance, Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry* (Oxford UP, 1993); Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance* (Cambridge UP, 1990); Dustin H. Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge UP, 1996); Valerie Rumbold, “The Alienated Insider: Mary Leapor in ‘Crumble Hall’” (*British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 19.1 [1996]); Jeannie Dalporto, “Landscape, Labor, and the Ideology of Improvement in Mary Leapor’s ‘Crumble Hall’” (*The Eighteenth Century* 42.3 [2001]); David Fairer, “Mary Leapor, ‘Crumble Hall’” (*A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*. Ed. Christine Gerrard. Blackwell, 2006); and Elizabeth Veisz, “Writing the Eighteenth-Century Household: Leapor, Austen, and the Old Feudal Spirits,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 30.1 (2011), 71-91.

poet—living and laboring, so to speak, within the spaces of poetry also leads to a confidence in her own poetic voice and agency.

Mira takes the reader on a tour of the country estate where she lives and works as a servant. Though the poem can be placed within the country house poetic tradition, it deviates significantly from the general form, most obviously because it is written from the perspective of a servant instead of an invited guest or visitor.¹⁵ Mira's servant's-eye tour is subversive, taking her readers down dark corridors and into the kitchen, drawing attention to the labor required to run the estate. She ends the tour on the estate's grounds, where a beloved old grove is being torn down as part of the process of improving the estate. Throughout the poem, Mira's tone vacillates from admiring to teasing to mocking, and even ventures into anger when she questions whether destroying the grove will make any "improvement" to the estate. She has a sense of attachment to Crumble Hall as a place and is invested in its future.

Scholars generally agree that there is sufficient evidence to believe that Crumble Hall is modeled on Edgcote House, at that time owned by the Chauncy family, and the last house Leapor worked in before she returned home to Brackley to live with her father. Though the house still stands, it is not the same building that Leapor would have worked in, which was torn down and rebuilt between 1747-1752 (Greene 16). Leapor likely wrote the poem after she left

¹⁵ Another significant difference from country house poems, such as those written by Ben Jonson, Andrew Marvell, and Alexander Pope, is that "Crumble Hall" is a satirical assessment of the estate's management instead of a panegyric to its owners. Leapor also deviates from the tradition by giving greater attention to interiors instead of the estate grounds, and by moving from the interior to the exterior instead of vice versa. "Crumble Hall" is also one of the few examples of a country house poem written by a woman, though another notable example that has been compared to Leapor's is Amelia Lanyer's "Description of Cooke-ham." For a description of the country house poem and a collection of some of the best-known examples, see Alastair Fowler's *The Country House Poem* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1994). See Nicole Pohl's *Women, Space and Utopia, 1600-1800* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006) for a discussion of how Lanyer and Leapor both construct the country house as a utopian space for women (28-35).

Edgcote, probably in 1745, during the early stages of the renovation to the estate's service buildings and park (Greene 16-17).¹⁶ "Crumble Hall," then, documents both an actual place and Leapor's experience working there. She is writing about the physical structure of the original Edgcote House, and she is doing so from memory about her everyday movements through its spaces.

Leapor meticulously notes the house's structural features, the furnishings of its rooms, and how people navigate its layout. Valerie Rumbold and David Fairer have pointed out how the poem's structure is similar to a house tour, with the latter noting that Mira "moves with assurance, like a guide to an old property where she feels at home, and we are only visitors" (225). Mira invites her readers to "step within" Crumble Hall as though we are her guests, directing our movements and what we should observe (Leapor 35). However, this tour is more humorous than serious, as Mira offers such descriptions as, "yon brown Parlour on the Left appears, / For nothing famous, but its leathern Chairs" (60-61). She teases her reader-guests with the more promising parlor next to it, but even this "Room more fair" proves equally uninteresting to her: "Gay China Bowls o'er the broad Chimney shine, / Whose long Description would be too sublime: / And much might of the Tapestry be sung: / But we're content to say, The Parlour's hung" (64, 68-71). Mira questions what rooms and objects are actually the most valuable to Crumble Hall, speaking with fondness of "more familiar Rooms, / Whose Hangings ne'er were wrought in Grecian Looms: / Yet the soft Stools, and eke the lazy Chair, / To Sleep invite the

¹⁶ See John Heward and Robert Taylor's *The Country Houses of Northamptonshire* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1996) for a description of the construction of the current Edgcote House, including the early changes made to the estate's exterior buildings and grounds in 1745. See Sally Strutt's *Edgcote: Building an Eighteenth-Century Country House* (David Allen, 2010) for an even more detailed description of the estate's history and reconstruction. I am grateful to Ms. Strutt for sharing her research with me on Edgcote House and for informing me of Heward and Taylor's book.

Wearied, and the Fair” (80-83). Instead of describing the china and tapestry, Mira gives us a catalogue of storage rooms that contain such homely objects as, “Old Shoes, and Sheep-ticks bred in Stacks of Wool; / Grey Dobbin’s Gears, and Drenching-Horns enow; / Wheel-spokes—the Irons of a tatter’d Plough” (99-101). Mira chooses to focus not on objects of monetary or cultural value, but of (former) use— she values the lived-in quality of the house, and trivializes the supposedly grand.

However, Mira’s attention to *how* a person might move through the spaces of Crumble Hall is even more significant than the rooms and objects she highlights on her tour. Cynthia Wall claims, “[W]hat the poem most insists upon is that we come inside, walk through and *see* the details of Crumble Hall” (274). Wall focuses on sight, emphasizing the objects in the poem, but of equal importance is Mira’s invitation for us to *move* through the house, “to inhabit” it, as Wall later says (275). Mira provides us with a map of the house, locating us alongside her as we move through the hall, the parlors, and then, “We count the Stairs, and to the Right ascend” (72). She presents herself as an expert on the house’s layout, imagining her reader-guests taking a wrong turn and having to correct the error:

Shall we proceed?—Yes, if you’ll break the Wall:

If not, return, and tread once more the Hall.

Up ten Stone Steps now please to drag your Toes,

And a brick Passage will succeed to those . . .

Would you go farther?—Stay a little then:

Back thro’ the Passage—down the Steps again;

Thro’ yon dark Room—Be careful how you tread

Up these steep Stairs—or you may break your Head. (84-87, 94-97).

Mira's precise mapping of the house reveals how deeply ingrained it is in her memory, as she reminds us to watch our heads and count our steps. She gives us the sense that she may have made those very missteps and wrong turns herself, learning which passage leads where through a process of trial and error, until eventually she knows its spaces in the detailed manner she records in the poem, re-walking Crumble Hall in her memory.

Mira's consciousness of her physical movements in Crumble Hall is suggestive of what David Seamon terms "place-ballet," a concept informed by his phenomenological approach to human geography, in which he considers "the taken-for-granted pattern and context of everyday life, by which the person routinely conducts his or her day-to-day existence" (149). He argues that our daily routines in our living and work spaces are usually unconscious activities, but a phenomenological approach brings awareness to them in order to understand how place shapes our daily lives (149). This is essentially what Leapor does in "Crumble Hall," acting like an eighteenth-century phenomenological geographer. Mira lays bare what was previously hidden, revealing the way the invisible servants of the country house are actively involved in the daily life of the estate, which she does by consciously acknowledging her own routine movements.

Seamon explains there are three characteristics of everyday movement: it is habitual, it is rooted in the body, and it can develop into "body and place 'choreographies'" (152). First, it is habitual in the sense that our movements through everyday spaces are automatic and unconscious (152). In the familiar spaces in which we live, work, and travel, we tend to walk up steps, dodge objects in our paths, and move through doorways in our familiar places without conscious awareness of our bodies and their physical movements. Mira, however, brings awareness to her physical movements through such actions as counting the number of steps to ascend. The second characteristic of everyday movement is that our bodies propel themselves

forward in a way that is “intentional,” as for example, when “feet carry a person automatically to his destination” (Seamon 155). Seamon uses Merleau-Ponty’s term “body-subject” to describe this “inherent capacity of the body to direct behaviors of the person intelligently, and thus function as a special kind of subject which expresses itself in a preconscious way usually described by such words as ‘automatic,’ ‘habitual,’ ‘involuntary,’ and ‘mechanical’” (155). Playing the role of tour guide forces Mira to become aware of herself as a body-subject as she must make her own “automatic” movements known to her reader-guests in order for them to move smoothly through the house with her. What is second nature to Mira from working and living in Crumble Hall is new and unfamiliar to the reader.

Mira’s daily experience of working in the house highlights the third characteristic described by Seamon, the development of body and place “choreographies” that he calls “body-ballet” and “time-space routine.” The body-ballet is “a set of integrated behaviors which sustain a particular task or aim” (157). Seamon particularly emphasizes labor here, whether in our living or workspaces, such as washing dishes, potting a flower, or ringing up a customer at a cash register. Each of these actions are not a single movement, but rather a complex series of movements that are the result of training or practice, repeated in the same space until they become smooth and rhythmic, and can be performed with the grace of a dance (158). In a similar vein, a “time-space routine” is “a set of habitual bodily behaviors which extends through a considerable portion of time,” such as our typical bedtime routines or routes we take to work (158). Like the body-ballet, these movements become so deeply ingrained that we move through them fluidly and without thinking. Thus, Mira’s own movements through Crumble Hall can be seen as a result of her labor as a servant, repeating the same series of movements in the same space over a period of time until it comes together as a kind of ballet. Whereas the reader-guests

are constantly in danger of running into walls, stumbling down the stairs, or getting lost, Mira is an expert on how to move through Crumble Hall, which she does with the rhythm and grace of a dance.

It is perhaps fitting that Seamon's description of how labor can become art is reminiscent of a well-known aphorism from Leapor's favorite poet, Alexander Pope, in *An Essay on Criticism*: "True ease in writing comes from art, not chance, / As those move easiest who have learned to dance" (362-363).¹⁷ Pope also compares writing to movement, and specifically the kind of graceful movement that is the result of practice over time. Likewise, the repetitive practice of movement allows us to become intimately familiar with the material contours of the everyday spaces of our lives. Leapor also opens up the possibility for a similar way of thinking about poetic composition. The repetitive practice of reading and writing—of laboring within the space of the poem—can lead to a similar ease and gracefulness. What begins as work can develop into art; or, in Leapor's case, the "scribblings" of a kitchen maid can become poetry. The concept of body-ballet can be applied to the conventions of poetry in the sense that they are also the result of the habitual movements of the poet in place—within the textual space of the poem.

Another fitting aspect of the dance metaphor is that it often involves coordinating one's movements with another person. For Seamon, the most important aspect of everyday movement is when the body-ballets and time-space routines of multiple people come together in what he terms a "place-ballet." This intersection of movements and routines can lead to the interaction of

¹⁷ Leapor's poems on Pope include "Celadon to Mira," "On Mr. Pope's Universal Prayer," and "On the Death of a justly admir'd Author." For Pope's influence on Leapor, see Betty Rizzo, "Molly Leapor: An Anxiety for Influence" (*The Age of Johnson* 4 [1991]: 313-343) and Caryn Chaden, "Mentored from the Page: Mary Leapor's Relationship with Alexander Pope" (*Pope, Swift, and Women Writers*. Ed. Donald C. Mell. Newark; London: U of Delaware P; Associated UP, 1996. 31-47).

the people who practice them; place-ballet “regularly brings people face to face who otherwise would probably not know each other” (Seamon 162). This sense of place is dynamic and relational, one that is ever changing and based on social relationships. Mira’s journey to the kitchen of Crumble Hall best represents this idea of place as active and relational.

In the kitchen, we are introduced to the other servants in rapid succession. There is Sophronia, “whose learned Knuckles know / To form round Cheese-cakes of the pliant Dough” (115-116); nearby, Colinettus idly sits thinking of his oxen before the sight of rain makes him abruptly exit, “anxious for his new-mown Hay” (123). Meanwhile, “Dinner calls with more prevailing Charms” to the others (125), as the “surly Gruffo in his aukward Arms / Bears the tall Jugg, and turns a glaring Eye, / As tho’ he fear’d some Insurrection nigh” from his expectant fellow servants (126-128). Finally, there is Roger passed out on the table, “O’er stuff’d with Beef; with Cabbage much too full, / And Dumpling too (fit Emblem of his Skull!),” while his frustrated partner Ursula bewails his ingratitude for a meal over which she has labored: “For thee these Hands wind up the whirling Jack, / Or place the Spit across the sloping Rack. / I baste the Mutton with a cheerful Heart, / Because I know my Roger will have Part” (130-132; 146-149). Her tirade gets interrupted by the boiling kettle signaling her back to work: “The greasy Apron round her Hips she ties, / And to each Plate the scalding Clout applies: / The purging Bath each glowing Dish refines, / And once again the polish’d Pewter shines” (152-155). Various people and their individual routines come into contact with one another, cooking, waiting on the others at table, scouring dishes, or resting. They cross paths, quarrel with one another, and eat together. The entire scene bustles with motion—Sophronia’s hands “bruise the Curd” and “her Fingers Squeeze” the butter (117), Colinettus “[r]uns headlong out to view the Doubtful Day” (124), and Ursula scrubs the dishes clean. Mira describes the smells and sounds; the “sav’ry Steams” from

the stove beckon the servants to dinner and the lazy Roger's "able Lungs discharge a rattling Sound" as he snores (121, 134). The scene is vibrant, even chaotic, and stands in stark contrast to the lone member of the upstairs family that Mira points out earlier when she gives the reader a glimpse into the library: "Here Biron sleeps, with Books encircled round; And him you'd guess a Student most profound. / Not so—in Form the dusty Volumes stand: / There's few that wear the Mark of Biron's Hand" (90-93). The servants are the ones "doing" place, their daily movements intersecting within their shared space of the kitchen. We too, in effect, become a part of the place-ballet of Crumble Hall in our role as Mira's guests accompanying her through the house. By conceptualizing both place and poetry as material and relational, Leapor suggests that poetry is also a place in which people can meet who otherwise probably would not.

Mira portrays the country house as a lived-in space, and significantly, one in which the servants have a more active presence than the house's owners. Possession or a sense of entitlement is not required to be attached to the place—one need only to live and work there as Mira and her fellow servants do. They are an integral part of making Crumble Hall what it is, and not through their own social, political, or cultural power, but rather through their ordinary, everyday movements through its spaces. Likewise, Leapor can portray herself as a poet because she imagines that role as founded not on social, political, or cultural power, but through the everyday practice of reading and writing, of laboring over the text in the same way that she labors in the country house.

The Everyday Labor of Poetic Composition

Leapor consistently portrays reading and writing as physical practices in her poetry. Her readers hold the page and run their fingers over the lines of poetry, squinting to decipher her poor

penmanship. Writing is described through action verbs with strong physical connotations, such as scrawling and scribbling. The poems she writes are seen as constant works in progress, always in need of some kind of alteration, as she tells Freemantle in a letter: "For I am sure there is no Paper of mine has any Title to Perfection" (302). For Leapor, the labor of poetry is never finished or complete, but always in a state of becoming. At the same time, she also remains painfully aware that other people—her fellow servants, her neighbors, and her family—are far less willing to see writing as a legitimate form of labor for someone of her station. They are more likely to characterize her writing as a form of leisure; however, Leapor strategically defends her role as poet by questioning the assumption that poetry is the product of leisure, and thus the province of a higher station than her own.

Leapor's position in the laboring class, and thus Mira's station as well, determines what activities get perceived as either an appropriate or inappropriate use of her time. Her appropriate labor is caring for the homes of others, or for her own home that she shares with her father. Other characters typically see Mira's writing as a distraction from this labor, or as a frivolous use of her leisure time. J. Jean Hecht explains that the eighteenth-century servant's time was not seen as his or her own: "[T]he servant was seen as having placed his whole energy at the disposal of his employer. All the servant's time, from the moment he was engaged, was supposed to belong to his master; he was expected to abandon all thought of maintaining a private life" (72). Likewise, Amanda Vickery points out that a servant's leisure time was typically just as controlled and monitored as his or her working day: "Maids and menservants often had the run of the house for the purposes of their labour, but their own time and room were strictly controlled, as the copious rules for servants testify at length" (307). Even her leisure time might not always have been Leapor's to do with as she pleased, though her own experience at Weston Hall may have differed

from the norm in this respect. Jennens certainly encouraged her servant's poetic inclinations, reading Leapor's poems and offering criticism on them. However, neither can Jennens be assumed to be the norm, and there is no reason to assume Leapor experienced the same liberality while working at Edgcote House or even from other members of staff at Weston Hall.

In fact, Leapor suggests otherwise, that the positive encouragement she received from Jennens and Freemantle was not typical. In "An Epistle to Artemisia. On Fame," a Horatian epistle that satirizes human ambition, Mira details a conversation between herself and two other servants, including Sophronia from "Crumble Hall," in which she is berated for writing when she has more practical activities demanding her attention:

Parthenia cries, 'Why, Mira, you are dull,
And ever musing, till you crack your Skull;
Still poking o'er your What-d'ye-call—your Muse:
But pr'ythee, Mira, when dost clean thy Shoes?'
Then comes Sophronia, like a barb'rous Turk:
'You thoughtless Baggage, when d'ye mind your Work?
Still o'er a Table leans your bending Neck:
Your Head will grow prepost'rous, like a Peck.
Go ply your Needle: You might earn your Bread;
Or who must feed you when your Father's dead?'
She sobbing answers, 'Sure, I need not come
To you for Lectures; I have store at home.
What can I do?'

'—Not scribble.'

‘—But I will.’

‘Then get thee packing—and be aukward still.’ (149-162)¹⁸

Her fellow servants’ objections to Mira’s writing come on two grounds: neglect of both her physical appearance and her social station. Parthenia instigates the mocking by focusing on Mira’s outward appearance, the dirty shoes that go without cleaning while she is “ever musing.” Parthenia’s policing of Mira’s dress is indicative of the priority given to servants’ appearances, which was considered a reflection of the house they served: "Slovenliness was rebuked, fastidiousness rewarded. Clothing purchased by the servant was carefully scrutinized to make certain it was in good taste. Gifts of apparel were often given with the proviso that the servant wear them himself" (Hecht 122). Parthenia also attacks Mira for failing to follow social standards, then, a point that Sophronia underscores with her even stronger threat that all Mira’s time spent bent over a book reading and writing will permanently deform her. This physical deformity then becomes a visual sign that sets Mira apart, suggesting there may be something morally or socially deformed about her as well.

A similar kind of escalating attack on Mira’s body occurs in “Corydon. Phillario. Or, Mira’s Picture. A Pastoral,” in which the supposedly urbane Phillario visits his friend Corydon in the country, eager to experience pastoral life and to see the local beauties. He is appalled when the first woman he sees is Mira, with her “studious Brows,” “Night-cap Dishabille,” and pale face that “looks a Stranger to the Beams of Day” (30-31). Corydon reluctantly concedes, “’Tis

¹⁸ Greene and Rumbold read this particular scene as representing Leapor’s possible dismissal from her place at Edgcote House. In this poem, as well as “Crumble Hall” and “The Disappointment,” Sophronia appears to be an upper servant, probably the housekeeper, and would therefore have the authority to dismiss Mira. However, Leapor’s exact reasons for leaving Edgcote House are not known, just as her reasons for leaving Jennens’ employ at Weston Hall are not recorded. Hecht points out that servants frequently left one place for another in the eighteenth century, especially if the new position was considered more lucrative or desirable in some way (77-78, 81-82).

true, her Linen may be something soil'd" (40), to which Phillario interjects, "Her Linen, Corydon!—Herself, you mean" (41). Phillario immediately leaps to the conclusion that Mira's disheveled clothing and pale skin are signs that there is something more than superficially wrong with her. The problem is not her unwashed linen, he implies, but something unclean within her. Corydon attempts to circumvent his argument by placing blame on outside sources, such as reading "wicked Plays" by candlelight that cause her poor eyesight (50). But Phillario continues to suggest the true problem is located within Mira herself, not from "wicked Plays." She is misshapen, hunchbacked ("Behind her Ears her list'ning Shoulders stand" [58]) with rotting teeth that "look decay'd with Posset, and with Plumbs, / And seem prepar'd to quit her swelling Gums" (61-62). His descriptions become increasingly detailed, even grotesque, and escalate in maliciousness.

These harsh descriptions of Mira's physical appearance draw attention to the other characters' distrust of the woman poet. Phillario focuses most of his misogynistic energy against Mira's body, and is incredulous when Corydon claims she has a literary bent: "*She* read!—She'd better milk her brindled Cows" (51). Phillario implies that this unattractive country girl is better suited to physical labor than the leisured pursuit of reading; since Mira does not fit the poetic ideal of feminine beauty, then he cannot imagine her capable of a poetic sensibility either.¹⁹ Sophronia also begins her attack on Mira by reminding her that writing distracts her from her appropriate labor as a servant: "When d'ye mind your work?" She informs Mira that her time would be better spent "plying her needle" instead of her pen. Needlework was one of the few

¹⁹ In "Mary Leapor: The Female Body and the Body of Her Texts" (*1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era* 10 [2004]: 63-78), Michael Meyer argues that Leapor frequently criticizes "the male perception of women as pleasurable or useful *bodies*" (65). He then applies this argument to her writing, pointing out that men are similarly "interested in her useful work and read her body rather than her poems" (69).

respectable occupations for poor gentry women, and thus one of the few forms of overlapping labor between workingwomen and gentlewomen. Sophronia seems to imply that if Mira wants to act above her own servant class, then “plying her needle” is the more respectable option and more likely to earn money for the material product.

Most significantly, though, “plying her needle” does not involve Mira displaying her superior education. Leapor is able to mimic the speech of sophisticated city-dweller Phillario, but she also skillfully ventriloquizes her less educated rural neighbors. Parthenia and Sophronia’s speech patterns are much rougher and less articulate than Mira’s own, and Parthenia and Corydon both fumble for the terminology they have heard Mira use for her writing, in nearly identical phrases: Parthenia’s “Still poking o’er your What-d’ye-call—your Muse” (151), and Corydon’s “’Tis she that makes your what-d’ye-call—your Rhyme” (34). Another character makes a similar intellectual gaffe in “The Epistle of Deborah Dough,” in which the title character berates her neighbor Mary, who,

Sits scribble-scribble all the day,
And making—what—I can’t remember;
But sure ‘tis something like *December*;
A frosty Morning—Let me see—
O! now I have it to a T.
She throws away her precious Time
In scrawling nothing else but Rhyme;
Of which, they say, she’s mighty proud,
And lifts her Nose above the Croud. (11-20)

Leapor cleverly puns on the word “rime,” or frost; the provincial Deborah Dough struggles to remember the word “rhyme” but can recall that it sounds something like a “frosty Morning.” All of the characters represented here do not understand Mira’s poetry, and her superior knowledge sets her apart, making her an object of, at best, bemusement or curiosity, and at worst, an object of suspicion. In all three poems, writing is not only leisure time that the laboring-class woman cannot afford to spend, it also puts her in danger of forgetting her place—of lifting her “nose above the Croud.”

Leapor herself is more likely to portray her writing as a form of labor. One of Mira’s most condemning comments in “Crumble Hall” is her observation of Biron asleep in the library, where the books lay untouched. These books are meant to be read, which Mira portrays as a material practice; a book that has been read wears the physical mark of its reader’s presence, such as the wear on its cover and spine, the bending of its pages, or the marking of annotations—it becomes, in its own way, lived in. That Biron is actually asleep, physically and mentally inert, is the harshest condemnation she can give. Likewise, writing is also a material practice. In one of her letters to Freemantle, Leapor petitions her friend to visit so that she can offer editorial advice: “I won’t command, but I think I have a Right to entreat you, to pay a Visit to Mira shortly; for she is extremely busy, adding, curtailing, and erasing one Piece of Nonsense, to substitute another in its stead: So that, without your speedy Admonition, the Tragedy will probably be reduced to a Farce, and from that to a simple Dialogue” (300). Though Leapor denigrates her play as “Nonsense” and humorously predicts it will diminish in both length and gravity, she also portrays herself as “extremely busy.” Her revisions have a physical impact on the play’s material form—she adds, curtails, and erases. She effectively portrays herself as mentally and physically laboring over the text.

Nor is Mira's sensitivity to the lectures from other characters necessarily evidence that she believes her writing is an inappropriate use of time; rather, it is an awareness that *other* people do. Leapor's depiction of characters such as Parthenia, Sophronia, Phillario, Corydon, and Deborah Dough is deliberately ironic; their disapproval rings hollow because they do not even understand the object of their derision. Even the supposedly sophisticated Phillario cannot tell the difference between the ideal world of pastoral poetry and actual rural life that requires hard, physical labor. Leapor does not endorse their opinions, but instead uses them to create a sympathetic connection with her readers who do appreciate her poetry. In this sense, Leapor anticipates the very arguments that a wider reading public may have for the kitchen maid who writes poetry in the style of Pope; she voices criticism before it can be made, allowing her to mount her own defense of her poetic labor.

In a similar manner, Freemantle also attempts to deflect potential criticism through the paratextual material that accompanies both volumes of *Poems upon Several Occasions*. Freemantle was a surprisingly savvy promoter of Leapor's work, projecting an image of her friend as humble and dutiful, traits she stresses in her "To the Reader" note in the first volume: "She was courteous and obliging to all, chearful, good-natured, and contented in the Station of Life in which Providence had placed her" (xli). Freemantle is even more strategic in her account of the poet's life prefixed to the second volume, where she conjectures that Leapor would have been even more prolific had she possessed the time, insisting, "I am persuaded, that many beautiful ones [poems] have been lost for want of Leisure to write them" ("To John ***** , Esq," xxxvi). While she characterizes Leapor's writing as an act of leisure, she also implies that her friend should have had more leisure time, not less. A similar rhetorical maneuver can be seen in Freemantle's wonder over "the Quickness of her Genius, especially when it is consider'd how

much she was engaged in her Father's Affairs, and the Business of his House, in which she had nobody to assist her" (xxxvii). Freemantle is quick to point out that Leapor never neglected her housekeeping duties. All her humble friend desired, Freemantle avers, was a brief respite from worldly cares: "Her chief Ambition seem'd to be to have such a Competency as might leave her at Liberty to enjoy the Company of a Friend, and indulge her scribbling Humour (as she call'd it) when she had a mind, without Inconvenience or Interruption" (xxxvii). Though Freemantle seems to endorse the view that Leapor's writing was a form of leisure, an "indulgence," it is important to remember that her letter was likely addressed to John Duncombe, one of the primary promoters of Leapor's poetry; as prefatory material for the second volume, it is also a marketing tool.

Freemantle repeatedly refers to Leapor's humble station and attitude as part of her marketing, even phrasing the publication as a charitable act to ease her friend's difficult labor: "I could not see how much she was straiten'd in point of Time for her Writing, without endeavouring to remove the Difficulty; and therefore propos'd a Subscription to some of my Acquaintance" (xxxvii). Publication by subscription was a democratized form of literary patronage, in which the author or her friends would seek out subscribers to finance the publication of a book by paying half of the price in advance (Prescott 125). The list of subscribers also acted as a public endorsement of the author's work, especially famous names (Prescott 125). Sarah Prescott argues that women in particular benefited from subscription, but that "presentations of the female author as objects of charity could be potentially limiting" (126). However, she also acknowledges that the presentation of these women as "the object of the subscribers' charity can also be read as an effective marketing ploy, designed to increase the number of names on the subscription list" (127). Subscription is an effective way to deflect from

Leapor's literary ambition and gratify the subscribers, while also allowing Freemantle to subtly suggest her friend's writing is as valuable a form of labor as her housekeeping.

Just as Freemantle uses her prefatory material to anticipate and deflect potential criticism, Leapor also turns her characters' criticisms to her advantage. She does not argue against Parthenia, Sophronia, or Phillario's claims that reading and writing will deform her body; instead, she admits these do physically affect her in the form of exhaustion and frequent headaches. The brilliance in this concession is that these pains get repositioned as the result of physically and mentally demanding labor, and not the outward sign of an inner deformity. In "An Epistle to Artemisia," the labor of writing is described as "[t]o beat one's weary Brains" (177), a metaphor that acknowledges writing as a mental activity with physical repercussions. At the beginning of "Crumble Hall," Mira gives several reasons for considering abandoning her poetry, including physical exhaustion: "With low'ring Forehead, and with aching Limbs, / Oppress'd with Head-ach, and eternal Whims, / Sad Mira vows to quit the darling Crime" (3-5). Her use of the word "crime" for her writing consequently means that she portrays these physical aches and pains as her punishment for writing. In the verse epistle "The Head-Ach. To Aurelia," she informs her friend, "For Cramps and Head-aches are our due: / We suffer justly for our Crimes; / For Scandal you and I for Rhymes" (31-33). Leapor is certainly being facetious here, attributing menstrual pain to her and Aurelia's indulgence in the feminine crimes of gossip and poetry. However, she is also playing on the idea that the mind and body are linked, and thus rejecting a strict division between physical and mental labor. Her understanding of the interconnection of mind and body, mental and physical labor, leads to a similar understanding of the connection between poet and poem; if the poem is the result of the labor of the poet's body, then it will bear

the mark of the poet materially on the body of its text, just as books also bear the mark of their readers' hands. Poet and poem become emblems of each other.

The Materiality of Poetry

Poems are material objects in Leapor's oeuvre. They bear the mark of the poet's inelegant handwriting and frustrated markings. They are shuffled back and forth between readers, and thus prone to damage as they are held by dirty hands and stained by wine. They are referred to as grubby children with awkward manners and ill-formed minds, requiring an education their parent alone is not equipped to provide. Poetry, then, is figured as the product of labor in two ways: as a material object created by Leapor to be consumed by readers and as human children of whom she is the parent. In turn, both metaphors impact how Leapor imagines her poetry's reception in the literary marketplace, and consequently, her reception there as a poet.

In the first metaphor, Leapor's poems are the product of her physical labor in the sense that they are material objects she has crafted and bear the mark of her hand. She is intensely aware of her poems' physical appearances, and that they are often as awkward and unrefined as she portrays herself. In "Minutius. Artemisia. A Dialogue," Minutius complains about the town of Brackley, which his "offended Taste declares . . . is the worst of Airs" (3-4). Brackley is an unpleasant backwater, where the only thing worse than the stench is the people, and "No Gentleman of Taste would stay / In this loath'd Parish half a Day" (13-14). Leapor sets up a series of connections between place, poet, and poem—Brackley, Mira, and her poetry. Minutius tells Artemisia, "I fain would hear how Mira sings" (16), but quickly characterizes her as a spinster who "scribble[s] Rhymes" (18), suggesting he has already come to a judgment on the

quality of her poetry. Artemisia insists Minutius should read Mira's verses for himself, but when he does, he cannot move beyond critiquing the poem's physical appearance:

He! he!—Are these the Verses then?
She wrote 'em with a filthy Pen.
As I'm a Gentleman, I vow
I never saw the like till now:
There's not a Stop throughout the Song;
Or if there is, 'tis planted wrong:
The hideous Scrawl offends my Sight. (37-43)

Minutius complains about the quality of Mira's pen and her penmanship, as well as the lack of proper punctuation, all of which offends the same fastidious taste that rejects Brackley and scorns Mira. He accuses Artemisia of foolishly encouraging her: "For you, dear Madam, I am told, / Have help'd to make the Damsel bold; / Have help'd to stain the sacred Bays, / By smiling on her foolish Lays" (19-22). Minutius claims that Artemisia and Mira both "stain the sacred Bays," associating dirtiness with Mira's poetry, just as Phillario associates uncleanliness with the body of the woman poet.

The intrepid Artemisia makes another attempt to encourage Minutius to look beyond Mira's illegible handwriting in order to perceive her intellectual and stylistic excellence:

That you should mark,--was my intention,
Her Thought, her Language, and Invention;
Point out the Blemishes, and tell
Where the Lines fall, and where excel;
Yet keep your Patience, tho' you see

A crump-back'd *H*, or faulty *G*;
For, trust me, Sir, I never try'd
To recommend her for a Scribe. (49-56)

Artemisia defends the cerebral quality of the poetry without denying its material reality—she readily admits Mira would never make a very good scribe, and that she had hoped Minutius would “Point out the Blemishes.” Artemisia does not assume the poems have achieved a state of perfection, but rather are works in progress. However, Minutius lives up to his name, remaining myopically focused on a missing asterisk and “a Comma upside down” (66, 70). He patronizingly informs Artemisia, “It is the Fault of Womankind / To overlook these solid Cares,” countering her argument that Mira’s lack of grammatical skill is a minor issue in comparison to the genius of the verses. For him, Mira’s rough and inelegant writing is a breach of poetic *and* feminine decorum.

Laura Runge argues John Dryden’s concept of “smoothness,” or poetry that is regular and even, would become the eighteenth-century standard for both poetic and feminine beauty; it ultimately “establishes a parallel between the cultural demands of femininity and his project for refining the English language of verse” (54). Minutius refers to himself as a “gentleman” several times, suggesting it his own station and gender that gives him the authority to judge Mira's lack of refinement, which is written on both her physical body and the body of her work.²⁰ He easily dismisses her poetic ambitions because he reads her low station in her inelegant handwriting and

²⁰ Michael Meyer argues that Leapor “rejects male critics, who seem to judge her manuscript poems rather as literal bodies of texts than poetical and logical works of art” (77). For other discussions on Leapor’s attention to the female body, see Laura Mandell, “Demystifying (with) the Repugnant Female Body: Mary Leapor and Feminist Literary History,” *Criticism* 38.4 (Fall 1996): 551-82) and Anne Milne, “*Lactilla Tends her Fav’rite Cow:*” *Ecocritical Readings of Animals and Women in Eighteenth-Century British Labouring-Class Women’s Poetry* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 33-49.

ignorance of grammatical conventions. Minutius views her clumsily written poetry as the emblem of a mind that will always be limited by her station and gender. Runge explains, “Codes of female decorum reinforce a direct correspondence between proper place and visual worthiness in recognition of a woman’s function both as subordinate and object of beauty” (53). The same scrutiny that picks apart the placement of a comma in a line of verse is the same scrutiny that dissects the female form, reading a “want of Wit or Grace” in both poem and poet.

Minutius is, of course, an object of satire; he is a posturing intellectual who reveals his own superficiality and inadequacy as a reader. However, his metonymic association of poet and poem reveals Leapor’s own underlying concerns over how the misreading of one can lead to the misreading of the other. By placing her poetry in the literary marketplace as a product of her labor, Leapor is by extension placing herself there, and Minutius represents the type of reader who will conflate Mira’s class and gender with her poetry’s perceived value.

Minutius subjects Mira’s poetry to the same scrutiny that Phillario gives to her physical body in “Corydon. Phillario.” Freemantle expressed reservations at including the latter poem in the second volume, protesting, “I think it may give the Reader a worse Idea of her Person than it deserv’d, which was very far from being shocking; tho’ there was nothing extraordinary in it. The Poem was Occasioned by her happening to hear that a Gentleman who had seen some of her Poems, wanted to know what her Person was” (“To John *****, Esq,” xl). The occasion, or inspiration, for the poem was exactly the kind of situation that Leapor anticipates in a letter to Freemantle, confessing, “seeing myself described in Print would give me the same Uneasiness as being stared at” (302). The gentleman who asks to know what her person is like seems to expect the same kind of poetic ideal of simplistic loveliness that Phillario expects from the women of the countryside. Leapor is conscious of the fact that she does not meet any such ideal, and she

expresses wariness that both her body and her poetry fall short of the required beauty and grace for both the female form and poetry.

In portraying her poems as material objects that she has crafted for the literary marketplace, Leapor worries that she objectifies herself by extension. The problem with this metaphor is that the material object does not feature the sociability Leapor typically values; similarly, the notion of “being stared at” implies a separation and distance from the audience instead of connection. However, Leapor offers another way of imagining her poetry as the material product of labor when she portrays them as human children, the offspring of the poet. Though they are still described as imperfect, they are better able to connect Leapor and her potential audience, even if she still worries about the kind of readers they may encounter once they are let loose into the literary marketplace.

In the poems “To a Gentleman with a Manuscript Play” and “Upon her Play being returned to her, stained with Claret,” Leapor considers the fate of her textual child once it is separated from her, sent for critique to a gentleman in London, possibly Colley Cibber.²¹ In the first poem, she tells the gentleman, “So this rude Babe I to your Mercy yield, / Rough as the Soil of some untillag’d Field” (26-27). Though Leapor stresses the “rude” character of her play, she is also anxious for her child’s fate, imploring the gentleman, “I trust this Infant to its Patron’s Care: / Ah let your Roofs the simple Vagrants shield, / I ask no more than Charity may yield, / Some little Corner in the friendly Dome, / (Lest the loose Varlet be induc’d to roam)” (47-51). The child metaphor allows Leapor to express affection and attachment, and it acts as an emotional

²¹ Cibber may have read Leapor’s play *The Unhappy Father*, and then returned it to her stained with wine (Greene 21). In the letter “On her Verses being sent to London,” Leapor describes anxiously awaiting the return of her play, confessing, “I intend speedily to provide a Quantity of Hysteric Drops, being apprehensive of Fits at the Sound of the Post-horn. I can’t hear the Playhouse spoke of without trembling; and shall not dare to look into a News-paper, for fear of meeting with the Name of *Cibber*” (301).

appeal to the reader's goodwill, that he will not allow her child to "roam" the city ungoverned. The extended metaphor of this poem reveals Leapor's anxiety over the company her child may keep once out of her sight.

The companion poem "Upon her play being returned to her" reveals the fate of the "rude Babe," and it is just as Leapor feared—the play returns stained red with the careless reader's spilled wine, which she then compares to the blushing face of a misbehaving child: "But say, O whither hast thou rang'd? / Why dost thou blush a Crimson Hue? / Thy fair Complexion's greatly chang'd: / Why, I can scarce believe 'tis you" (5-8). Leapor reads the stain on her child's face as proof he has kept "ill Company," which has sunk him into disgrace (11). A similar scenario is imagined in "The Proposal," in which her personified Muse reacts angrily to a discussion she overhears about Mira considering printing her poems in periodicals:

And shall I see the crippl'd Crew
Discarded from their Seat and you,
Turn'd out to skip from hand to hand
In dirty Gazettes round the Land,
To grace the Knee of ev'ry Sot,
And catch the droppings of His Pot. (17-22)

To place her "children" in the periodicals would be to separate them from their parent and their home—the place where they are known and governed. It also once again puts them danger of keeping bad company, the drunken sots who read newspapers. Mira reveals two contradictory fears here; the first is that her poems might not be fit to seek out worthy companions. They are already "crippl'd," or defective in their metrical schemes, in some way anticipating their further disgrace in the "dirty Gazettes." However, her telling adjective "dirty" implies that she has a

better fate in mind for her poem-children than to be thoughtlessly passed “from hand to hand” in the ephemeral periodicals, read one day and used to catch excrement the next.

Leapor portrays her poetry’s potential readers as “bad” company versus “good” company. The “bad” type only sinks them lower in station, whereas the “good” is able to elevate them, usually by offering further education that Leapor cannot provide. She compares her poems to children again in “The Muses Embassy,” where they are portrayed as deformed, “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” (17-20). Leapor refers to the poem’s metrical irregularity by playing with the double meaning of “foot,” and her own poor penmanship as the blemishes on their bodies. The “wayward Brats” are sent to school with Parthenissa (her name for Jennens), who may be able “[t]o form their Bodies, and their Minds, / Till they should flourish into Rhymes” (46, 35-36). Leapor uses the same school metaphor in a letter to Freemantle on the subject of her poem “Mopsus; or, The Castle-Builder:” “It is impossible to guess at the Fate of this new-born Son: But, as he was produced under your Smile, he cannot but thrive. You are to observe, that I send him to you, as to a private School, in order to receive his first Principles, before I trust him in the Hands of more severe Teachers” (303). The school metaphor reinforces the idea of community, of the poem-children coming into contact with the kind of intelligent reader and instructor that both Jennens and Freemantle represent, and who can help them develop in both content and form, body and mind.

While much of Leapor’s wariness about print publication stems from her class and gender—her apprehension at being reduced to an object of curiosity or an unattractive female body—it is also predicated on concerns over losing the social intimacy of manuscript culture. Freemantle was first introduced to Leapor’s poetry when a copybook of her poems was passed

along to her, which suggests the poems were circulated by manuscript throughout Brackley and the surrounding area (“To John *****, Esq.,” xxxv). Leapor’s poetry also details the extent of her manuscript audience, documenting her many readers and portraying her as something of a local celebrity: nearly every character immediately recognizes Mira as the “scribbling” maid. Thus, while Leapor considers extending her authorship into print publication, it is just that—an *extension* of her identity as a writer, not its formation. Both she and her community already identify her as a writer, long before print publication is entertained as a possibility.

Margaret Ezell argues that “the manuscript text operates as a medium of social exchange” (40), encouraging the interaction of reader and writer; the reader who participates in manuscript culture “is responsible for participating in literary production as well as consumption . . . often the role of reader of manuscript text becomes conflated with the roles of editing, correcting, or copying the text and extending its circulation of readers” (40). Ezell’s description of readers as producers as well as consumers is especially relevant in light of Leapor’s sociability; the manuscript text is more likely to encourage the reader to participate, if not in altering the manuscript itself, then perhaps by copying it or sharing it with someone else. Freemantle and Jennens in particular typify this kind of participant; both frequently commented on and edited Leapor’s poetry. The manuscript model is in many ways more in keeping with Leapor’s imagining of the poem as a meeting place, a social space for reader and poet to interact. Ezell’s emphasis on the fluidity of the manuscript text also highlights the tendency of writers to continually revise and change their manuscripts (40), a practice also in keeping with Leapor’s own sense of her poems as ever-changing works in progress. In this context, her constant practice of refining and reforming becomes less about class-related anxiety over meeting cultural

standards, and more indicative of the common practice of constant revision in manuscript culture, including by Leapor's favorite, Pope (Ezell 78).²²

The manuscript model of production would also have been particularly well suited to Leapor as a provincial writer. Ezell points out that manuscript culture was especially important for provincial areas outside of the metropolis, where relying upon print was impractical: "[W]hen speaking of the intellectual and literary culture of a provincial community, it is essential to remember how much of it was based on the exchange of manuscripts, how much the reader's experience of literary culture was transmitted through manuscript copy, not print" (105). Thus, we can see Leapor at the center of Brackley's "intellectual and literary culture;" it is far too easy to take the position of Phillario or Minutius and sneer at the kind of culture a provincial place such as Brackley is capable of sustaining, but the extension of literary culture outside of London is a dynamic aspect of eighteenth-century literary production.

Thus, Leapor's metaphor of her poems as children who require schooling allows her to consider more fully the importance of poetry's sociability, which her own experience with manuscript circulation may have encouraged, a case of form influencing content. But it is also precisely what makes it so difficult for her to determine her poetry's value in the literary marketplace; despite her concern over her poetry's lack of refinement, Leapor is actually apt to

²² In contrast, Michael Meyer reads Leapor's desire to refine her poetry as a submission to "(male) aesthetic norms of beauty, shaping her 'natural' voice, as women apply artifice in order to enhance their natural appearance and to cater to the erotic taste of men," even if she simultaneously "rejects male critics, who seem to judge her manuscript poems rather as literal bodies of texts than poetical and logical works of art" (77). While I agree that Leapor is certainly attempting to emulate the poetic norms of her time, I would suggest that she sees the other model, the "natural" voice of laboring-class poets such as Stephen Duck, as another kind of artifice and one that does not avoid the dilemma of making her body the object of the male gaze. I also see Leapor herself as interested in the materiality of her texts, and that this is not as wholly negative as Meyer portrays—the attention to the materiality of her poetry does not necessarily deny its cerebral qualities.

overestimate its value. In the poem “The Penitent,” subtitled “Occasion’d by the Author’s being asked if she would take Ten Pounds for her Poems,” Parthenissa approaches Mira about publication. But when Mira “heard the Sound / Of number Ten with added Pound, / The saucy Minx betray’d her Pride, / And turn’d her scornful Head aside” (4-7). Mira is offended by the amount, though she never clarifies whether this is because she finds it too low or finds the concept of fixing value itself distasteful. Mira’s rejection of the ten pounds here resonates with her similar apprehension over being perceived as a hack, perhaps the kind pilloried by Pope in poems like *The Dunciad*. In “An Epistle to Artemisia” she tells one of her readers, Vido, that she worries her verses “smell / Too much of Grub-street” (128). This concern is similar to her hesitancy to publish in the “dirty Gazettes” in “The Proposal,” where her Muse emphatically avers, “if you want a Muse, / To grace the Page of weekly News, / The Task is much too low for me” (27-29). Both references are tinged with Leapor’s worry that her own poetry is no better than the excrement of Grub Street, where hack writers churn out texts purely for commercial profit, clogging the streets like so much sewage. This anxiety is riddled with class connotations, that both she and her poetry will be seen as “low.” She conceptualizes this anxiety about her own “place” by thinking of the literary marketplace in terms of a material space, as Grub Street, an actual, physical location known for its noise and filth, and not just as a metaphor for moral and cultural squalor (Rogers 1). But Leapor is not just worried that her poems may be no better than the refuse of Grub Street; she is also apprehensive about the related symbolism of ephemerality. The periodicals and Grub Street represent a certain kind of literary space that Leapor does not want to be associated with—squalid and disgusting, but also transient, made up of texts that are read one day and become a part of the town’s sewage the next.

Leapor own material circumstances also affect the kind of spaces she imagines herself occupying. In “The Penitent,” for example, Mira admits that pride causes her to reject the offer of ten pounds, but she gives a humorous explanation for her haughtiness—her new top-knot, “[s]o gay, ‘twou’d make a Hermit vain” (19).²³ The admission is meant to be funny but also establishes a connection between physical appearance and self-perception. The presence of the top-knot affects Mira’s self-image, and she imagines herself as someone “better” than the ten pounds offered for her poems. However, this material reality also cuts both ways, as Mira finds:

But now disrob’d—with dirty Shoes
And Apron ragged as the Muse,
In Night-cap tight and wrapping Gown,
No more is seen the haughty Frown;
The fatal Top-knot laid aside
With its destructive Daughter Pride.
The vain Chimeras all are flown,
And Reason re-assumes her Throne. (21-28).

Once she is “disrob’d” and the beloved top-knot laid aside, both Mira’s body and her material reality more accurately reflect one another. The ragged apron and tight night-cap are material reminders of her financial circumstances, and suddenly the ten pounds is no longer offensive to her. Mira now urges, “We for a Trifle shall not part, / Nor from an easy Bargain start, / And that his Purchase mayn’t be hard, / I’ll add of Packthread half a Yard, / To satisfy the greedy Lout, / And bind the Papers round about” (33-38). The chastened Mira humorously offers to throw in

²³ A top-knot was an eighteenth-century headdress made of ribbons and lace that was cheap to make and could be very flamboyant based on the quantity and color of ribbons used (McShane and Backhouse 338).

the packthread that binds her poems together free of charge, though she also manages to get in a dig at the printer's greediness. In this poem, her material dress impacts her perception of herself—it is as though the top-knot literally swells Mira's head. Later, once the top-knot is gone and she is again in her shabby room, Mira's perception of herself adjusts to fit within her material reality.

However, material reality can also be adjusted by her imagination, and her self-image changes accordingly. In "The Disappointment," Sophronia reneges on a promise to gift Mira a cast-off gown. From the moment the promise is made, Mira imagines how this gown will transform her:

What Shadows swam before these dazzled Eyes!
Fans, Lace, and Ribbands, in bright Order rise:
Methought these Limbs your silken Favours found,
And thro' straight Entries brush'd the rustling Gown;
While the gay Vestment of delicious Hue
Sung thro the Isle, and whistled in the Pew:
Then, who its Wearer, by her Form shall tell:
No longer Mira, but a shining Belle. (3-10)

Mira imagines the dress in luxurious detail, including the tactile sense of the silk on her skin and the rustling sound its skirt makes when walking through narrow church aisles. Here an imagined change in material circumstances offers the opportunity to transform the self, to exchange one place for another; she is no longer the shabby maid Mira in this fine dress, but an elegant and beautiful "Belle." Thus, when Sophronia goes back on her promise, Mira loses not just the dress, but the dreams that accompany it—dreams of exchanging her place for a better one. Though she

portrays herself as bitterly disappointed, she also offers herself a chance at another kind of clothing, telling Sophronia to let her, “Enjoy her Whims, and wrap herself in Bays” (37). Mira imagines herself achieving poetic excellence, of her labor becoming art, and she does so in material terms. The bay laurel, symbolic of the highest status in poetry, is a material symbol of how Mira might change her place in the world; the gown allows her to imagine herself as a beautiful woman, but poetry allows her to alter her social circumstances and cultural power.

She plays with such a possibility again in a letter to Freemantle, admitting she has “an excellent Knack at Castle-building,” a phrase that plays on the idea of building a physical reality out of nothing but imagined materials. She tells Freemantle that should her publishing venture be successful, she already has grand plans for her new wealth:

In short, if our Scheme succeeds, I intend to shew my Public Spirit: As, first, I shall open two or three more Windows in the College-Chapel, and perhaps add another Isle to it. I shall erect a few Alms-houses; and have some Thought of founding an Hospital for indigent or distracted Poets. I presume this will take up as much of my superfluous Wealth as I can spare from the Extravagance of a gay Retinue and splendid Equipage, in which I intend to abound. Amidst all this, I shall not be ingrateful, tho’ perhaps somewhat haughty. Yet my Chariot or Landau shall be ever at your Service, and ready to convey you to my Country-seat, or to my House in Hanover-square. (301)

Leapor’s tone is tongue-in-cheek here, but she also implicitly acknowledges the seriousness of their “scheme” to publish her poems. Leapor imagines finding success and becoming something of a great lady, capable of philanthropic endeavors, such as adding to the local chapel or founding a hospital, amusingly, for “distracted Poets.” Of course, such benevolence will also

extend to herself, including the purchase of a chariot and two houses, one in the country and one in fashionable Hanover Square. Leapor's intimate knowledge of the spaces that the elite occupy is on display here— after all, she spent a portion of her own life living with employers for whom fine houses and chariots are a fact of everyday life. As a laborer with limited means and an occupant of small spaces, Leapor imagines expanding her own physical space; she revels in the luxury of multiplying one's space—not one home, but two, and the means to travel between them. The house in Hanover Square is also at a safe distance, geographically, socially, and culturally, from Grub Street. Leapor is intensely aware of her poetry's value, its potential to change her material circumstances, and thus her place.

Conclusion: Poetry as Meeting Place

In Leapor's struggle to determine her poetry's value to other people, she remains consistently aware of its greatest value to herself— its ability to bring the poet into the acquaintance of readers. Freemantle's description of her own introduction to Leapor highlights how this might happen. She describes encountering Leapor's poetry several years before they actually met, when an acquaintance shared with her “a Book about the Size of a common Copy-Book (but something thicker) fill'd with Poems of her writing, that much pleas'd me. I thought them extraordinary Performances for a Girl of her Age, and one that had so little Advantage (or rather none at all) either from Books or Conversation” (“To John *****, Esq.,” xxxv). Freemantle significantly remembers the physical details of the book; it acts as a material and metaphorical meeting place, where poet and reader first come into contact. This initial “meeting” prompted her desire to meet Leapor in person, though Freemantle's poor health at the time

prevented her from seeking out the young poet; they later met after Leapor left Edgcote House and remained in nearly daily contact up until the poet's death.

Leapor addresses many of her poems to Freemantle in her most frequently used poetic form, the verse epistle. Like the familiar letter, the verse epistle is addressed to a specific recipient, and it acts as a material link between different people in different places. In the case of Leapor and Freemantle, they did not live far from each other in terms of geographical distance, but they did occupy different social places. The daughter of a rector, Freemantle was a member of the gentry, and her initial interest in Leapor may have been prompted as an act of charity. However, Freemantle herself stresses this did not remain the case: "I was so far from thinking it a Condescension to cultivate an Acquaintance with a Person in her Station, that I rather esteem'd it an Honour to be call'd a Friend to one in whom there appear'd such a true Greatness of Soul as with me outweigh'd all the Advantages of Birth and Fortune" (xxxvi-xxxvii). Leapor's poems and letters to Freemantle suggest there was a mutual feeling of equality on her side; though she clearly admires Freemantle and often defers to her opinion, she also uses a familiar and friendly, even teasing, tone of voice with her.

Several of the verse epistles written to Freemantle are invitations to Leapor's home, such as "To Artemisia," in which Leapor acknowledges the class differences between them while also maintaining the potential for friendship and communion: "If Artemisia's Soul can dwell / Four Hours in a tiny Cell, / (To give that Space of Bliss to me) / I wait my Happiness at three" (1-4). Leapor portrays friendship in terms of space—it is a "Space of Bliss" in which two people from different stations can meet and interact. The verse epistle further elucidates the potential for poetry to become a meeting place; it acts as a material link that connects sender to recipient, imitating the physical space of drawing rooms by containing the conversation of friends. Leapor

makes this even more explicit when the epistle is an invitation to her home, using the social space of the letter to collapse the distance between sender and recipient. The invitation is a request to extend the correspondents' social exchange from over the page of the letter to over the space of the tea table. The verse epistle, then, is another way for Leapor to multiply her space.

Leapor also exchanged verse epistles with Jennens in a series of three poems: "The Pocket-Book's Soliloquy," "The Pocket-Book's Petition to Parthenissa," and "Parthenissa's Answer to the Pocket-Book's Soliloquy." Jennens sent the pocket-book as a gift to Leapor, who responded with the first two poems in the voice of the pocket-book, complaining its London origins and handsome cover meant it for a greater fate than "With Darkness, Dirt, and Mira, dwell" ("Pocket-Book's Petition," 22). The two women appear to have actually exchanged the pocket book back and forth with the poems written inside. "The Pocket-Book's Petition" invites Parthenissa to write within its pages:

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,
And I from hence will live at Ease. (15-20)

Leapor calls to mind her own poor penmanship in comparison to the wealthy and educated Jennens' "easy Hand," and pays detailed attention to the physical movement of writing. Jennens' reply specifies in parenthesis that it was "[Written in the same; and returned to Mrs. Leapor next Day]," offering further evidence that the pocket book was used to change the poems. The series

of epistles contained by the pocket book shows a hyper-awareness of their materiality, standing in for the links of friendship connecting Leapor to Jennens.

In her response, “Parthenissa’s Answer to the Pocket-Book’s Soliloquy,” Jennens bows to Leapor’s superior skill, berating the pocket-book for its pride in rejecting “[t]he Honours of her Hand” (6). She lectures the pocket book not to let Mira’s humble home deceive it: “Know’st thou who ‘twas accepted thee? / The successor of Pope” (39-40). She links Leapor to her favorite poet by making her his direct descendant, his literary daughter. Just as Leapor’s poetry is worthy of the handsome pocket book, Leapor is worthy of keeping the company of Pope. This is her “place,” where she belongs; Jennens imagines Leapor in a literary community that recognizes her former servant’s value in the same way that she does. She also imagines, through the space of the poem, an opportunity for Leapor to meet the poet she most admires.

The dream of becoming a successful and wealthy author that Leapor amusingly entertains in her letter to Freemantle would not come to fruition. In the autumn of 1746, Leapor contracted measles and died that November, long before the first volume of *Poems upon Several Occasions* would be published in 1748. Freemantle took it upon herself to continue with the subscription and conjectures in her “To the Reader” note as to what might have been: “The generous and charitable Spirit that appeared in her was exerted upon all Occasions to the utmost of her ability, and was such as would have been ornamental in a much higher Sphere, to which in all Probability, if it had pleased God to spare her Life, her own Merit would have raised her” (“To the Reader,” xli). Leapor also humorously entertains the possibility of her merit raising her to the imagined house in Hanover Square, though in the more sober “Epistle to a Lady,” she admits the discrepancy between these dreams and her material reality:

Yet Mira dreams, as slumbring Poets may,
And rolls in Treasures till the breaking day:
While Books and Pictures in bright Order rise,
And painted Parlours swim before her Eyes:
Till the shrill Clock impertinently rings,
And the soft Visions move their shining Wings:
Then Mira wakes,--her Pictures are no more,
And through her Fingers slides the vanish'd Ore.
Convinc'd too soon, her Eye unwilling falls
On the blue Curtains and the dusty Walls:
She wakes, alas! to Business and to Woes,
To sweep her Kitchen, and to mend her Clothes. (21-32)

Just as the ragged apron reminds her of her actual financial circumstances in “The Penitent,” the borders of her “dusty Walls” remind her of both the circumscribed boundaries of her world and the labor required to maintain it.

Though Leapor may not have gained the material space represented by those “painted Parlours” in her dreams, it is worth noting that she received prominent placing in two seminal anthologies of eighteenth-century women’s poetry. Her inclusion in George Colman and Bonnell Thornton’s *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755) ensured that her poetry would continue to be read throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Roger Lonsdale then renewed interest in her poetry by including her in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989). In both anthologies, Leapor is given more space than any other woman poet, including Montagu, Anne Finch, and Charlotte Smith. The poet with the least amount of physical space in life received the most in print.

Though Leapor spent her life intensely aware of her material and social existence—the “blue curtains” and “dusty walls” of her small cottage, her “place” as a servant—she was also aware of the possibility of learning to move with confidence and grace within those bounded spaces, and of imagining other ways of being through poetry. Within the textual space of the poem, “who so frolick as the Muse and I?” she asks in “Crumble Hall” (10). Just as the library at Weston Hall becomes a site for Leapor to connect with other people, the space of the poem allows for freedom of movement and the interaction between the poet and her readers. The pages of the poem become a meeting place in which people meet who otherwise would not, allowing for the possibility that the kitchen maid poet can establish herself as a vital link in a network of literary women.

CHAPTER THREE: ANNA LETITIA BARBAULD AND THE POEM AS SACRED SPACE

In 1767, Anna Letitia Barbauld composed what is her earliest known poem, “On Mrs. P[riestley]’s Leaving Warrington,” written on the departure of her close friend Mary Priestley from Warrington Academy, the Dissenting college in Lancashire where both Barbauld’s father and Mary’s husband were tutors. In this poem, Barbauld fondly recalls both Mary Priestley’s friendship and the house itself where their amiable social circle would meet: “How oft the well-worn path to her abode / At early dawn with eager steps I’ve trod, / And with unwilling feet retired at eve” (37-39). Barbauld supposedly flung her farewell poem into the Priestleys’ carriage just as it was driving away from their house (McCarthy, *Anna* 73). The impulsive and emotional gesture is also a physical one, as Barbauld uses the material poem to express her desire to remain in contact with her friend now that the boundaries of their friendship must necessarily expand beyond Warrington.

Barbauld’s biographer William McCarthy argues Warrington is foundational to both her personal development and her literary career, the source of some of her most important adult relationships, such as Mary and Joseph Priestley, and the inspiration for a number of her poems, including what may be her first serious poetic effort, “On Mrs. P[riestley]’s Leaving Warrington” (*Anna* 62). Though Warrington Academy was a male school, Barbauld was, in a sense, educated in this institution, which Anne Janowitz explains “aimed in its ethos to blend together the familial and the educational” (*Women* 18). Barbauld’s father John Aikin instructed her at their home on the school’s grounds in a far more liberal way than was typical for an eighteenth-century woman, teaching her alongside her brother on such subjects as Greek and

Latin (*Women* 18). Like McCarthy, Janowitz argues that Barbauld's educational experience at Warrington Academy profoundly influenced her perception of the world and her own place in it: "She might well have had an idealized notion that the boundaries of the domestic scene were very porous, and her early poems suggest her own awareness of her special place" (*Women* 18). At Warrington, Barbauld was the pretty and intelligent daughter of a beloved tutor, a privileged position that only became more visible when she began writing poetry, which was circulated around the school by manuscript. Though Barbauld's gender prohibited her from participating in the academy's classes, she was still able to participate in its intellectual life precisely because the boundaries between the "familial and educational" were so porous and flexible. It was typical for conversations to carry over from the classroom to the tutors' homes, where students would frequently meet with their instructors' families for meals and social gatherings.

Barbauld's "special place" at Warrington was further cemented when she published her first collection of poetry, *Poems*, in 1773, to critical and popular acclaim; her poetry was now read by a much larger audience, lauded in London by such influential figures as the Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu. Indeed, *Poems* was designed to be a serious bid for literary respectability. The first edition, published by Joseph Johnson, is a slim and elegant book, in which everything, as McCarthy says, is "designed to impress" (*Anna* 108). The Latin epigraph from Virgil's *Eclogues* on the title page, which can be translated as, "To have sung of these things, goddesses, while he sat and wove / A frail of thin hibiscus, will suffice your poet" (Lee 105-107), serves as an announcement of the poet's learning while simultaneously distancing her from writing for profit. Each poem that follows is introduced by a similar epigraph from an ancient or modern text, reinforcing the collection's erudite quality. Barbauld's intellect and education is on display throughout the collection, whose diversity of poetic modes reveals her confident grasp of the

standard poetic forms of her era, including songs, hymns, elegies, verse epistles, mock epic, and the pastoral.

Barbauld would go on to construct one of the most diverse and influential literary careers of any individual, man or woman, of the eighteenth century. In addition to poetry, she would write political and religious essays, literary criticism, children's literature, and she would become a respected editor, compiling both *The Correspondence of Samuel Richardson* (1804) and the fifty-volume collection *The British Novelists* (1850). Barbauld's ability to present herself to the public literary sphere as a respectable and intelligent female writer, first in *Poems* and then throughout the rest of her diverse career, is partly the result of her historical position in the late eighteenth century when such a role had actually become viable for women writers.²⁴ But Barbauld's persona as a "professional intellectual," as Jaqueline Labbe puts it (3), is not just the fortuitous result of her specific historical moment. It is also a deliberate authorial construction, and one that is, like Lady Mary Wortley Montagu and Mary Leapor before her, informed by her sense of place.

All of the poems featured in Barbauld's literary debut in 1773 *Poems* were written during the period that she lived in Warrington. This sense of rootedness greatly influences her understanding of place as a stabilizing force that she is simultaneously drawn to and desires to escape from. The collection reflects a simultaneous urge to be both in place and out of place, with significant implications for how Barbauld conceptualizes sacred spaces in particular. In this chapter, I examine how Barbauld's portrayal of sacred space in *Poems* reflects an ecological

²⁴ Susan Staves argues that during the mid-eighteenth century, "women writers who exemplified certain qualities were increasingly accepted as members of the literary family, albeit subordinate members" (229). These "certain qualities" namely meant those women "who supported virtue and who could at least be perceived as staying within the bounds appropriate to women" (283). Examples who were roughly contemporaries of Barbauld include other members of the Bluestocking network, such as the poet Elizabeth Carter, and the novelist Frances Burney.

sense of place—a way of thinking that is marked by diversity and openness, and that affirms the interconnection of all living things, human and non-human. For Barbauld, places in eighteenth-century England are generally made of restrictive boundaries, where she is made to feel “out of place” as both a woman and a Dissenter; however, the imaginative space of the poem allows for a way of thinking about place that is *not* constricted by boundaries, but is expansive and connective. In this sense, Barbauld fundamentally differs from both Montagu and Leapor who remain consistently aware of both the material and social boundaries of their world, though they also find a way to be mobile within and through them. Barbauld, however, finds radical possibility in the position of outsider, pilgrim, and in her later poetry, prophet, identities that are formed by her religious beliefs.

Sacred Space and Ecological Thinking

Numerous scholars, including McCarthy and Janowitz, have emphasized the importance of Warrington to Barbauld, and her own contemporaries likewise saw her as indelibly linked to both a location and a particular way of being—that of provincial Dissent.²⁵ According to McCarthy, “When she first presented herself to the public she did so, in part, as a voice of Lancashire and Dissent. She was first received as the unofficial laureate of a region, a sect, and a school” (*Anna* 62-63). The interconnection of familial, academic, religious, and social life at Warrington Academy inculcated in Barbauld a sense of the permeability of spatial and

²⁵ Some notable examples that consider the influence of both Warrington and Dissent on Barbauld include Deidre Coleman’s “Firebrands, Letters, and Flowers: Mrs. Barbauld and the Priestleys” (*Romantic Sociability: Social Networks and Literary Culture in Britain, 1770-1840*. Ed. Gillian Russell and Clara Tuite. Cambridge: Cambridge, UP, 2002. 82-103), Daniel White’s *Early Romanticism and Religious Dissent* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006), and Felicity James and Ian Inkster’s *Religious Dissent and the Aikin-Barbauld Circle* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

phenomenological boundaries—the domestic life of the tutors and their families was inextricably bound up in both the academic and social lives of their students. Some of the students actually boarded with the tutors and their families, including Barbauld’s close friends Joseph and Mary Priestley (McCarthy, *Anna* 69). The tutors’ children often became close friends with each other and with the academy’s students with whom they would take meals, meet to read poems and plays, and in the case of Barbauld’s close friends the Rigby sisters, notoriously engage in more mischievous behavior such as playing practical jokes and flirting (McCarthy, *Anna* 69, 82). And of course, the common tie binding them all together at Warrington Academy was their religious beliefs. Dissenters were nonconformists to the established Church of England, and thus shut out from attending the established universities or holding public office; their position as outsiders resulted in making their own communities all the more closely knit.

Warrington Academy became known not just for its sociable atmosphere, but also for encouraging independent thinking in its students. Daniel White claims “openness” was “the defining feature of a Warrington education,” and that Barbauld’s own father John Aikin “so encouraged free discussion” in his classroom that “he can be credited with having presided over the first class we could properly call a seminar” (26). These classroom conversations defined by “free discussion” often carried over into the tutors’ homes and within their own families. Indeed, such conversations are as much a hallmark of Barbauld’s Dissenting identity as they are of a Warrington Academy education. White explains that nonconformist identity was informed by three principles: “private judgment, personal conscience, and free interpretation of scripture” (25). The culture of Dissent simultaneously allowed Barbauld to view herself as an independent individual and an interdependent member of a community, which is also an ecological way of thinking about both human relationships and place. Furthermore, when Barbauld applies this

ecological way of thinking to her religious views, it becomes a way to renegotiate and reimagine human relationships to one another, to the nonhuman world, and to the divine. In Barbauld's poetic oeuvre, places, and consequently, different ways of being, need not be closed off, rigid, and permanent; instead, they can be reimagined as open, porous, and ever changing.

Through re-creating the physical and social space of Warrington Academy within the textual space of her poetry, Barbauld participates in constructing a set of moral and intellectual values that simultaneously reinforce and interrogate the values of the Dissenting community. Janowitz considers some of Barbauld's early poems "quite naïve" in comparison to her "more critical and mature poetry," such as *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven* ("Amiable" 68); however, McCarthy insists that her feelings toward Warrington Academy and Dissent were "ambivalent and by no means uncritical" (*Anna* 63). The fact that scholars can offer these opposing yet valid views of Barbauld's attitude toward Dissent in her early poetry is both a reflection of her own ambivalence and the culture of Dissent itself. I would suggest that these two strains—Barbauld's "naïve" endorsement of Warrington values versus her ambivalent and sometimes critical representation—do not need to be seen as incompatible, and that her ecological understanding of place actually allows for and supports this kind of difference. Jon Mee argues that Barbauld was more comfortable and socially at-ease in Dissenting circles exactly because "a more vigorous enquiry after truth . . . did not preclude the clash of differences" (22). Independent thinking and disagreement were encouraged at Warrington Academy, creating an atmosphere that influenced Barbauld's own thinking and would pave the way for her to write such polemical texts as "Thoughts on the Devotional Taste," which would alienate many of her fellow Dissenters, and the *Eighteen Hundred and Eleven*, which would alienate just about everyone who read it. Barbauld's post-Warrington, Romantic career is not a sharp distinction from the Enlightenment

era Anna Aikin, unofficial poet laureate of Warrington Academy and Lancashire Dissent; rather, this is a unified persona *created by* that very place.

Though “On Mrs. P[riestley]’s Leaving Warrington” is not included in *Poems*, as one of Barbauld’s earliest poems it does anticipate that collection’s major thematic concerns, such as the importance of community and a way of being that is marked by liberality and open-mindedness. In the poem, Barbauld praises the Priestleys for creating a social circle that epitomizes those very traits:

No cold reserve, suspicion, sullen care,
Or dark unfriendly passions enter there,
But pleasing fires of lively fancy play,
And wisdom mingles her serener ray.
Not in that form those stern forbidding airs
Which seated on the Cynic’s brow she wears
To damp the spirits, each gay hope controul
And check the unguarded sallies of the soul. (45-52)

Such images of flight and liberty abound in Barbauld’s early poetry, as do corresponding images of captivity and restraint. What makes the Priestley home so important to Barbauld is that her way of being there is characterized by freedom—of the intellect, emotions, and will. Her imagination—“the unguarded sallies of the soul”—is allowed to soar in such a place. For Barbauld, being in place is primarily a way of anchoring herself in the physical world before she allows her imagination “to launch,” one of her favorite verbs, herself away from the boundaries of her known world. There is a simultaneous pull towards earth, to being rooted in place, and a push outwards, into “the bright unknown” as she puts it in “The Invitation” (182).

The geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes this dual impulse for stability and change, to be “in place” and “out of place,” as a fundamental human need (3). He explains that human beings across history “have developed various devices that are in fact different ways of going temporarily ‘out of place’” in order to break up the “drowsiness of routine” (5). Barbauld is at her most energized when she finds herself out of place, a way of being that is almost certainly formed by her identity within the Dissenting community.

Barred from participating in public life and attending Cambridge or Oxford by the Test and Corporation Acts, the Dissenters were accustomed to knowing what it means to be out of place, how religious and social restriction manifests itself in spatial restriction. In her pamphlet *Address to the Opposers of the Repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts* (1790), Barbauld uses the image of spatial restriction as a metaphor for the Church of England’s treatment of Dissenters:

What! fenced and guarded as she is with her exclusive privileges and rich emoluments, stately with her learned halls and endowed colleges, with all the attraction of her wealth, and the thunder of her censures . . . resting in security under the broad buckler of the State, does she tremble at the naked and unarmed sectary? him, whose early connections, and phrase uncouth, and unpopular opinions set him at a distance from the means of advancement; him, who in intercourses of neighbourhood and common life, like new settlers, finds it necessary to clear the ground before him, and is ever obliged to root up a prejudice before he can plant affection. (*Selected Poetry and Prose* 264-265)

Barbauld uses spatial metaphors that represent enclosure and separation, portraying the Church and State as “fenced and guarded” against those who do not belong, and the Dissenters as “at a

distance from the means of advancement.” They are cast as “new settlers,” perpetual pioneers having to “clear the ground” of prejudice and bias. Though Barbauld is thinking principally of Dissenters in her metaphor comparing them to settlers, Tuan acknowledges that there is a prevalence in Christian thought to portray the Christian as a pilgrim, a “sojourner, a traveler, a bird of passage” (6). Tuan explains the religious significance of the pilgrim: “Christianity has always been ambivalent toward rootedness as a human condition. From a Christian viewpoint, man is amphibious, his home being the Kingdom of God—a heavenly city—as well as a place on earth” (6). While Barbauld challenges the religious and social restrictions for Dissenters, she also finds the phenomenological state of being “out of place” to be an energizing and mobilizing poetic and rhetorical position. It also has strong religious connotations, recalling as it does the biblical New Testament’s call for believers to be “not of this world.”²⁶ To be “out of this world” is a position of moral authority, turning the negative sense of being “out of place,” locked out of the establishment, into a positive one.

Ultimately, to be “out of place” is to be located *outside* of known boundaries, whether these are material, social, political, or religious; for Barbauld, this becomes a powerful metaphor for her poetic imagination and the textual space of the poem. In her poetic oeuvre, the imaginative space of the poem is vast, expansive enough that her imagination can take flight. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her religious verses, where the space of the poem is vast enough to address the divine. Timothy Morton has argued that this kind of expansive thinking is characteristic of what he calls the “ecological thought,” which he defines as “thinking of interconnectedness” (7). Morton argues that we often think of ecology as being place-bound, “a

²⁶ Some of the most frequently cited examples include Jesus’s words to Pilate: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36), and his characterization of his disciples: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world” (John 17: 16).

closed system” (8), when we should be conceptualizing it as “a vast, sprawling mesh of interconnection without a definite center or edge” (8). Barbauld makes a similar move in her religious verses, imagining the world and everything in it as connected to God, as she claims in “An Address to the Deity:” “God is seen in all, and all in God” (56). For Barbauld, thinking about God is a way of thinking about interconnection and interdependence, which as Morton explains, is a method of “dissolving the barrier between ‘over here’ and ‘over there,’ and more fundamentally, the metaphysical illusion of rigid, narrow boundaries between inside and outside” (39). The “rigid, narrow boundaries” that separate the Dissenters from the establishment are exactly what Barbauld seeks to avoid in her poetry, and her religious verses in particular. Instead of replicating boundaries that insist on “inside and outside,” Barbauld suggests in her poetry that sacred space is vast and connective, not restricted and isolating. She offers an ecological way of thinking about sacred space, one that conceptualizes the religious devotee as the pilgrim “out of place,” on an imaginative journey toward the divine.

One of the most interesting facets of Barbauld’s religious faith is that she sees it as a means of expanding her thinking, and not limiting it. This is partly because religion is not always clearly tied to brick-and-mortar religious institutions for her, a trait that most likely stems from the Dissenting tradition, for whom a legitimate place was difficult to establish. Ana Acosta proposes that the Dissenters’ “identity as outsiders . . . may have led them to settle in peripheral communities closely knit by family, business, and religious ties” (3). Lacking a legitimized space in the establishment, the Dissenters had to create their own spaces, including “their own unauthorized and often makeshift academies” (Acosta 5), as well as their places of worship or sacred spaces.

While the most obvious type of sacred spaces are human-constructed places of worship, such as churches, temples, and mosques, sacred space can be defined much more broadly as any “portion of the earth’s surface which is recognized by individuals or groups as worthy of devotion, loyalty or esteem” (Jackson and Henrie 94).²⁷ This definition of sacred space has been largely shaped by the religious scholar Mircea Eliade, who argues, “Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane” (11). He uses the term “hierophany” to describe “the act of manifestation of the sacred,” or the revelation of the sacred in a specific place (11). In an experience with the sacred, the religious individual “experiences interruptions, breaks” in homogenous space, and that location becomes something “qualitatively different from others” (Eliade 20). In Barbauld’s *Poems*, sacred space is usually not located within churches or other physical buildings with clear spatial boundaries; instead, the sacred tends to manifest itself in the natural, non-human world. When Barbauld encounters the divine, she typically locates herself as outside, a physical positioning that reflects and reinforces her rhetorical positioning—conceptualizing the poem as an imaginative space without boundaries. For Barbauld’s Christian faith, this is fitting as God himself is portrayed without boundaries—he is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Thinking about God, then, is a way of thinking expansively, and it is here that the sacred and ecology intersect for Barbauld.

Though ecocritics frequently incorporate the concept of place in their scholarly work due to its potential to turn an attachment for place into a sense of responsibility for place, scholars

²⁷ Richard H. Jackson and Roger Henrie suggest that sacred space need not be defined solely by religious devotion: “Other types of space can be categorized as sacred if they evoke feelings of sanctity or esteem” (95). Other examples include “homelands,” such as an individual’s or family’s ancestral home or land, and “historical sacred spaces,” such as the grounds of a famous battle or monument to a historical figure (95). Sacred space, then, can be any location that human beings recognize as set apart from secular or “profane” space or “mundane” space, which they define as “the space man operates in and recognizes as different from the rest of the world, but not as sacred” (94).

such as Lawrence Buell have identified the negative implications for ecology when place gets conceptualized as closed off, bounded, and permanent: “But taking a good thing too far (place-attachment and stewardship at the local level) manifestly can produce bad results too: maladaptive sedentariness, inordinate hankering to recover the world we have lost, xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders and wanderers” (68). More recently, Morton has argued even more forcefully for a complete separation of place from ecology, arguing that place restricts an ecological way of thinking: “In the West, we think of ecology as earthbound. Not only earthbound: we want ecology to be about location, location, location. In particular location must be local: it must feel like home” (27). Instead, Morton calls for a “progressive ecology” that is “spacious, not place-ist; global, not local” (28). His argument recalls Doreen Massey’s own calls for a “progressive” sense of place, though she fashions her argument in *defense* of place as a concept.

Massey asks whether place must necessarily be conceptualized as bounded and closed, separating people into insiders and outsiders: “Is it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self-enclosing and defensive, but outward-looking?” (147). For Massey, a progressive sense of place allows for places to have “multiple identities” and histories that get “constructed out of a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus” (153-154). In this way of thinking, places are not “areas with boundaries around” them, but rather “articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings” (154). This progressive sense of place, then, is entirely compatible with what Morton calls “progressive ecology.” Massey explains that a progressive sense of place “is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links in the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local” (155). Thus, both a progressive sense of ecology and a

progressive sense of place emphasize diversity over homogeneity, interconnection over separation, expansive thinking over restrictive thinking.

I see Barbauld's poetry as exhibiting traits that are compatible with both a progressive ecology and a progressive sense of place, which I will hereafter combine and refer to as ecology of place. For Barbauld, ecology of place is a way of thinking about connections, whether between herself and other people, between herself and the non-human, or perhaps most importantly for her, between herself and God. She also exhibits awareness of the simultaneous uniqueness and interdependence of living organisms (Kroeber 23). This way of thinking allows for diversity and individuality while also acknowledging that no human or nonhuman exists in complete isolation—they are a part of an ecosystem, a community (Kroeber 7).

The textual space Barbauld constructs makes room for disagreement, even as it also consistently emphasizes the importance of community. Disagreement and community are not mutually exclusive terms for Barbauld, even when the setting is in the close-knit social atmosphere of Warrington Academy. There is a tendency in scholarship on Barbauld to view her 1773 *Poems* as a distinctively different phase of her career, and one that is indelibly tied to her time at Warrington Academy. Deidre Coleman argues that in the tumultuous 1790's, which would see the failure to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts in 1790 and the Birmingham riots of 1791, the "Enlightenment sociability represented by Warrington in the 1760s and 1770s suddenly seemed a thing of the past" (85). Janowitz sees a similar distinction from the Enlightenment Anna Aikin and the Romantic Anna Barbauld. She argues that Barbauld would later more thoroughly interrogate the Warrington values that she endorses in *Poems*, claiming the collection as a whole "promoted the Academy" and that individual poems such as "The Invitation" even act "as an advertisement for the institution" ("Amiable" 68). However, like

McCarthy, Janowitz acknowledges that Warrington Academy was not the cozily sociable atmosphere it is often portrayed, pointing out that “the boundaries of amiable sociability upon which Warrington was built and needed to stabilize itself, had to be rhetorically made firm if it were not to call attention to the troubles of a small community” (“Amiable” 69). However, Massey also argues that places “do not have single, ‘unique’ identities; they are full of internal conflicts” (155). A progressive sense of place is not threatened by conflict or diversity, but rather defines itself as a “*meeting* place” for a diverse group of people and their different ways of being (Massey 154). I would argue that Barbauld offers a progressive view of Warrington as place in *Poems*, one that challenges any essentialist idea of identity and promotes instead an ecological understanding of community as both diverse and interdependent.

Though her criticism may be subtly deployed in *Poems*, it is there to challenge the notion of Warrington Academy as having a single, uniform identity. For example, “The Invitation” is certainly a celebration of the academy as “[t]he nursery of men for future years” (82). Barbauld predicts its graduates will go on to influence their nation as its leaders: “When this, this little group their country calls / From academic shades and learned halls, / To fix her laws, her spirit to sustain, / And light up glory thro’ her wide domain!” (135-138). However, her frustration at being locked out of participating in the academy’s glory is also apparent when she addresses the school’s male students: “How rich a field is to your hopes display’d! / Knowledge to you unlocks the classic page . . . What bliss (did ye but know that bliss) were yours?” (112-113, 116). There is an undercurrent of envy and reproach in her parenthetical aside, suggesting she understands better than Warrington Academy’s male students the value of their education precisely because it is denied to her. She acknowledges the irony that Warrington Academy exists because the Dissenters are locked out of the boundaries of their own nation’s university system, and yet it is

also enacting that very sense of separation. However much she may identify with the limitations imposed on the Dissenting male students of Warrington, they are capable of belonging, of being in place there, in a way that Barbauld fundamentally cannot, even if she is the celebrated, unofficial poet laureate of the school.

Barbauld also challenges an essentialist identity for Warrington by questioning its strict moral values in her humorous mock epic, “The Groans of the Tankard,” which immediately follows “The Invitation” in *Poems*. In this poem, the Aikin family tankard comes to life to mourn its fate, from its formal place in the “festal board” (29) where “the nectar’d draught I pour’d” (37), to its new home with sober Dissenters: “Unblest the day, and luckless was the hour / Which doom’d me to a Presbyterian’s power; / Fated to serve the Puritanick race, / Whose slender meal is shorter than their grace” (61-64). Ann Messenger reads the poem as a reinforcement of Dissenting values, but McCarthy views the tankard’s complaints as a subtle “imaginative insurrection” on Barbauld’s part, a complaint about the “joyless, anti-sensual” tendency of Dissenters (“Woman” 117).²⁸ McCarthy offers an astute reading; though the poem concludes with the tankard quieted by an “ancient Sybil,” it is not completely silenced: “Yet still low murmurs creep along the ground, / And the air vibrates with the silver sound” (87-88). The tankard’s “low murmurs” might easily stand in for a youthful Barbauld, grumbling over the strictures that she says “damp the spirits, each gay hope controul / And check the unguarded sallies of the soul” in “On Mrs. P[riestley]’s Leaving Warrington” (45-52).

²⁸ Messenger points out that the review of *Poems* in the *Critical Review* found “The Groans of the Tankard” a self-congratulatory poem about the sobriety of Dissenters: “From its Establishment point of view, the *Critical Review* was beginning to get the point that this playful burlesque was, under the cloak of the mock heroic, a scathing indictment of the Establishment” (176).

She lodges a similar complaint in “To Wisdom,” which her niece Lucy Aikin claimed was prompted by the adults’ refusal to allow the students to perform a private theatrical at Warrington Academy; the young people involved, including Barbauld, were both disappointed and irritated by the decision (*Poems* 253). In the poem, Barbauld claims that she will always welcome wisdom’s “soft controul” if its intent is to “sooth the sickness of the soul” and “bid the warring passions cease” (1-3); however, she will not accept it on less reasonable grounds:

But if thou com’st with frown austere
To nurse the brood of care and fear;
To bid our sweetest passions die,
And leave us in their room a sigh;
Or if thine aspect stern have power
To wither each poor transient flower,
That cheers this pilgrimage of woe,
And dry the springs whence hope should flow;
Wisdom, thine empire I disclaim,
Thou empty boast of pompous name! (7-16)

Barbauld is willing to accept “soft controul” but rejects motives of “care and fear,” emotions that restrict youthful spirits and propensity for joy. Adjectives such as “austere” and “stern” suggest an atmosphere of restraint, and sound very similar to the “cold reserve, suspicion, sullen care” that Barbauld claims is absent from the Priestley home, which McCarthy points out suggests she does find those attitudes somewhere else, perhaps her own home (“Woman” 122). Barbauld’s “To Wisdom” can be read as a statement of rebellion when she avers, “Wisdom, thine empire I disclaim.” The word “empire” implies a spatial territory that Wisdom rules; by rejecting its

empire, Barbauld is rejecting its authority. Both “The Groans of the Tankard” and “To Wisdom” are protests on rigidity and lack of flexibility on matters of moral or spiritual concern. McCarthy points out that “The Groans of the Tankard” is a poem that “ratifies appetite” (“Woman” 118). It is an appropriate metaphor for Barbauld’s approach to religion—it is meant to affirm life and joy, not repress these qualities.

Though poems such as “The Invitation” and “The Groans of the Tankard” offer critiques about the danger in constructing the spatial and moral boundaries of Dissent too narrowly and rigidly, they also affirm Warrington Academy’s sense of community, where the students learn together, eat meals together, and worship together. Though she may disagree with elements of this identity, Barbauld still views herself as a part of this community, even when it excludes her from participating fully in its academic life. She does, however, offer challenges to how her community defines its social and communal space, suggesting it should follow the model set in “On Mrs. P[riestley]’s Leaving Warrington,” which is characterized by warmth, joy, openness, and connection. In Barbauld’s controversial “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste, on Sects, and on Establishments” (1775), which she wrote soon after leaving Warrington for Palgrave to begin a boys’ school with her new husband, Rochemont Barbauld, she “argues warmly in behalf of devotional feeling and against the intellectual and professional practices which, she believes, chills it” (Kraft and McCarthy, *Selected Poetry* 210). Though her lifelong friend William Enfield, also a Warrington Academy tutor, wrote appreciatively of the essay, other Dissenters, Joseph Priestley in particular, vehemently disagreed with Barbauld; in fact, Priestley suggested “that she had betrayed the cause of Dissent itself” (Kraft and McCarthy 210). In “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste,” Barbauld argues, “From an over-anxious fear of admitting any expression that is not strictly proper, we are apt to reject all warm and pathetic imagery and in short, every

thing that strikes upon the heart and the senses” (*Selected Poetry* 217). This “over-anxious fear” of anything that “is not strictly proper” certainly does sound like the portraits of Warrington Academy that Barbauld offers in “The Groans of the Tankard” and “To Wisdom.” The unfavorable reactions that “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste” elicited from Dissenters affiliated with Warrington Academy, with the notable exception of Enfield, suggests there is an element of truth to Barbauld’s portrayal of their tendency toward constraint. Notably, she feels free to criticize this constraint without making any suggestion that she wants to leave the community of which she is a part. She merely wants to expand the way it thinks of itself, to push against the restrictive boundaries that too rigidly define a religious way of being. Barbauld concludes *Poems* with a series of religious verses, which use the unbounded nature of God to argue for a definition of sacred space that is open and expansive, that affirms interconnection without erasing difference.

Sacred Space as the Ecological Sublime

Since Dissent emphasizes intellect and reason, Barbauld takes it upon herself to defend the emotional aspect of religious devotion in “Thoughts on the Devotional Taste,” which she characterizes as an essential component of spiritual life. For her, the source of religious devotion is located in “the imagination and the passions, and it has its source in that relish for the sublime, the vast, and the beautiful, by which we taste the charms of poetry and other compositions that address our finer feelings” (“Thoughts,” *Selected Poetry* 211). Barbauld associates religious devotion with the sublime’s characteristics of vastness and overwhelming emotion, allowing her to make two crucial rhetorical moves. First, connecting religious devotion to the sublime allows her to make a case for the importance of poetry, reinforcing her own authority as a poet. To write

poetry can be an act of religious devotion, a claim she also makes in her elegy on the poet Elizabeth Singer Rowe, which appears earlier in *Poems*. In “Verses on Mrs. Rowe,” Barbauld praises the joining of the “Christian’s meekness and the Poet’s fire” (6), suggesting that a religious life and literary accomplishment are compatible. Significantly, Barbauld chooses Rowe, a woman and a Dissenter, as her model: “Bright pattern of thy sex, be thou my muse” (39). The role of poet is made viable, even admirable, and positioned as a figure of authority and influence, in matters both sacred and poetic. Secondly, the connection to the sublime allows Barbauld to expand the boundaries of sacred space. The sublime is associated with the natural or non-human world; it overpowers the human, and by extension, human-constructed institutions.

Barbauld imagines an encounter with the divine as a sublime experience in her religious lyric “An Address to the Deity,” one of her most frequently reprinted and anthologized poems in her lifetime. In this poem, God is an overwhelming and overpowering presence, one that humbles Barbauld and reminds her of her own insignificance in comparison:

I feel that name my inmost thoughts controul,
And breathe an awful stillness thro’ my soul;
As by a charm, the waves of grief subside;
Impetuous passion stops her headlong tide;
At thy felt presence all emotions cease,
And my hush’d spirit finds a sudden peace,
Till every worldly thought within me dies,
And earth’s gay pageants vanish from my eyes;
Till all my sense is lost in infinite,
And one vast object fills my aching sight. (11-20)

In this moment, Barbauld essentially experiences Eliade's "hierophany," a "manifestation of the sacred" (11), an intense experience that is so all-encompassing that she is freed from all other thoughts and feelings. Significantly, Barbauld uses the word "controul," though in a far more positive sense than she does in "On Mrs. P[riestley]'s Leaving Warrington." In "To Wisdom," Barbauld claims she can accept "soft controul" when its intent is to release her from negative emotions; in this sense, wisdom's control is actually providing a form of freedom, of release from the captivity of "warring passions." She uses the word "controul" in exactly this sense in "An Address to the Deity," in which God's control over her heart and mind is a release from all sense of ego, as "one vast object fills my aching sight."

Barbauld's deployment of the sublime here is representative of Christopher Hitt's definition of the ecological sublime, in which the "ennobling validation for the perceiving subject" that typically follows the moment of "humbling fear" in the sublime encounter is rejected in favor of remaining in a state of humility ("Ecological Sublime" 606). In this model of the sublime, humility does not get "transformed into self-apotheosis," which Hitt points out has typically ended up "validating the individual's dominion over the nonhuman world" ("Ecological Sublime" 608). When the sublime occurs as part of hierophany, defining the space as sacred, the transformation to domination gets interrupted. Barbauld remains aware that she is on holy ground, where all are equal before God, the source of the sublime experience. Within sacred space, even "the brightest Seraphs could no more / Than veil their faces, tremble, and adore. / Worms, angels, men, in every different sphere / Are equal all, for all are nothing here" ("An Address" 5-8). Barbauld is advocating for a more correct understanding of the self, one that recognizes the individual is equal to everything around her—all are equal before God.

For Barbauld, the significance of sacred space is that it serves as a reminder of the equality of souls, and therefore the interdependence of the human and nonhuman. Sacred space is fundamentally social, or communal, in the sense that it allows the soul to be in communion with God and with others. Barbauld later defends the importance of the religious community in her response to her fellow Dissenter Gilbert Wakefield's argument against the necessity of public worship in her "Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's "Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship" (1792). She argues that public worship provides one of the few opportunities for members of different classes to interact: "The temple is the only place where human beings, of every rank and sex and age, meet together for one common purpose, and join together in common act. . . . This is the only place, to enter which nothing more is necessary than to be of the same species;--the only place where man meets man not only as an equal but a brother; and where, by contemplating his duties he may become sensible of his rights" (*Works* 446). Barbauld acknowledges that the actual boundaries of the church, where public worship occurs, reinforce a sense of belonging, much like the social circle of the Priestleys' house; however, these boundaries are generous because they are set by God, the infinite. Though Barbauld uses the word "species" to suggest that the sacred space of churches are only for the human, elsewhere in "Remarks" she refers to the sense of spiritual kinship that human beings can have with the nonhuman. When discussing the impulse to share our joy with another being, Barbauld claims, "When men are wanting, we address the animal creation; and, rather than have none to partake our sentiments, we find sentiment in the music of the birds, the hum of insects, and the low of kine: nay, we call on rocks and streams and forests to witness and share our emotions" ("Remarks" 428). The emotional and spiritual dimensions of being human are fundamentally social, to be shared with other creatures, whether human or nonhuman.

In “Remarks,” Barbauld defines public worship as “the public expression of homage to the Sovereign of the Universe. It is that tribute from men united in families, in towns, in communities, which individually men owe to their Maker” (417). She portrays public worship as an act that is both individual and communal, an idea reinforced by the series of hymns that precedes “An Address to the Deity” in *Poems*. The function of a hymn is to facilitate public worship—they are sung by a church congregation in praise of God. However, Barbauld’s “Hymn 1” is a reminder that God is larger than human structures and institutions: “He rules with wide and absolute command / O’er the broad ocean and the stedfast land, / Jehovah reigns, unbounded, and alone, / And all creation hangs beneath his throne” (7-10). God is “unbounded;” his divinity extends beyond human boundaries, which includes the walls of the church. Barbauld repeats the word “unbounded” again later in the hymn: “He dwells within his own unfathom’d essence, / And fills all space with his *unbounded* presence” (53-54, my emphasis). While God is infinite, he does not transcend space—he *fills* it. The spatial image is one of abundance, capaciousness, reminiscent of Barbauld’s affirmation of appetite in “The Groans of the Tankard.”

Likewise, in “An Address to the Deity,” Barbauld offers an expansion of what can be considered sacred space, stretching beyond the church walls to any place the individual finds herself in communion with God. She does this by “reading,” and thus locating, God in the natural world around her:

I read his awful name, emblazon’d high
With golden letters on th’ illumin’d sky;
Nor less the mystic characters I see
Wrought in each flower, inscrib’d in every tree;

In every leaf that trembles to the breeze
I hear the voice of GOD among the trees;
With thee in shady solitudes I walk,
With thee in busy crowded cities talk,
In every creature own thy forming power,
In each event thy providence adore. (57-66)

Barbauld claims to find the presence of God everywhere, from the stars in the sky, to the flowers and trees, to the busy cities. This manner of locating God does not rely upon the sublime encounter, which White points out: “Whereas the experience of the infinite, when ‘one vast object fills my aching sight,’ necessarily fades out . . . this second achievement of devotion initiates a sustained form of habituation, pointing the poet’s path ‘to everlasting peace’” (64). Indeed, when the sublime moment fades, Barbauld describes the loss of the divine presence as a return to captivity to her human concerns: “But soon, alas! this holy calm is broke; / My soul submits to wear her wonted yoke; / With shackled pinions strives to soar in vain, / And mingles with the dross of earth again” (21-24). Ellen Ross explains that such images of captivity and freedom are a recurring type in women’s religious writing, one of the ways women “spatially experience manifestations of the divine” (94). Ross calls this type of image, “Space as Apocalyptic Presence,” explaining that geography is not imagined in terms of “physical, territorial boundaries, but by spiritual categories of bondage and freedom” (95). In this mode of thinking, freedom is found in “the divine realm whose boundaries are established not by literal, physical markers, but by the values of freedom and liberty” (Ross 106). Thus, to be rooted on earth is to be, in a sense, always a captive, in bondage to earthly desires and unjust social systems. Ross explains that this view of space leads to “the idea that this world is finally only a

temporary place of passage on a journey to the eternal realm of the divine” (105). This is an idea in keeping with the Christian as pilgrim, a temporary sojourner on earth.

Barbauld concludes “An Address to the Deity” with just such an image of the earth as a temporary location for the Christian pilgrim. She portrays death as passage from one spatial realm to another:

Then when the last, the closing hour draws nigh,
And earth recedes before my swimming eye;
I stand and stretch my view to either state;
Teach me to quit this transitory scene
With decent triumph and a look serene;
Teach me to fix my ardent hopes on high,
And having liv'd to thee, in thee to die. (73-80)

Barbauld imagines herself as pulled by twin desires—to remain rooted in her earthly home but also desiring to journey on to what is her true home in heaven. Earth is only a “transitory scene,” as are its sacred spaces: terrestrial manifestations of the divine, but not the divine itself. Chris C. Park explains, “Sacred space is much more than hallowed ground because it symbolizes and sometimes embodies the gateway to the unknown” (246). The sacred spaces that Barbauld encounters on earth are pathways that lead her elsewhere, to the unknown; they are always pushing her onwards and outwards, to release her “shackled pinions” so that she might be able “to soar” (“An Address” 23).

Sacred Space as Pilgrimage

This desire to take flight reaches its consummation in the final poem of the collection, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” a majestic blank verse poem reminiscent of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. In this poem, Barbauld does not merely take flight—she embarks on a poetic version of space travel. She describes leaving “the green borders of the peopled earth” (73), soaring through “the suburbs of the system” (78), and then even further into “the trackless deeps of space” (82). Each stage of the journey is a move beyond a set of known borders, whether of physical landmarks, human knowledge, or her imagination. Barbauld’s journey is a pilgrimage, a voyage from her home on earth through the unknown corners of the universe in an attempt to seek out the presence of God. Whereas “An Address to the Deity” finds her content in terrestrial manifestations of the sacred, “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” is an effort to locate God himself. Tuan argues that pilgrimage is one of the ways that human beings can break up the routine of their daily lives, a method “of going temporarily ‘out of place’” (5). Barbauld emphasizes this sense of being “out of place” in an extreme way by imagining herself entirely outside the borders of the known universe—she is as “out of place” as her imagination can fathom. Significantly, her status as a pilgrim, a traveler, stays with her even after she returns to earth at the end of her cosmic voyage. The pilgrimage into space serves as a forceful reminder that “place is necessarily a temporary abode, not an enduring city” (Tuan 9). Barbauld’s pilgrimage into space, and her encounter with the divine, leads her to a new understanding of how sacred space might be conceived on earth.

Barbauld’s journey is structured into distinct physical movements: first she is located on earth, then she embarks on her journey through space and the outer limits of the universe, and then she returns to earth again at the conclusion of the poem. The three stages of her pilgrimage

correspond to Belden C. Lane's four axioms, or rules, of sacred space that he argues can help to explain "the way in which landscape is molded in the religious imagination" (19). The first axiom is that "sacred place ultimately is not chosen, it chooses" (20). In this sense, sacred space is not a matter of "individual or even communal recognition" (21), but rather a matter of mysterious discovery. The second axiom of sacred space is that it "is very often *ordinary* place, ritually set apart to become extraordinary. Its holiness resides not in certain inherent marks of external significance or obvious distinction. It is, instead, only *declared* to be different, heterogeneous, discontinuous from the commonness of the surrounding terrain" (25). These first two axioms go together in "A Summer Evening's Meditation;" the moment of hierophany comes unplanned, on an ordinary evening as Barbauld gazes at the stars. The moment cannot be anticipated or planned. Lane's third axiom establishes that sacred space "can be tread upon without being entered" (19). In other words, we can enter a sacred space and yet never experience the sacred while we bodily occupy that space: "It affirms that simply moving into an allegedly sacred place does not necessarily make one present to it. One can *be* there and yet *not* be there at the same time. Being bodily present is never identical with the fullness of being to which humans can be open in time and space" (Lane 29). Sacred spaces are encountered both materially *and* immaterially. So how does one actually enter the sacred space and fully recognize it as such? Lane considers whether an encounter with the sacred is "entirely a mystical-poetic insight" or if we can "find parallels in our common human experience of recognizing the enduring texture of the familiar—discerning there more than we had first expected to find" (30). The third stage of Barbauld's journey, when she returns to earth again, exemplifies this conception of sacred space. Finally, the fourth axiom of sacred space that Lane outlines is that it "always possesses a double impulse—a movement that is at once centripetal and centrifugal, a

pulling in and a pushing out from a center, a tendency alternately toward localization and universalization. The idea hinges on yet another essential paradox that human existence is an ever-renewed tension between exile and home” (32). “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” explores this tension between exile and home, the simultaneous desire for rootedness and movement.

The tension between exile and home also has significant implications for Barbauld’s ecology of place. Morton argues that the Western mind views “ecology as earthbound” (27), and he wonders if we could instead develop a mindset that is “global, not local (if not universal); not embodied but displaced, spaced, outer spaced?” (28). He uses Milton’s *Paradise Lost* as an example of this kind of thinking, citing the angel Raphael’s conversation with Adam about the possibility of other worlds. Morton argues that Raphael’s speech “offers a negative image of human location, suggesting that humans shouldn’t think that their planet is the only important one” (22). He points out that Raphael’s argument makes good ecological sense as well as “good theological sense” by restoring humility to human perception (22). The importance of outer space to an ecology of place is that “displaces our sense of centrality, making us see ourselves from the outside” (Morton 24). When Barbauld locates herself among the stars looking back at earth, she is able to view her home as a true outsider. Victor Turner charts the pilgrimage process as “beginning in a Familiar Place, going to a Far Place, and returning, ideally, ‘changed,’ to a Familiar Place” (213). Barbauld’s act of pilgrimage is just such a process of destabilization and dislocation that allows her to return to her Familiar Place with a new perspective on her earthly home and her relationship to it.

The poem begins with Barbauld locating herself firmly rooted on earth, specifically outside at night. McCarthy compares this poem to Anne Finch’s “A Nocturnal Reverie,” in

which the nighttime is claimed poetically as the province of women (“Woman” 130). Both Finch and Barbauld use the conventional gendering of the sun and day as masculine, and the moon and night as feminine to their advantage by associating the latter with poetic inspiration and contemplation. Significantly, though she portrays the night as gentle and mild in comparison to the “sultry tyrant” sun (1), its meekness is not without strength. She calls upon the figure of Diana, the Roman goddess of the moon and hunting, to represent a version of femininity that is also strong: She is “[i]mpatient for the night, and seems to push / Her brother down the sky” (9-10). Even “meekn’d Eve, / Her cheek yet warm with blushes” (14-15) is granted a firmness of character as she “shuts the gates of day” (17), officially closing the masculine day and inaugurating the feminine night’s reign.

McCarthy points out that Barbauld not only tends to use conventionally feminine personifications in her poetry, but also “unexpected nouns” most notably in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” where he notes “ten of the fourteen explicitly gendered nouns” are feminine, making the setting of the poem essentially a “gynetopia” (“Woman” 116). In this thoroughly feminized environment, Barbauld announces,

. . . ’Tis the hour
When Contemplation, from her sunless haunts,
The cool damp grotto, or the lonely depth
Of unpierc’d woods, where wrapt in solid shade
She mused away the gaudy hours of noon,
And fed on thoughts unripen’d by the sun,
Moves forward. (18-23)

The feminine personification of Contemplation is located within the enclosed spaces of the grotto and the woods, but the circumscribed boundaries of these small spaces are not necessarily constricting; rather, they are seen as conducive to, even protective of, Contemplation's ability to think. It is after she emerges from these enclosed spaces that she directs Barbauld's attention to the stars emerging in the night sky, which will later prompt her sublime journey through space. Thus, contemplation precedes sublime transcendence, and enclosure within earth's boundaries precedes the intergalactic journey through space. Lane points out that in "Jewish and Christian theology the freedom of a transcendent God of history" has led to "the tendency in western civilization . . . toward the triumph of history over nature, time over space, male dominance over female dependence, and technical mastery of the land over a gentle reverence for life" (23). However, Barbauld interrupts such a tendency toward domination, offering a version of religious devotion that finds compatibility between a transcendent God and nature, space, female dependence, and reverence for life.

Indeed, the feminine and nonhuman are what lead Barbauld to discover sacred space through the moment of hierophany, the divine encounter. It is the personified figure of Contemplation who directs her attention to the night sky:

Where, one by one, the living eyes of heaven
Awake, quick kindling o'er the face of ether
One boundless blaze; ten thousand trembling fires,
And dancing lustres, where th' unsteady eye
Restless and dazzled, wanders unconfined
O'er all this field of glories: spacious field! (25-30)

The stars emerge individually and interdependently, both “one by one” and as “one boundless blaze.” Barbauld will echo her own language here later in “Remarks on Public Worship,” when she claims, “If devotion really exists in the heart of each individual, it is morally impossible it should exist there apart and single. So many separate tapers, burning so near each other, in the very nature of things must catch, and spread into one common flame” (*Works* 420). Religious devotion cannot remain an individual act—it is an example of interdependence, the human reliance on a community. The imagery of individual flames coming alight and then catching their neighbors on fire becomes a powerful metaphor for this interdependence. Laura Mandell points out that “flame imagery is employed systematically across her [Barbauld’s] works” (122), including “Hymn 1” where God is portrayed as the source of this light and energy: “Th’ eternal fire that feeds each vital flame / Collected, or diffus’d is still the same” (51-52). Thus, God is the unifying figure bringing together the individual souls who have come together for public worship, or the individual stars in the night sky that also collectively proclaim his glory: “[H]e, whose hand / With hieroglyphics elder than the Nile, / Inscib’d the mystic tablet; hung on high / To public gaze, and said, adore O man! / The finger of thy God” (31-35). Sacred space is fundamentally communal as the image of the stars is meant to reinforce—together they are “one boundless blaze.” At this moment, as Lane argues, the sacred chooses the space—it is a mysterious discovery that takes her by surprise. Contemplation draws attention to the beauty of the night sky, which prompts Barbauld’s moment of spiritual epiphany, marking the spot as a sacred space.

There is nothing extraordinary about this moment, and yet it becomes exactly that; thus, as Lane argues, a known and familiar place becomes sacred ground. There is a correlation between expansive physical sight and imaginative sight, as the stars become not just inanimate

objects in the sky, but speaking subjects, pointing her to God and inspiring her spiritual journey through space to locate him. She describes her sight as “unconfin’d” and the sky as a “spacious field;” both the physical world and her perspective are described as expansive, apparently free of all limits and boundaries. This expanded physical perspective translates into an expansive spiritual perspective as Barbauld wonders about the origins of the stars, seeing them both as the creation of God and as independent agents. They are at once “worthy of the master” (31), awe-inspiring evidence of a creator God, and “friendly lamps” that “point our path, and light us to our homes” (37, 39). Barbauld emphasizes this dual quality when she imagines the stars as capable of speech, exclaiming, “How deep the silence, yet how loud the praise! / But are they silent all? or is there not / A tongue in every star that talks with man, / And woos him to be wise; nor woos in vain” (47-50). Barbauld portrays the stars as in communication with humanity, guiding not only their nightly walks, but even leading them to wisdom.

It is at precisely this moment that Barbauld experiences a moment of epiphany, as she, “[t]urns inward, and beholds a stranger there / Of high descent, and more than mortal rank; / An embryo God; a spark of fire divine” (54-56). Barbauld’s physical space becomes sacred the moment she encounters the divine in the poem. It is at this moment that the sacred chooses to reveal itself to the speaker, or as Lane says, “The sacred place becomes the point at which the wondrous power of the divine could be seen breaking into the world’s alleged ordinariness. As a result, that fixed point becomes the center of the world, the navel of the earth or *axis mundi* by which passage can be obtained to the cosmic region beyond, from where all meaning derives” (20). Barbauld embodies this in a literal way in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation,” as she launches her soul into the cosmos, where she searches out God himself.

Lane's fourth axiom, the "double impulse" for "exile and home," can be seen in Barbauld's imaginative relocation in the stars. Though she begins the poem rooted on the earth, at home, her gaze outward toward the stars works like a centrifugal force pulling her away from this center. She suggests that she would be at home living among the stars, musing,

Perhaps my future home, from whence the soul
Revolving periods past, may oft look back
With recollected tenderness, on all
The various busy scenes she left below,
Its deep laid projects and its strange events,
As on some fond and doating tale that sooth'd
Her infant hours. (62-68)

She imagines herself living in exile among the stars for so long that it becomes home, and her life on earth becomes a distant memory. From this vantage point, all of earth's human activity takes on a quality of smallness—its "deep laid projects" and "strange events" no longer have the same urgency, putting herself and her desires into perspective, and freeing her imagination to think far bigger than it has before.

Once Barbauld imaginatively locates herself among the stars, pushing against the physical boundaries of her world, her imagination expands even further: "Seiz'd in thought, / On fancy's wild and roving wing I sail, / From the green borders of the peopled earth" (71-73). She travels first through the earth's solar system, revealing her knowledge of astronomy as she describes sailing past the moon, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, all the way to the "suburbs of the system" (78). She has moved beyond the borders of the earth, and now she travels even further beyond the borders of its solar system, confidently announcing, "fearless thence / I launch into

the trackless deeps of space” (81-82). She has quickly moved from a world marked by the clear boundaries of physical borders to discovering that such markers are no longer in her view, finally locating herself among the oldest stars in the universe, “Sons of the morning, first-born of creation” (87).

It is here that Barbauld pauses, unsure whether she has reached both the final borders of the universe and of her own imagination:

. . . Here must I stop,
Or is there aught beyond? What hand unseen
Impels me onward thro’ the glowing orbs
Of habitable nature; far remote,
To the dread confines of eternal night,
To solitudes of vast unpeopled space,
The desarts of creation, wide and wild;
Where embryo systems and unkindled suns
Sleep in the womb of chaos; fancy droops,
And thought astonish’d stops her bold career. (89-98)

Both Hitt and McCarthy have compared Barbauld’s journey into chaos to Satan’s journey in *Paradise Lost*, and both acknowledge it is a position that she is ultimately uncomfortable with taking, though she has not ended her journey quite yet.²⁹ Once she finds herself at the very limits

²⁹ McCarthy claims Barbauld’s voyage is reminiscent of Satan’s journey from hell through Chaos to earth in Book 2 of *Paradise Lost* (*Anna* 95). Though he views her as “appropriating Miltonic sublimity for use in a female sally of the soul,” he also acknowledges this is a problematic position for Barbauld as “she seems to imitate the rebellion of Satan against the master of all patriarchs,” which is “not a stance to which she would have admitted” (*Anna* 95). Hitt, however, views Barbauld as more deliberately rejecting the model posed by Satan in

of the universe, Barbauld questions what might lie beyond this last boundary, and specifically, whether she might find the divine there: “Where shall I seek thy presence?” (101), she asks God. McCarthy observes that she interrogates God in the manner of Job, at once bold and humble (*Anna* 96), asking him to speak to her in his “gentler voice, / That whispers comfort to the dwelling heart, / Abash’d, yet longing to behold her Maker” (109-111). Just as she imagines the stars communicating with humankind, Barbauld also imagines God as speaking directly to them.

However, this attempt to make direct contact with God remains unfulfilled, and Barbauld concedes, “But now my soul unus’d to stretch her powers / In flight so daring, drops her wearing wing, / And seeks again the known accustom’d spot” (112-114). Hitt views this poem as an instance of what he elsewhere calls the ecological sublime, arguing that Barbauld is not just rejecting “the notion that nature offers a conduit to spiritual enlightenment” but also that it can lead to “self-apotheosis” (“Ecocriticism” 141). Though Barbauld uses the sublime in her poem, Hitt says that she also questions its ethics, and he ultimately sees her as suggesting, “that in order to be ethical our relationship to nature must be characterized by restraint and humility” (“Ecocriticism” 142). I would further suggest that this restraint and humility is discovered not just through the religious awe Barbauld feels for a God she views as the creator, but also through seeing human and non-human as interconnected and interdependent; to return to “An Address to the Deity,” “Worms, angels, men, in every different sphere / Are equal all, for all are nothing here.”

The poem concludes with a return to earth, to that “known accustom’d spot” where Barbauld first began her journey. It is a place she is intimately familiar with because it can fit within the limits of human knowledge and experience, unlike her intergalactic voyage to locate

Paradise Lost, arguing that she actively questions “the ethics of that desire,” i.e. the desire “to be Godlike” (“Ecocriticism” 141).

God. However, this place is also “Drest up with sun, and shade, and lawns, and streams, / A mansion fair and spacious for its guest: / And full replete with wonders” (115-117). In other words, this “spot” on earth is also marked by openness, expansiveness, and wonder. The speaker is ultimately able to revel in both the sublime wilderness of the cosmos and in the familiar places in her earthly home. Lane’s third axiom, in which “simply moving into an allegedly sacred place does not necessarily make one present to it. One can *be* there and yet *not* be there at the same time,” exemplifies Barbauld’s beginning and concluding positions in her pilgrimage. She returns home, but finds something there she did not discern before her pilgrimage. In a sense, she has a second spiritual epiphany in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation.” Barbauld’s pilgrimage takes her out of place, leading her to “recognizing the enduring texture of the familiar—discerning there more than [she] had first expected to find” (Lane 30)—and it is “full replete with wonders.”

Park explains that that “in pilgrimage it is the journey itself that really matters, perhaps just as much as arrival at the destination” (260). Barbauld actually interrupts her own pilgrimage, stopping short at arrival to her final destination. This foreshortened journey may be at least partly due to the fact that Barbauld is, as McCarthy and Hitt argue, morally uncomfortable with fully embracing the language of the sublime. Much like Finch, Barbauld frequently checks her impulse to soar imaginatively through the medium of poetry; however, it would be shortsighted to attribute this to female modesty or social strictures alone.³⁰ For Barbauld, this position of humility is a spiritual position, a way of reminding herself of her relationship to God, but also that her earthly home is not her final destination.

³⁰ See, for example, Finch’s “The Introduction” in *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century* (Ed. Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2009): “Be caution’d then my Muse, and still retir’d; / Nor be dispis’d, aiming to be admir’d; / Conscious of wants, still with contracted wing, / To some fe friends, and to thy sorrows sing; / For groves of Lawrell, thou wert never meant; / Be dark enough thy shades, and be thou content” (59-64).

Barbauld frequently refers to a “veil” between herself and complete knowledge; to be on earth is always to have incomplete knowledge. “A Summer Evening’s Meditation” concludes with Barbauld urging herself to find contentment in her earthly home, which she now sees as a “mansion fair and spacious for its guest.” That word “guest” is key—her home on earth is only temporary; she remains a pilgrim:

. . . Let me here
Content and grateful, wait th’ appointed time
And ripen for the skies: the hour will come
When all these splendours bursting on my sight
Shall stand unveil’d, and to my ravish’d sense
Unlock the glories of the world unknown. (117-122)

The words “unveil’d” and “unlock” suggest the opening of those final borders that she finds herself unable to move past during her intergalactic pilgrimage. Turner writes, “[W]hile the pilgrimage situation does not eliminate structural divisions, it attenuates them, removes their sting. Moreover, pilgrimage liberates the individual from the obligatory everyday constraints of status and role, defines him as an integral human being with a capacity for free choice, and within the limits of his religious orthodoxy presents for him a living model of human brotherhood and sisterhood” (221). The pilgrimage challenges boundaries, but it does not remove them altogether. In Barbauld’s Christian faith, death represents the final boundary of human life, separating life on earth from life in heaven. Park points out that the experience of displacement through pilgrimage can be “a means of release in preparation for the final release on death” (260-261). Likewise, Tuan points out, “Even in the best of times, in periods of peace and plenty, home is only a temporary abode, nurturing for a brief span, but powerless to keep us forever. Such is

the universal human condition; yet human beings rarely acknowledge it. The inevitability of death—that ultimate exile—is effectively suppressed” (7). For Barbauld, sacred space is a way of thinking about this detachment from place, a way to understand the “ultimate exile” as something else entirely—as a voyage to her true home. In her poem “Life,” which was published in 1825, Barbauld considers her own death, wondering what really does wait on the other side of the veil. She concludes this poem by admitting the difficulty of saying good-bye to dearly loved people and places, preferring that death “give little warning, / Choose thine own time; / Say not Good night, but in some brighter clime / Bid me Good morning” (27-29). She suggests that death may not be an end, but a beginning.

Conclusion: The Poetic Ecosystem and an Ecology of Place

Poems itself is structured like a journey; Barbauld begins the collection on earth with the rousing “Corsica,” a celebration of the Corsican fight for independence, and concludes in outer space in “A Summer Evening’s Meditation.” Along the way, she traverses a remarkable amount of poetic ground, her diversity of poetic form matched by a corresponding diversity of subject. The politically-charged “Corsica” is immediately followed by the verse epistle “The Invitation,” a poem that rejoices in female friendship as much as it praises Warrington Academy. Barbauld also includes verse epistles to Mary Priestley and Sarah Rigby, another Warrington friend. There is an elegy for her grandmother in addition to the one on Rowe, as well as several examples of the pastoral and a series of love songs. *Poems* as a collection reflects an ecological sense of place in its material form by offering a wide and diverse range of poetic modes and subjects, forming a kind of ecosystem of poetry, in which each poetic kind exists individually and interdependently.

The diversity of *Poems* is meant to be a testament to Barbauld's poetic skill, suggesting she is a serious poet and not just a provincial young woman dabbling in the fashionable forms of her day. But Barbauld is also modeling ecological thinking through the form of the book itself; its textual space contains multitudes. The form of the book models the same traits of ecological thinking that are apparent in her religious verses—an emphasis on diversity, interconnection, and openness. Barbauld's experience at Warrington gave her a sense of the permeability of spatial and phenomenological boundaries, and *Poems* reflects this way of thinking, offering a similar sense of openness and interconnection between its various modes and topics. Daniel Watkins points out that when Barbauld released a new edition of *Poems* in 1792, she added several new hymns and *Epistle to William Wilberforce* at the end of the collection (30). Her argues these additions suggest she did not see the collection as ever fully complete, but continued “reworking pieces of it, adding to it, rearranging some of its textual features” (30). *Poems*, like place itself, is a process. Barbauld's ecological thinking applies to the material book itself, making it also a physical representation of openness and change.

In one of her undated and unpublished discourses, or sermons, Barbauld muses on the kingdom of heaven, claiming, it is not

. . . separated from the kingdoms of this world, as they are from one another, by barriers of rock and wide-extended seas and jealous gates and fortresses, nor need we go out into the wilderness to find it. It is in the midst of us. It exists silently, to most invisibly, in the very heart and bustle of the world, a kingdom within a kingdom. Its boundaries have nothing in common with those of space or time. They relate to dispositions only. Where these are heavenly, there is the kingdom of heaven. (qtd. in McCarthy, *Anna* 523).

Whereas human-constructed places are always circumscribed by physical boundaries, and usually political, religious, and social restrictions as well, the kingdom of heaven is immaterial and therefore unbounded. There is a direct correlation between imagining sacred space as unbounded and challenging the unjust boundaries that human beings use to separate the insiders from the outsiders. The images of flight and liberty, captivity and restraint that appear in her early poems, and her religious verses in particular, are Barbauld's way of insisting that sacred space is without the boundaries we find in the "kingdoms of this world." She most fully realizes this idea after she allows her poetic imagination to take flight in "A Summer Evening's Meditation," to indulge in one of her "unguarded sallies of the soul." For Barbauld, the kinds of places we imagine in poetry can have a direct effect on the kinds of places we imagine for ourselves on earth. Barbauld's ecology of place encourages her readers also to view earth as a "mansion fair and spacious for its guest: / And full replete with wonders" (115-117).

CHAPTER FOUR: MARY ROBINSON AND THE POEM AS DAILY PRACTICE

After completing her manuscript for *Lyrical Tales* in July 1800, Mary Robinson retired for the summer to her daughter Maria Elizabeth's cottage in Englefield Green near Windsor, a fashionable suburb that offered both the countryside and quick access to London for its residents (Byrne 370). But Robinson was already in very poor health, and her stay with Maria Elizabeth extended from the summer into the fall; she did not regain the strength to return to London, and she died at Englefield Cottage on December 26, 1800. However, despite her weak state, Robinson's biographer Paula Byrne claims the last few months of her life were characterized by "continuing literary productivity and professionalism despite a constant struggle against ill health and discomfort in the exceptionally hot weather that lasted through the summer" (371). Indeed, Robinson's thoughts were often on London and her literary business. In addition to the recently completed *Lyrical Tales*, Robinson was serving as chief poetry contributor for the London periodical, the *Morning Post*. The job involved selecting poems for the newspaper's poetry column, which regularly included her own original poetry. In a letter addressed to Samuel Pratt on August 31, 1800, she writes, "I continue my daily labours in the Post. All the Oberons. Tabithas. MR's and indeed most of the Poetry, you see there is mine" (Cameron I: 232). Robinson refers to her multiple pseudonyms, indicating how prolific she is in writing for the paper "daily." In fact, she is proficient for exactly that reason—writing for the paper is a daily practice. She also characterizes writing as her work; she labors to provide the paper with poetry—with most of its poetry, according to her.

Robinson first began writing poetry for the *Morning Post* in 1795, and by 1797 she was a regular contributor to the newspaper, publishing one to three poems a week (Byrne 336). That same year, the paper's owner, Daniel Stuart, officially engaged both Robinson and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as "poetical correspondents;" they joined Robert Southey who was acting as chief poetry contributor at that time (Byrne 335).³¹ When Southey left his post in December 1799, Robinson was Stuart's choice to take over, a role she filled up until her death a year later (Byrne 336). Though Robinson would continue to publish both novels and poetry collections, including *Sappho and Phaon* (1796) and *Lyrical Tales* (1800), during these final five years of her life, her periodical publication is perhaps the most constant feature of her daily life as a writer and her most consistent (if not most ample) source of income. Under Stuart's direction, the *Morning Post* became one of the most widely read periodicals in London, rising in circulation from 350 when he first purchased the paper in 1795 to 2,000 in 1798 (Byrne 335). The newspaper's regular readership ensured that Robinson's poetry was read by a wide and diverse audience that otherwise might not encounter or purchase her poetry collections. Periodical publication also meant greater immediacy, distributing the poetic text much more quickly than the printed collection.

Many of Robinson's poems for the *Morning Post* are concerned with the same urban scene that the newspaper also captures. In her letter to Pratt, Robinson suggests her work for the *Morning Post* is ongoing, never finished, much like the city of London itself that she constructs

³¹ I follow Daniel Robinson's lead in using the term "chief poetry contributor" to describe Southey's and Robinson's roles at the *Morning Post*, as opposed to the more commonly used term "poetry editor" for Robinson. See Daniel Robinson, *The Poetry of Mary Robinson* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2011), for his argument for using the former term instead of latter (182-189). He points out that the term "poetry editor" has only ever been used in connection with scholarly work on Robinson, but not on Southey, even though they were performing the same job (184-185).

in her urban poetry for the paper. In this chapter, I argue that Robinson's urban poems published in the *Morning Post* from 1795-1800 portray place as an embodied practice by a diverse and active population. Robinson's London is busy, crowded, noisy, and chaotic. It is a site of ongoing social injustices, but also a place of connection and contact across social classes. This conception of urban space is shaped by her own experiences living in London and by the textual space of the print periodical itself. Robinson was intimately familiar with a wide cross-section of the city: as a space for commerce, politics, entertainment, and literature. In a similar manner, her urban poems are populated by the fashionable "ton," the city's middle and laboring classes, as well as the wretchedly poor. Writing is a reiterative, embodied practice in a particular type of textual space—the poetry column in the *Morning Post*—that reinforces the repetitive and constantly changing nature of place. Instead of Grub Street waste, the periodical plays a vital role in the daily construction of the city.

The Practice of Place in the Urban Periodical

Robinson first began writing poetry for the *Morning Post* in January 1795, when she contributed a series of four poems under the pseudonym of Portia: "To Liberty," "St. James's Street, on the Eighteenth of January, 1795," "To Philanthropy," and "January, 1795." Robinson had previously contributed poetry to the government-subsidized periodicals the *Oracle* and the *True Briton*, but this was the first time she had published in an Opposition paper.³² Though

³² The government subsidized periodicals that supported its actions by providing information, buying issues for free distribution, and rewarding staff with places and pensions (Werkmeister 21). Likewise, it could "punish a recalcitrant newspaper by forcing it or its editor into bankruptcy, by blocking its sources of information, by interfering with its distribution through the Post Office, by increasing taxes, or by harassing its printer and editor with prosecutions, heavy fines, and long prison sentences" (21). Lucyle Werkmeister admits it can seem a "marvel"

Robinson was still occasionally contributing poetry to the *True Briton* in early 1795, her growing contributions to the *Morning Post* illustrate a dramatic shift in both her political and professional allegiances (D. Robinson 154). While offices for both newspapers were located in Catherine Street in the Strand (Werkmeister 171; D. Robinson 189), they occupied opposite ends of the political spectrum and comprised entirely different professional networks. Robinson's *Morning Post* poems not only exhibit more radical political views, they also locate her in a new professional and social network that included the owner of the *Morning Post*, Daniel Stuart, and younger writers such as Southey and Coleridge (D. Robinson 155).

Stuart was cannily aware of the literary talent he had amassed, and began advertising the *Morning Post* as a place where "Poetical Readers" could expect the highest literary quality: "The POETRY of The Morning Post will in future be critically select. None but first-rate compositions will be admitted to our columns; and we are promised the aid of several of the most distinguished writers of the present day. Thus powerfully supported, we request the attention of the LITERATI to this department of our Paper; where the enlightened mind will not fail to receive ample gratification" (17 April 1798). The announcement invites the reader to imagine both the textual space of the newspaper and its poetry department as elite spaces for the literati—both the best writers *and* readers. The word "department" is especially suggestive, even for modern readers. Daniel Robinson observes the term has often been interpreted as if it "consisted of a physical space, with cubicles perhaps, in the *Morning Post* office in Catherine Street" (189). Indeed, the phrase makes it possible to imagine Southey, Robinson, and Coleridge at their desks, sharing copy with one another, though this is an entirely fanciful image. Daniel Robinson points out that both Southey and Robinson largely filled their posts as "correspondents

that the Opposition press even continued to exist under such circumstances, which can be read as a testament to the widespread unpopularity of the Prime Minister William Pitt (21).

in the literal sense” by sending their contributions to Stuart by post (188). However, he argues the image is still powerfully suggestive of another kind of space: “It is, rather, a textual space in the paper itself that is devoted to a particular genre of writing for a particular audience. To be hired to undertake it, then, means to take responsibility for filling that textual space” (189). The poetry correspondents fill that textual space in a literal sense by contributing their poetry, but Stuart’s announcement suggests they fill it in a metaphorical sense as well; they construct the poetry column as a “critically select” space.

Stuart’s announcement also draws attention to the timeliness of the periodical; it is a space for the best poetry “*of the present day*,” suggesting the immediacy of the daily paper is also essential to the construction of this literary space. It is a promise to keep the readers up-to-date and in the know—to present them with the best poets before the city’s booksellers can provide the latest poetry miscellany or single-author collection. We have come a long way from Mary Leapor’s uneasiness over the periodical as Grub Street ephemera, the sewage of the town; instead, the *Morning Post*’s announcement suggests the daily offerings of the print periodical make a valuable contribution to the literary public sphere. In fact, the periodical’s immediacy is an asset, not a disadvantage. The textual space of the periodical is ever shifting and changing, offering fresh news and even literature to the urban audience every day. It plays a major role in constructing London as a place in the public imagination on a daily basis, and specifically as a place that mirrors the textual space of the newspaper itself: it is a repetitive practice, written and rewritten each day.

Thus, the periodical draws attention to one of the key aspects of place that has been stressed throughout this study: it is “never completed, finished or bounded” but rather “always becoming—in process” (Cresswell 37). Just as the periodical changes daily, “place is made and

remade on a daily basis” (Cresswell 39). While the basic material features of the newspaper may remain relatively stable (size, typeface, column length, and so forth), its content changes every day. Similarly, while the physical features of a location may only change in slight or imperceptible ways, places are always in a state of constant (re)construction due to the daily practices of the people who inhabit them. Location provides the material structure or “template” for the everyday activities and behaviors that help shape the identity of a given place (Cresswell 39). According to Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, our “‘ways of operating’ or doing things” in daily life are what give locations their meaning, what turns space into place (xi).³³ The everyday practices that Certeau discusses are all embodied, physical activities: “reading, talking, walking, dwelling, cooking, etc.” (xvii). They are also reiterative activities that we perform in place on an ongoing, daily basis. Certeau insists these are not passive acts of consumption, but rather creative acts that construct place.

Cresswell also emphasizes place making as a creative act through his metaphor of the stage: “Place provides a template for practice—an unstable stage for performance” (39). He often uses the words “practice” and “performance” interchangeably, and indeed, they can mean the same thing: “to carry out” a particular task or activity (“Perform” def. 1; “Practice” def. 3b). However, for the purpose of my discussion of Robinson, it is important to distinguish between the two terms. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to perform can mean “to present on stage or to an audience” and “to act or play a part” (def. 4 b-c), implying a theatricality that practice does not. The definitions of “perform” also focus on the execution or completion of a task; as in, for instance, “to do, carry out, execute, or accomplish what one has to do” and “to

³³ Certeau uses the terms space and place in the opposite sense of human geographers; he uses the term place to mean “the empty grid over which practice occurs while space is what is created by practice” (Cresswell 38-39).

cause, bring about, bring to pass, effect, or produce (a result)” (def. 2-3). However, practice more often implies repetition, as multiple definitions suggest: “to pursue or be engaged in (such as an occupation, skill, profession, or art)” (def. 1), “to exercise oneself in a skill or art in order to acquire or maintain proficiency” (def. 2a), and “to carry out or perform (a particular activity, method, or custom) habitually or regularly” (3b). While a performance can occur at a single moment in time, practice is ongoing and implies a desired goal: proficiency in a particular skill, craft, or art. In that sense, practice is also a more fitting term for writing, and in particular, writing about place. The habitual and repetitive nature of writing as a practice reflects the notion of place as daily, lived experience.

This clarification between practice and performance also has significant implications for a discussion of Robinson’s poetry. Robinson was a famous actress before she turned to a literary career, and many scholars have explored the importance of her celebrity and “theatricality,” to borrow Judith Pascoe’s term, throughout her literary oeuvre.³⁴ Her celebrity extended into notoriety, as she was most famously known as the mistress to the Prince Regent, later King George IV, as well as other notable men, including the infamous British hero of the American Revolutionary War, Banastre Tarleton. She also was a fashionable fixture on the London social scene, on friendly terms with some of its most elite figures, including Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire. However, more recently, Daniel Robinson claims that Robinson’s later writing career shows her making “a distinction between her cultural celebrity and her quest for literary

³⁴ For notable examples, see Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997); Paula Byrne, *Perdita: The Literary, Theatrical, Scandalous Life of Mary Robinson* (New York: Random House, 2004); Claire Brock, *The Feminization of Fame, 1750-1830* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006); Michael Gamer and Terry F. Robinson, “Mary Robinson and the Dramatic Art of the Comeback” (*Studies in Romanticism* 48.2 [2009]: 219-256); and Tom Mole, “Mary Robinson’s Conflicted Celebrity” (*Romanticism and Celebrity Culture, 1750-1850*. Ed. Tom Mole. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009. 186-205).

fame . . . her desire for poetic fame was born out of her awareness of a fine line between her celebrity and ignominy” (5-6). In his discussion of her pseudonyms, Robinson argues that the poet’s prior career as an actress “need not overdetermine” the way we approach these poetic signatures as performed “selves” (19).³⁵ I would like to extend his argument more explicitly to her poetry in general, that the stage has become the ruling paradigm by which we approach Robinson’s entire literary oeuvre. This is not to say that Robinson does not exhibit such moments of theatricality or performativity in her poetic texts or elsewhere; Byrne, Pascoe, Michael Gamer and Terry F. Robinson, and Tom Mole, among others, have argued persuasively and compellingly on this subject. My aim in this chapter is to suggest that place and the periodical offer another way of thinking about her poetry, and one that acknowledges Robinson’s experiences beyond the stage, taking into account her life in London both prior to her celebrity and after its zenith in the 1780’s.

Any discussion of Robinson’s construction of London as a place must acknowledge her varied experience of the city itself, including her peripatetic movements prior to her debut at Drury Lane Theatre in December 1776. Byrne points out that Robinson “was to experience London in its entirety, from debtors’ prison to parties given in her honor as the Prince’s consort at St. James’s Palace” (18). While she would eventually become intimately familiar with the fashionable ton in the West End, Robinson was also well acquainted with the city’s middling and lower classes, its commercial sector, and its poverty. Her experience of London as a place, and her own place in it, was ever shifting. In 1768, her family moved from Bristol to London, residing in Spring Gardens near Vauxhall (Byrne 11). When her father largely abandoned the family for his overseas travels and his mistress, Robinson would spend much of her adolescence

³⁵ For an extensive discussion of Robinson’s pseudonyms as performances, see Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1997).

being shuttled to various lodgings across the city. Over the next two years, she moved from her boarding school in Battersea to live with her mother and brother in Little Chelsea, Marlyebone, and finally Chancery Lane (Byrne 14-16). She went from living in the suburbs on the periphery of London to living within the City itself; after her marriage to Thomas Robinson in 1773, she set up house in Hatton Gardens near Smithfield (Byrne 40). Upon Thomas's arrest for his debts in 1775, Robinson dutifully followed her husband to Fleet debtors' prison, where they lived with their young daughter for fifteen months (Byrne 56). After his release from prison, they moved to Southampton Street, near Drury Lane where Robinson would embark on her stage career (Byrne 74). By 1780, she was ensconced in the West End at Cork Street in a house paid for by the Prince Regent (Byrne 120). Robinson's constantly changing addresses in London reflect her fluctuating economic and social status. One's location is also symbolic of one's place in the urban social milieu, and Robinson's ever-shifting sense of place is indicative of a growing mobility both up and down the social ladder. It is also a place that is increasingly defined by one's profession, which for Robinson included wife, mother, actress, mistress, and author.

It is this final profession that is the subject of this chapter, and I use the term "professional" deliberately to characterize Robinson's career as an author. Betty Schellenberg identifies the hallmarks of professionalism as "a specialized set of skills" that "meet a defined need to society at large," and that are "deserving of certain status and economic rewards as a result" (13). In this sense, Robinson differs from the other poets featured in this study. Montagu's aristocratic status meant that any deliberate association with print publication was off limits; though she took her literary pursuits very seriously, she was a participant in coterie manuscript culture, and did not have a "career" in the professional meaning of the term. While Montagu would have seen any work as degrading to her position, Leapor's place in the laboring

class also made a literary career untenable, though for her it would have been an attempt to reach above her station in life. Leapor's own anxiety about her class often manifests itself in her wariness of periodical publication; while she aspired to a literary career, she also clearly models herself on the professionalism of Pope and not the Grub Street hack. Barbauld's own career represents a move toward professionalism, and she can be said to have a literary career in the sense that she was financially compensated for her work. However, Barbauld did not entirely rely upon her writing for a living, and she prioritized her roles as wife, mother, and teacher over that of author. Barbauld's respectability also garnered her a security in her public role that Robinson would never really have. Robinson's career is often tenuously held together, and as Byrne, Pascoe, and Daniel Robinson have all noted, she makes and remakes this career several times over according to the demands of the marketplace and the changing literary fashions of the time.³⁶ She experimented with different voices through her many pseudonyms, multiple poetic forms, and different genres, exhibiting a virtuosity that suggests both a desire for literary fame but also a real need to make ends meet. Robinson practices writing as a profession, and due to its immediacy and constancy in print culture, nothing makes this more visible than periodical publication.

Robinson effectively "begins and ends" her career as a professional author by writing for London newspapers (D. Robinson 18). Though her first literary work was a collection of poetry published in 1775 as a way to help pay off her husband's debts, her literary career did not begin in earnest until the mid-1780's after her celebrity had turned into notoriety. While scholars frequently acknowledge the importance of periodical publication to Robinson, it is most often

³⁶ The most famous example is Robinson's involvement with the Della Cruscan poetic movement in the London newspapers, the *Oracle* and the *World*, in the 1780's, a short-lived literary fad that nonetheless helped kick-start her career. See Byrne, Pascoe, and Daniel Robinson for discussions of Robinson's involvement in the Della Cruscan network of writers.

still under the rubric of performance—the newspaper offers yet another stage that is “particularly suited to performative modes of self-representation” (Pascoe 164). However, I am more interested in how the periodical as a textual space may influence the way Robinson approaches both place and writing as an embodied practice. Her literary career also becomes a way for her to negotiate yet another way of being in the city where she had already undergone so many changes personally, financially, socially, and professionally.

In writing the city, Robinson finds another way of participating in urban life. During the height of her fame, she was one of the celebrities, and hence one of the sights, of London; however, by 1795 when she first began writing for the *Morning Post*, Robinson was an invalid, and often in great physical pain.³⁷ Though she was frequently bed-ridden and unable to walk, she still managed to move about the city by riding around in expensive and elaborate carriages, becoming what Pascoe calls a “spectacular flâneuse,” both “spectacle and spectator, lacking the anonymity of the flâneur, but possessed of that figure’s moving perspective on the city” (132). In a similar manner, Martha Jane Musgrove calls Robinson a “semi-detached flâneuse,” who “takes pleasure in being part of the urban scene” but resists the male gaze in favor of an “engaged and sympathetic” way of looking at the city and its residents (160). No longer one of the sights of the city, Musgrove sees Robinson as exchanging the role of “observed” for “observer” (162). These perspectives view Robinson as an all-seeing eye, gazing on the city in the manner of the flâneur, the urban walker. However, I would suggest that Robinson’s urban poems in the *Morning Post* find the poet replacing one kind of embodied practice—walking—for another: writing. For Robinson, writing about the city becomes a figurative way to walk the city.

³⁷ In July 1783, Robinson pursued her lover Banastre Tarleton, who had left England and his debts for the Continent (Byrne 212-213). Her impetuous overnight journey to Dover resulted in what appears to have been an acute rheumatic fever, which left her with lingering bad health and largely without use of her legs for the rest of her life (Byrne 213).

Certeau makes this connection between writing and walking in his analogy of the pedestrian. When pedestrians create their own paths instead of following the constructed roads and walkways of the city, they effectively write a new “urban ‘text’” over top of these established routes, and a “*migrational*, or metaphorical, city thus slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city” (93). The process of walking is an “*appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian” that is similar to the way the speech act appropriates a system of language (97). Walking “is a spatial acting-out of the place” just as the speech act is also an “acting-out of language” (98). In a similar manner, writing is a “concrete activity” that takes a textual space and constructs a text “in this place” (Certeau 134). Writing is a material practice that occurs within a material space—the blank page—and constructs a system or world within that space: “In other terms, on the blank page, an itinerant, progressive, and regulated practice—a ‘walk’—composes the artifact of another ‘world’ that is not received but rather made” (Certeau 135). Writing is a figurative walking, which constructs a world in the same manner that the pedestrian “writes” a new city in the way he or she ventures off the constructed path and creates a new one. Writers and walkers are both engaged in creative acts that construct place.

In Robinson’s urban poems, she replaces walking the city with writing the city, and the daily periodical is the medium; in turn, the periodical shapes her construction of the city as a place that is constantly in flux, host to a diverse population and numerous injustices. However, by writing the city, Robinson challenges the institutional structures that make social injustice a part of the urban landscape. Certeau uses the image of pedestrians walking the city in order to argue that places may have a constructed order or “rules” we are expected to follow, but we often circumvent these rules through our “everyday practices” by using space in unexpected ways outside their prescribed rules. The way people actually use space can challenge its dominant

political and social structures. In this sense, everyday practices, such as walking and writing, can be subversive, even radical, acts.

Walking/Writing the City

On January 10, 1795, the *Morning Post* published its first poem by Robinson, writing as Portia: “To Liberty,” a sonnet that hails the personified figure of Liberty as able “[t]o quell the minions of oppressive pow’r” (11). Though nothing in the sonnet locates it in a particular time or space, its publication in an Opposition newspaper at the beginning of the new year acts as an implicit reference to the government’s suspension of habeas corpus and the treason trials that concluded with the acquittal of key British radicals at the end of 1794.³⁸ Robinson’s initial contributions for the *Morning Post* show her aligning herself with the political aims of the paper. On January 21, she contributed her second poem on the birthday celebration of Queen Charlotte. Now known as “The Birth-Day,” the poem’s original title, “St. James’s Street, on the Eighteenth of January, 1795,” is a precise location in both time and space.³⁹ The poem describes the callow self-absorption of the aristocracy processing down St. James’s Street toward the palace for the Queen’s birthday celebration as they willfully ignore the poor around them. When the poem was published, England had been at war with France for two years and the country was in the midst of a subsistence crisis (O’Gorman 267). The context of the royal birthday adds a political

³⁸ The government suspended habeas corpus in May 1794 in an attempt to squash the reform movement (O’Gorman 246). The State Trials of 1794 tried members of the London Corresponding Society and other leading reformers for treason, and their acquittal later in the year was received with exultation by many of the city’s residents (246).

³⁹ The *Morning Post* republished “St. James’s Street, on the Eighteenth of January, 1795” as the work of T.B., another of Robinson’s pseudonyms, with the title “St. James Street. The Birth-day” on 19 Jan. 1798. It was retitled as “The Birth-Day” in her *Poetical Works* (1806).

dimension to Robinson's depiction of the disparity between rich and poor by drawing attention to England's institutionalized social hierarchy.

Robinson highlights this disparity by pairing images that contrast the aristocracy with the neglected poor: "Here, guarded by a motley train, / The pamper'd Countess glares along; / There, wrung by poverty and pain, / Pale Mis'ry mingles with the throng" (5-8). The nobles are described in terms that point to both their practices of consumption and their obsession with surfaces, which Robinson then holds in relief against the physical conditions of the poor: a "painted dame, in rich array" (14) and a "senseless Duchess" surrounded by "jewels, feathers, flow'rs" (21-22) are set beside a "sad, shiv'ring child of need" (15) and a "Beggar freezing" (27). In his perceptive reading of the poem, Stuart Curran points out its "radical metonymic construction" in these atomizing images that reduce each figure to their outward appearance (12). All they see of each other are the surface, whether this is the "silver'd, and embroider'd" Duchess or the "poor wan mother" clothed only in a "thin tatter'd garment (25, 34-35). One of the ways the aristocracy reinforced the ascendancy of their power and prestige was through "fashion, consumption, and public display" (Greig 4), all of which are seen in full force in the poem. Robinson herself was well aware of the power of fashion to construct one's image, and her knowledge on the significance of clothing to shape public perception is apparent in her description of the aristocratic women in her poem.⁴⁰

This attention to surface appearances also highlights a similar superficiality of character, as Curran further points out: "It is not that the part simply stands for the whole: it is that there is no whole, only parts; no essence, only representation; no humanity, only its attributes" (12). The

⁴⁰ According to Byrne, Robinson "was very attuned to the ways in which clothing could transform her image" (21), and she "loved to remember the tiniest details of the clothes she was wearing on a particular occasion" (22). Byrne discusses how Robinson used fashion to shape her public image and celebrity throughout *Perdita*.

Queen's birthday brings a wide range of the city's residents to view the day's spectacle, but they remain fundamentally detached from one another; they appear as "only parts" without recourse to assembling as a "whole." Robinson's descriptions enact this physical separation that prevents these disparate classes from actually connecting with one another: the Countess is "guarded by a motley train" (5) and "four tall laquies" walk before the painted dame (13). Meanwhile, the "wretched poor are driv'n around" like cattle by the lackeys who yell, "'Room, room! stand back!'" (17-18). Robinson reinforces the nobility's emotional removal from the plight of the poor around them through the way they physically guard themselves against any potential contact. This physical separation is also implied by their manner of arrival, in vehicles such as "the gaudy gilded chair, / Bedeck'd with fringe, and tassels gay" and "blazon'd" chariots (1-2, 9). The aristocracy is quite literally "above" the crowd, reinforcing the social hierarchy. Curran astutely points out that the chair "bounds" through the street "without apparent support, since, implicitly, the actual bearers are erased from the consciousness of the chair's inhabitant or the throngs gathered to gawk at their betters" (12). The self-absorbed nobility refuse to acknowledge the suffering of people whose lives they view as not touching their own.

Robinson's condemnation of the aristocracy in "The Birth-Day" implicitly draws attention to its context in a time of war and an especially difficult winter, as do the news items that appear alongside the poem. The column to the right of the poem lists the ships that have recently sailed from Portsmouth, including the number of guns on board and the names of their commanders. Immediately below this information is a list of commanding officers "[w]ho have lost their Lives in the service of Great Britain, since the commencement of the War." These sober reminders of the war's ongoing toll are followed by reports on the British government's assistance of refugees from Holland and predictions of the imminent surrender of the Dutch Fleet

to the French. Placing the poem within its original textual space is a reminder that the poetry column was not read in a vacuum; instead, it was encountered alongside these other news items, shaping the reader's perception of the poem itself and the place it represents—St. James's Street, the recent site of the public pageantry associated with a royal birthday.

The same issue also reports on the celebration of Queen Charlotte's birthday on January 19, describing the "very numerous and splendid appearance of the Nobility, Foreign Ministers, and other persons of distinction, to compliment Their Majesties on the occasion." Pascoe points out that Robinson's poem "is careful in its critique; there is no direct reference to the royal family per se," only their aristocratic entourage (179). The *Morning Post* is likewise circumspect in its announcement of the birthday celebrations here, but the same issue also takes a harsher stance in a report titled "Aristocratical Anecdote" about an English family that had escaped from Rotterdam and sought asylum on a ship headed to England. They were "half perished with cold, fatigue, and the other horrors attendant on a sudden Invasion—they desired! they implored! to be taken on board." The family was allowed on board the ship under the condition they did not disturb Prince William of Gloucester; however, they were then unceremoniously "crammed into the hold with the common sailors, the whole of the passage, men, women, and children, there to ruminate on the blessings of Aristocracy, and the unfeelingness of those, who were not worthy the name of Englishmen!!" In a time of war and suffering, this lack of sympathy and compassion is portrayed as an affront to the national character. After the recent trials of British radicals for treason in 1794, the article subtly hints that there are other ways of being treasonous towards one's country. The article also reinforces the self-absorption of the aristocracy in the "The Birthday" who ignore the poor around them; likewise, the English refugees from the "Aristocratical

Anecdote” are allowed on board the ship as long they remain out of sight, their suffering left unseen.

Robinson’s criticism of the nobility is not just about their excessive displays of wealth and luxury during an especially difficult winter; it is perhaps most concerned with this refusal to acknowledge the suffering around them. The Duchess is portrayed as living in a state of willful blindness as she “overlooks with nice disdain” the beggar freezing on her own doorstep (28). Robinsons’ phrase, “She neither knows nor pities pain” (26), suggests that knowledge and recognition must first occur before pity or compassion can be felt. Without either, any action is impossible among these “high-born fools” who “[c]ontemn the pangs they never know” (39-40). Adriana Craciun argues that the change in title from “St. James’s Street” to “The Birth-Day” in 1806 ultimately “distanced the poem from the specific circumstances of its composition” (67). While the re-naming of the poem does dislocate it and potentially disrupt its more radical qualities, the new title also suggests that the suffering it presents does not belong to any one place or time but rather is an ongoing societal problem. The *Morning Post*’s republication of the poem on January 19, 1798 as “St. James Street. The Birth-day” similarly denotes the poem’s continued relevance. Though three years have passed, the newspaper again uses the occasion of the royal birthday to suggest the aristocracy persists in their thoughtless luxury just as the city’s poor continue to suffer. The problem Robinson isolates in “The Birth-Day” is a constant feature of urban life, and it requires a continual practice to remedy it. The next poem she published in the *Morning Post* two days later in 1795, the sonnet “To Philanthropy,” proposes one way to respond to the injustice of the previous poem.

In the sonnet, Robinson features the personification of Philanthropy as “[w]and’ring untired, to seek the haunts of Woe, / Where ruthless Sorrow lingers to devour!” (3-4). Though

Robinson is typically classified as a Romantic writer, scholars often recognize the influence of eighteenth-century poetics on poems such as “January, 1795” and “London Summer’s Morning,” and her use of personifications in “To Liberty” and “To Philanthropy” are no exception.⁴¹

Though William Wordsworth would dismiss “personifications of abstract ideas” in his Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802) as not part of “the company of flesh and blood” (600), John Sitter explains that personifications “do not lie outside the ‘company of flesh and blood’ but within it, within us. No mere ghostly decorations, personifications express ways of thinking about the world” (158). Robinson uses the personification of Philanthropy in exactly this kind of material sense, where the figure walks without weariness “from Pole to Pole” (6), seeking to find other members of “the company of flesh and blood” whose suffering she can alleviate.

Sitter further explains that personifications can be read as “causal explanations, figurative attempts to make events legible by turning them into actions” (173). In this sense, Robinson takes the need for charity in the midst of a food shortage and creates the figurative form of Philanthropy who meets the needs of individuals across the globe. She effectively creates a universal principle that she would like to see become an enacted particular in England itself; in a disconnected society, where the parts are not relating to each other in order to create a whole, Robinson suggests an action that might offer the chance of connection. The action of philanthropy is also an ongoing practice, a constant seeking of people plagued by sorrow and woe. It is not the kind of action that can be performed or executed once; its virtue is in its constant practice, its ceaseless wanderings.

⁴¹ For instance, Anne Janowitz points out the formal similarities of Robinson’s “January, 1795” and John Bancks’s “A Description of London” (1738) (*Women* 87-88). Both Curran and Pascoe note the influence of Swift’s city eclogues, such as “A Description of the Morning” (1709) and “Description of a City Shower” (1710), on her “London Summer’s Morning” (Curran 15; Pascoe 145). In fact, Pascoe admits that many of Robinson’s late *Morning Post* urban poems seem “antiromantic in both form and subject matter” (145).

In fact, Philanthropy “scorn’st the mummery of empty show” (5), an implicit reference back to the pomp and circumstance of the arrivals of the aristocracy at St. James’s Palace in “The Birth-Day.” Robinson suggests the pageantry is a performance—an “empty show”—whereas philanthropy or charity is habitual and humble. Philanthropy understands, “Life’s gilded pageant, dazzling as it goes, / Stops at the *sepulcher*, and fades away, / To let the Beggar and the Prince repose!” (12-14). Robinson’s conclusion of the sonnet echoes the conclusion of “The Birth-Day,” which also refers to death as the universal leveler: “The tomb shall close thy glitt’ring day, / The BEGGAR provide thy equal there!” (43-44). The poem itself enacts another kind of leveling by bringing the rich and the poor, the great and the small, into the same space as each other in the streets of London. Though the aristocracy would prefer to ignore them, Robinson dramatically reinserts the city’s poorest citizens on the urban scene, making them not just spectators but a dynamic part of the birthday parade alongside the nobility. The wretchedness of their poverty becomes its own kind of grotesque spectacle, forcing her readers to acknowledge the poor in the city even if the nobility refuse to see them.

In a sense, “The Birth-Day” reflects the aim the periodical itself: to present a cross-section of London life to the reader—everything from news of its political concerns and commercial dealings to births, deaths, and reports on the weather. The mundane and the trivial often occupy the same space as news of national importance, perhaps best represented in the *Morning Post*’s regular society column, “The Fashionable World,” a call back to its founding in 1772 as *The Morning Post and Fashionable World*. In his history of the *Morning Post*, Wilfrid Hindle points out that the newspaper had to live down its early reputation as a scandalous “West End Sheet,” breathlessly reporting on the social activities of the world of fashion (22). Despite its Opposition politics, the *Morning Post* was certainly never unfriendly toward the beau monde,

and continued to report on its masquerades, balls, dinners, and movements about town.

Robinson's fourth poem for the *Morning Post*, "January, 1795," appeared on January 29 next to "The Fashionable World" column. The poem similarly juxtaposes the serious and the trivial in London daily life, and like "The Birth-Day," sets up contrasting images of how the rich and poor fare differently during this harsh winter: "Pavement slip'ry; People sneezing; / Lords in ermine, beggars freezing; / Nobles, scarce the Wretched heeding; / Gallant Soldiers—fighting!—bleeding!" (1-4). The fur-clad nobles continue to ignore the sufferings of the poor, but Robinson also references the soldiers fighting and dying in the ongoing war, highlighting the callousness of the nobles even further. The poem's placement next to "The Fashionable World" indirectly offers judgment on the same society scene the paper is celebrating.

Each stanza of the poem abruptly changes settings as Robinson presents a wider swath of London society than just the "fashionable world." The second stanza features a new topic with each line: "Lofty Mansions, warm and spacious; / Courtiers, cringing and voracious: / Titled Gluttons, dainties carving; / Genius, in a garret, starving!" (5-8). Each line is end-stopped, emphasizing the shift in topic to occur in the following line, as Curran observes: "Nothing connects, as the complete avoidance of any enjambment among the lines implicitly testifies" (13). He astutely compares the lines to "newspaper headlines superimposed one upon the other" (13). Indeed, the poem's singsong rhythm of trochaic tetrameter couplets reinforces this idea of pithy newspaper headlines that can grab the reader's attention.

The rapid changes in each line also reflect the eighteenth-century periodical's typical structure. Lucyle Werkmeister points out that the era's newspaper "coverage was broader than it is in the newspaper of today," but that it was also presented in a way that the modern reader can find jumbled and confusing: "The leading article tended to be a series of disjointed items, in

which reports were intermixed with editorial comment, the comment itself being backed by letters from supposed readers” (19). Likewise, Hindle points out that the newspapers “made little typographical distinction between different kinds of news. It assumed not only that its readers read everything it offered, but also that they were competent to judge for themselves as to the relative importance of the items jumbled together” (22). “January, 1795” thus enacts a similar reporting of news items as the paper it is published in. Robinson moves from reporting on trivial news of the fashionable world—those lords in ermine and gluttons stuffing themselves with dainties—to news of dying soldiers and the flailing economy.

Though Robinson obliquely offers judgment through her deliberate contrast of images such as, “Balls, where simpering Misses languish; / Hospitals, and groans of anguish” (11-12), her terse language also prevents her from offering any overt commentary—the images are allowed to stand for themselves. Curran argues the result is that “[t]his is a lyric of pure surface: whatever depth it possesses is provided by its readers’ individual reactions to the jumble of its disassembled signifiers” (13). But this is also a quality of the periodical itself that presents news, opinion, puff pieces, and advertisements with little typographical or spatial distinction between items, relying upon its readers to make out the difference. Whereas many texts invite or even require us to start at the beginning and move through them in a specific order (the paragraphs of prose, the lines of verse), the periodical requires no such orderly movements. In fact, it is an especially fitting example of Certeau’s pedestrian creating his or her own path through the city. Certeau argues that reading is not a passive activity: “In fact, to read is to wander through an imposed system (that of the text, analogous to the constructed order of a city or of a supermarket)” (169). However, the eighteenth-century newspaper and Robinson’s poem

construct a place whose order is already suspect and that fully expect their readers to make sense out of their “disassembled signifiers.”

The version of London that Robinson presents to the reader in “January, 1795” is one that is similar to the textual space of the newspaper: it is chaotic and features vastly different people from different social stations; the rapid transition between topics suggest their connection even as the heavily end-stopped lines enforce a simultaneous separation. If these are contradictions, then that is London too. The sound of the wives “who laugh at passive Spouses” may seem discordant, even grotesque, when followed by the “groans of anguish” from the hospitals in the same stanza, but they are also an accurate representation of the activity that one can find occurring in the city at any given moment on any given day. These contrasting images occur simultaneously, just as the newspaper can report on which peer is hosting a dinner this week at the same time they report on the shortage of soldiers for the military.

Robinson’s first poems for the *Morning Post* in January 1795 find her reassessing the role of the poet in the world she depicts in her urban poetry. In the chaos and jumble of city life, with all of its entertainments and political debates, its luxury and its wretched poverty, the poet is there to record it all. While none of the January 1795 poems from the *Morning Post* feature explicit references to the role of the poet, “January, 1795” suggests that Robinson is thinking of herself in this role, and specifically of herself as a laboring poet—one who must work and who perhaps identifies more with the city’s residents who struggle to get by than the nobility she often lived near in her series of West End lodgings. Robinson considers the various ways that people attempt to make a name (and money) for themselves in the metropolis: “Poets, Painters, and Musicians; / Lawyers, Doctors, Politicians; / Pamphlets, Newspapers, and Odes, / Seeking Fame, by diff’rent roads” (29-32). She sets up a comparison between artists and those in the

professions, all of whom practice their work in the city. She suggests that the medium for this practice is what differentiates them, but all labor for a similar end: fame. The difficulty of achieving this fame while also managing to eke out a living is not lost on Robinson: “Authors, who can’t earn a dinner; / Many a subtle rogue, a winner!” (17-18). The line is a similar iteration to the earlier “Genius, in a garret, starving!” suggesting that Robinson is thinking of the writer for hire, whose genius goes unrecognized in the same way the poor are unacknowledged by the wealthy aristocrats in “The Birth-Day.”

As Robinson walks/writes the city in her urban poems, she uses the textual space of the periodical to consider the possibility of challenging the political and social structures that allow for the injustice she encounters. Her sonnets on liberty and philanthropy suggest a “metaphorical” city might be written that can challenge “the clear text of the planned and readable city” (Certeau 93). What is needed is a new way of walking and writing the city, an urban text that allows for the kind of connection that Robinson finds missing in her January 1795 poems. It is the work of the poet to discover whether this metaphorical city might be written. The newspaper poet in particular seems poised to take on this task because she plays a vital role in the daily practice of the city. In her urban poems, Robinson argues for the value of the hack writer, whose constant writing is a reiterative practice, and whose prolific contributions to the literary life of the city play a significant role in constructing its meaning.

The Daily Work of the Poet in Place

Robinson provides a snapshot of the life of the hack writer in “The Poet’s Garret,” which appeared in the *Morning Post* on September 6, 1800. This poem provides a tour of the cash-strapped poet’s modest attic home that is nonetheless also “the lofty seat / Of the heav’n-tutor’d

nine! the airy throne / Of bold imagination” (2-4). In this poem, Robinson portrays the poet at his daily work, churning out a variety of texts: “Sonnet, song, and ode, / Satire, and epigram, and smart charade; / Neat paragraph, or legendary tale, / Of short and simple metre, each by turns / Will there delight the reader” (16-20). The urban poet labors daily, becoming ever more proficient in his chosen profession. However, his proficiency does not quite match up with his material circumstances, and he seems barely able to eke out a living from his chosen profession. Robinson suggests this poet is barely staving off poverty as she catalogues his meager possessions, such as “an old rusty suit of ‘solemn black,’— / Brush’d thread-bare, and, with brown, unglyssy hue, / Grown somewhat ancient” and a “pair of silken hose, whose footing bad / Shews they are trav’lers, but who still bear / Marks somewhat *holy*” (22-27). His dinner appears to be in the same state of wear as his clothing: “At the scanty fire / A chop turns round, by packthread strongly held” (27-28). Everything in the poet’s garret is barely hanging on by a thread, in a very literal sense.

As with many of her urban poems, “The Poet’s Garret” seems to harken back to the early eighteenth century. Timothy Webb argues the poem is “probably indebted also to a well-established eighteenth-century tradition which features in Hogarth’s *The Distrest Poet* and in the desperate and unrecognized London bard in *The Dunciad*” (103). Robinson directly links this poet to Grub Street when she mentions his “well-known ballads” that are “of Grub-street fame!” (51). She describes the “quires of paper, white and beautiful” stacked around the poet’s home that eventually will be “[s]crawl’d o’er and blotted; dash’d, and scratch’d, and torn; / Or mark’d with lines severe, or scatter’d wide / In rage impetuous!” (12-16). This poet labors over the text in a physical, even violent sense, similar to the way Leapor portrays writing as labor. There is a sense that he is generating waste here, an idea that hinges upon earlier notions of Grub Street as

churning out the sewage of the town, and yet there is the same kind of celebratory quality that Sophie Gee finds in early eighteenth-century satirists' descriptions of waste and excrement. Gee explains further, "Remnants exert an allure that belies their status as unwanted objects. The allure is generated by the fact that waste is simultaneously a kind of surplus. Unexpectedly, there is similarity between abundance and decay—a proximity between descriptions of effluence and affluence" (103). Robinson's poet is surrounded by the litter of all kinds of literary debris:

. . . All around
Small scraps of paper lie, torn vestiges
Of an unquiet fancy. Here a page
Of flights poetic—there a dedication
A list of *dramatis personae*, bold,
Of heroes yet unborn, and lofty dames
Of perishable compound, light as fair,
But sentenc'd to oblivion! (54-61)

Many of these poems, as well as the heroes and heroines of an unfinished play, are destined never to become anything more than discarded scraps; and yet, they exert the allure Gee attributes to waste—there is an abundance that slips into affluence here, despite the fact this poet is also barely getting by.

Thus, Robinson suggests there is a richness to her hack poet's life in "The Poet's Garret." Though the poem's title seems like a deliberate reference back to "Genius, in a garret, starving" from her earlier "January, 1795," the poet here can find comfort in his lofty aspirations:

Poor poet! happy art thou, thus remov'd
From pride and folly! for in thy domain

Thou can'st command thy subjects; fill thy lines;
Wield th' all-conqu'ring weapon heav'n bestows
On the grey goose's wing!" (67-71)

In this instance, the poet's separation from the rich in their warm mansions is not used as a criticism of a society that leaves "Taste and Talents quite deserted" ("January, 1795" 33); instead, it proves the poet's greater worth that he chooses to seek literary greatness instead of seeking fame by a lesser or disingenuous route. His garret is his "domain" where he rules with the power of the pen; literary merit matters here and is a source of cultural authority, even if it is not recognized elsewhere. Pascoe observes that "The Poet's Garret" seems to sentimentalize the life of the starving writer (159), a marked contrast from the unappreciated genius in "January, 1795" or Robinson's depictions of the poor in "The Birth-Day." Instead, there is a strange coziness and charm to the scene, as the poet sits down to eat with his kitten that "[s]cratches his slipper for her fragment sweet" (47). Pascoe suggests that Robinson is deliberately eliding "the grittier realities of the city," a reaction to her own "precarious economic situation" (157). Robinson could well be displacing her own anxieties by comforting herself that this poet is happy despite his meager possessions and cold attic home in which "the wind / Whistles thro' broken panes" (32-33). However, she is also valorizing the life of the professional writer for whom lasting fame is not incompatible with his daily labor, which serves as a validation of her own career in the process.

Robinson is participating in a reconfiguration of the writer as a professional, indicative of a shift towards professionalism that occurs over the course of the eighteenth century. Linda Zionkowski explains a new model that "proposed the commercial market in texts as the arena where manhood and cultural authority are established" eventually displaced earlier thinking that

viewed commercial publication as a threat to the writer's masculinity and class status (10). However, Zionkowski also argues this is an exchange of one problematic system for another: "[W]hat begins as an attack by a professional writer upon a literary system that privileges rank and birth as determinants of merit ends in a set of prescriptions for poetic work that privileges new, different configurations of class and gender" (23). The new standards of professionalism did not include "writers whose rank or gender proscribed engagement in commercial literary culture" (23). It is not accidental that Robinson's poet is male. In fact, most of her urban poems either leave the gender of the poet unidentified—as in "January, 1795" and "London Summer's Morning"—or they identify him as male, as she does in "The Poet's Garret." Daniel Robinson argues that Robinson "sees poetry as a masculine genre and thus plays on (admittedly) essentialized notions of gender and form in order to transgress them" (12). He also points out that Robinson "consistently and purposively affiliated herself with powerful male figures" (12), whether these were politicians such as Charles James Fox and Richard Brinsley Sheridan, newspaper publishers like Stuart, or artistic figures such as Coleridge or Joshua Reynolds (6).

Robinson perhaps found it easier to identify with the male writer because he offers a version of professionalism that could appear incompatible with the figure of the modest female poet. In this sense, she resembles the novelist Frances Burney, who Schellenberg argues can also be seen "steering a course toward identification with authors successful in the marketplace, and thereby choosing to foreground male forbears in the profession" (21). Schellenberg claims that Burney used the "print-culture model of professionalism to establish an authorial identity that freed her, to a significant extent, from the limitations of an essentialized feminine identity while allowing her to adopt tenets of female propriety in her private life" (144). Robinson similarly

embraces the model of male professional authorship, though for far different reasons than Burney.

In the construction of her own literary career, Robinson had to contend with her past celebrity, which made her a recognizable name, but for reasons completely unrelated to her literary work. Tom Mole argues that Robinson “cultivated a strand of self-effacement which runs, sometimes awkwardly, alongside the strand of self-promotion in her work” (194). Both Mole and Sharon Setzer read this desire for self-effacement in Robinson’s series of essays on London for the *Morning Post* in 1799, written in the persona of a Sylphid, an invisible figure like one of Pope’s sylphs in *The Rape of the Lock*. Setzer argues that Robinson can be seen trying to “refine herself out of bodily existence” (503), an attempt to remove herself from “the physical body that had been stigmatized as a site of sexual promiscuity” ever since her notorious affair with the Prince Regent (506). Robinson’s former career as an actress and her scandalous reputation as a mistress lends a dubious element to her participation in the literary marketplace. Popular cartoons and caricatures of the period often expose her body in a lewd manner, suggesting she is little more than a prostitute.⁴² In this context, Robinson’s decision to embrace a model of professionalism that relies upon masculinity makes sense; it is an attempt to distance herself from those associations of her body in the marketplace for sale. By identifying with the professional male poet, Robinson attempts to draw attention away from the popular depictions of her overly sexualized body that intimate she is another kind of female “professional.”

⁴² A representative example is *Perdita upon Her Last Legs*, which depicts Robinson as a beggar pleading for money from the Prince Regent (Pascoe 157). Pascoe points out the cartoon is a pun on Robinson’s disability, and leaves her indistinguishable from other female walkers, namely streetwalkers (157). See Byrne’s *Perdita* for an extended discussion of Robinson’s varied portrayals in periodical cartoons of the period.

Robinson's bid for professional authorship is a way of remaking her own identity from scandalous paramour to esteemed author, and it is a strategy that relies upon a masculine model. If this is an "uncomfortable truth," as Daniel Robinson admits, it is "true nonetheless" (12). However, Robinson could also be fiercely defensive of women writers as a group, and often appears to be far more conscious of writing within a tradition of female writers than the other poets featured in this study. In her pamphlet *A Letter to the Women of England*, she rages that so many talented female writers are "living in obscurity; known only by their writings; neither at the tables of women of rank; nor in the studies of men of genius; we hear of no national honours, no public marks of popular applause, no rank, no title, no liberal and splendid recompense bestowed on British literary women!" (150). Robinson argues that women writers deserve social and intellectual approbation for their cultural contributions to their society, just as she argues that authors deserve adequate financial compensation in "January, 1795." Like Burney, Robinson finds the male professional model a useful way to navigate the literary marketplace, distancing herself from the amateur "poetess" and identifying instead with the daily labor of the Grub Street hack. For Robinson, this model is more in line with the notion of writing as embodied labor, the daily practice required for professionalization, and as she suggests in "The Poet's Garret," for "immortal fame" (72).

A month before the *Morning Post* printed "The Poet's Garret," the poetry column featured another poem that finds Robinson thinking about the daily practice of life in the city for a wide cross-section of its residents, including the urban poet. "London Summer's Morning," which portrays the city awaking to its commerce and physical labor, appeared in the *Morning Post* on August 23, 1800. Robinson includes a diverse selection of the city's workers: craftsmen, shop girls, vendors, and servants are all pictured at their daily work. She draws attention to the

way its laboring class is responsible for much of the daily activity that “makes” London in a very literal sense.

Robinson begins the poem with the question, “Who has not wak’d to list the busy sounds / Of summer’s morning, in the sultry smoke / Of noisy London?” (1-3). Robinson places the reader right in the midst of the chaos of urban life by drawing attention to one of its most distinctive features: its noise. Though the city’s sounds are loud and cacophonous, they are not necessarily unpleasant:

. . . . Now begins
The din of hackney-coaches, wagons, carts;
While tinmen’s shops, and noisy trunkmakers,
Knife-grinders, coopers, squeaking cork-cutters,
Fruit-barrows, and the hunger-giving cries
Of vegetable venders, fill the air. (9-14)

The poem is in blank verse without any end rhymes, but is dense with alliteration, such as the harsh “c” consonant in this particular passage. Robinson replicates the din of vehicles and craftsmen using their tools through the sounds of words themselves. People’s voices also supply this noise, such as the vegetable vendors calling out their wares and the “sooty chimney-boy” who “shrilly bawls his trade” (4-5). Webb observes, “the city expresses its character and existence through the very diversity of its sounds and their resistance to any controlling structure of harmony” (97). In this sense, the diversity of sound is also reflected in the diversity of people, the “plurality of city life” as Webb puts it (98).

Robinson portrays an active community, though it also resists any “controlling structure of harmony;” perhaps a better term than community would be Timothy Morton’s concept of the

“mesh,” which allows for distance and connection, for concord and disagreement. Most importantly, Morton explains, is that “each being in the mesh interacts with others. The mesh isn’t static” (30). Robinson’s poem is heavily populated with people from various social strata all coming into contact with another, even if this interaction is often fraught with irritation and annoyance. She sets up a pattern of cause-and-effect relationships among the people in her poem, who affect one another in clear physical ways, in what seems a direct contrast to the disconnection and fragmentation of “The Birth-Day” and “January, 1795.” For example, the chimney boy “bawls his trade, Rousing the sleepy housemaid” (5-6), and the “ruddy housemaid twirls the busy mop, / Annoying the smart ‘prentice, or neat girl” (18-19). In both of these pairs, the actions of one individual annoy another. The vendors and pretty shop girls are similarly aware of their ability to entice passersby to become customers: the vegetable vendors “fill the air” with descriptions meant to remind walkers of their hunger, and the “smart damsel” sitting near the shop window draws the attention of “the passenger” who “[p]eeps thro’ the window, watching ev’ry charm” (25-26). Each individual who comes into contact with another has the potential to affect that person in a dynamic way: their yells wake one another, they fling dirty water on one another, and they entice each other to buy their wares. In fact, the intense choreography of the scene Robinson depicts is suggestive of the place-ballet Leapor creates in the kitchen of “Crumble Hall,” where human interactions can include conflict as well as collaboration. Likewise, in “London Summer’s Morning,” the sounds of the city are a kind of cacophonous symphony, and its disharmony nonetheless suggests an interconnection and interdependence among the people who supply this noise.

Robinson takes a similar approach in describing the dirt and grime of urban life, which are presented as the natural features of this urban ecosystem. The majority of people in the poem

are all laborers who work for a living, though Robinson marks the gradations in social status among them by juxtaposing the appearance of the “smart ‘prentice, or neat girl” walking down the street with the chimney boy’s “dingy face” and “tatter’d covering” (19, 4-5). The city itself is also dirty as the traffic of vehicles stirs up “clouds impervious” (9), and the “sultry smoke” and “hot pavement” add to the general sense of filth (2, 3). Curran writes that this is a “deliberately rude poem, unconcerned with nicety, palliation, euphemism” (14). Robinson revels in the noise, chaos, and grime of city life. She also hints at the darker side of the city through seemingly minor details, such as the presence of child labor in the figure of the chimney boy covered in soot and wearing tattered clothing, the outward signs of his penury and possibly his lack of a parent or guardian to care for his basic needs. Likewise, the “old-clothes man” who “side-long views / the area for his traffic” in order to sell second-hand clothes gestures toward the city’s petty criminals; Robinson’s speaker admits, “the half-worn suit” the man sells is “[s]ometimes the pilfer’d treasure of the base / Domestic spoiler” (33-38). Robinson’s celebration of vibrant urban life does not erase the ugly aspects of the city—its unprotected children and poor, as well as its criminal activity. In fact, its very ugliness becomes part of its energy in a way that recalls Swift or Pope’s depictions of the city in poems such as “Description of a City Shower” or *The Dunciad*.

The poem’s context in the *Morning Post* features a similar acknowledgment of the coexistence of the mundane with the exciting, the liveliness of the city with its corresponding dark side. In the August 23, 1800 issue, “London Summer’s Morning” appears on the same page as an assortment of news items that vary drastically in both tone and topic. For instance, one paragraph offers the rather innocuous announcement that a “Mr. Alexander Charters in Drumlane, parish of Balmaghie [Scotland], has a field of excellent rice.—This is the first

instance, we believe, of that grain being cultivated in this country.” However, directly following are grislier news items of criminal activity, such as the conviction of one John Cook who was discovered to have “seventy carcasses of dead dogs in his apartment in Castle-street,” in the Borough of Southwark, and more disturbingly, “a group of poor emaciated children, one of whom, about five years of age, died at the time, supposed in the consequence of the inhuman treatment of this man.” The rest of the issue features the same juxtaposition of daily news, recording relief over a “very agreeable change in the weather, from a sultry heat to a refreshing coolness,” announcements about the available entertainments at the city’s theatres, the comings and goings of the royal family, and reports about more alarming events such as fires and burglaries.

The poem also imitates the periodical’s sense of immediacy. Robinson uses the word “Now” seven times in the poem, usually to begin a sentence or independent clause; for instance, “Now begins” (9), “Now ev’ry shop” (15), “Now the sun” (20), and so forth. Likewise, the verbs are all in the present tense, suggesting that the poet is giving us a moment-by-moment update. This is a city constantly in motion. The heavily enjambed lines add a quickness and urgency to the verse, imitating the bustling scene it depicts. There is constant movement throughout the poem: the housemaid “twirls the busy mop” (18), the “neat girl, / Tripping” down the street (19-20), the lamp-lighter “[m]ounts the tall ladder, nimbly vent’rous / To trim the half-fill’d lamp” (29-31). The fast pace of the poem likewise imitates the rapid movements of the people who populate it. There is a constant sense of the poem’s form imitating its content.

In many ways, the poem considers how individual activity comes together to create a group identity for the city—how each individual part relates to the whole. Unlike the “radical metonymic construction” that Curran observes in “The Birth-Day” or the disjointed quality of

“January, 1795,” “London Summer’s Morning” suggests that each individual’s daily practice, their embodied movements, actions, and behaviors, unfold alongside one another, even overlap, interrupt, and coincide with one another. Robinson begins with a general question—“Who has not wak’d to list the busy sounds”—but concludes with a specific listener: “And the poor poet wakes from busy dreams, / To paint the summer morning” (41-42). The opening question suggests a universality to being awoken by noisy city life in order “to list,” or listen, to the bustle of activity. Robinson then identifies these sounds one-by-one, indicating how they exist individually and interdependently. While the poet is singled out as the artist who can make poetry out of the city’s noise, Robinson also locates this poet within the same textual space as the other people who populate the poem. The activities she lists are all focused on trade, mechanical labor, domestic service—people who work with their bodies and their hands. The verb “to paint” suggests the poet is also an artisan who labors with his or her hands, and is suggestive of her similar portrait of the laboring poet in “The Poet’s Garret,” who violently scrawls on the paper found throughout his home.

Also similar to “The Poet’s Garret” is the point of view: Robinson writes of both figures in the third person. Pascoe points out that the poem lacks “a guiding ‘I’” (143), and Webb similarly points out the absence of a “uniquely personal” vision or even an “identifiable perceiving presence” (102). Whereas “The Poet’s Garret” is entirely focused on the poet himself, “London Summer’s Morning” is about the residents of London. This is not a poem about the gaze of the urban walker/writer; instead, the poet appears as one of many of the city’s residents who labors for a living. Robinson presents the city as an ecosystem in which everyone and everything exists independently and interdependently. Curran calls this a “recyclable poem, ending where it begins, recording the prismatic surfaces of the ever-recycling street scene” (16).

The poem is a self-renewing ecosystem; its title “London Summer’s Morning” suggests the activity within can be found any morning in the city. The activity never ceases, but is made and remade everyday. In this sense, then, places are “recyclable” too, providing the materials used in the daily practice of its residents, the constantly changing urban population.

Conclusion: “a map of busy life”

In Book IV of William Cowper’s *The Task* (1785), the speaker eagerly reads a recently delivered periodical from London from the comfort and safety of his house in the country.⁴³ As he physically shuts himself in from the cold winter’s night, effectively drawing up borders around himself, he luxuriates in his home’s distance from the city: “Now stir the fire, and close the shutters fast, / Let fall the curtains” (36-37). He settles in with a cup of tea and “[t]his folio of four pages, happy work!” (50), expressing relief that he is not “squeez’d / And bor’d with elbow points through both his sides” at one of the metropolis’s packed theatres, or enduring aching feet while listening to “patriots, bursting with heroic rage” (43-44, 48). Nonetheless, he enjoys reading about the daily news from London because it allows him to participate in the life of the city by proxy. From his sofa, he is able to appreciate the bustle of activity, marveling, “What is it but a map of busy life, / Its fluctuations, and its vast concerns?” (55-56). Cowper succinctly captures the role of the periodical in constructing London in the public imagination, regardless of the reader’s actual location. Cowper’s speaker expresses no desire to actually be in the city itself, but he does enjoy imaginatively participating in its energetic activity, apparent in his characterization of the newspaper as “a map of busy life.” He emphasizes the periodical’s ability to report in a timely fashion the ever-changing “fluctuations” of the world. While the textual

⁴³ I am indebted to Wilfrid Hindle’s *The Morning Post, 1772-1937: Portrait of a Newspaper* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1937) for bringing this reference to my attention.

space is itself is limited (“folio of four pages”), it is able to present the world in a panoramic view with all its “vast concerns”—even to a provincial reader.

Thus, the kind of place the periodical creates is one that reflects the medium itself—busy, constantly changing, and comprised of both mundane, everyday activities and events of global and historical significance. As Cowper illustrates, the newspaper does not just textually reproduce the place it discusses—it can become a means of entering the place itself. Reading the newspaper leads his speaker to imagine being in London, jostled at its theatres and standing to hear its statesmen lecture. He imagines being at the heart of the city’s politics and entertainments in a distinctly physical and embodied way; it is as though the material presence of the London periodical in his cozy home becomes a forceful reminder of the materiality of the city itself, and the embodied, everyday practices by its residents that make it a place.

Robinson’s urban poems likewise capture the practice of everyday life in the city. Like Certeau’s pedestrian, Robinson walks and writes the city, and in the process, she enacts “the pedestrian unfolding of the stories accumulated in a place (moving about the city and travelling)” (Certeau 110). She creates a poetic city that her readers can enter just as Cowper’s speaker metaphorically walks the city as he reads the newspaper. She too provides a “map of busy life,” and it is one comprised of people from all levels of the social hierarchy, one that confronts injustice instead of erasing it from the scene, and that recognizes the importance of the everyday practices that create and recreate the city on a daily basis. Instead of viewing periodical publication as ephemeral, as waste, it is a vital part of constructing place. It provides endlessly recyclable material, much like the city itself, for the practice of poet in place.

CONCLUSION

“ . . . for great poets do not die; they are continuing presences; they need only the opportunity to walk among us in the flesh.”

—Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*

In *Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate proposes treating poems as “imaginary parks,” considering the possibility that “works of art, mostly poems, may create for the mind the same kind of re-creational space that a park creates for the body” (64). Bate makes this proposal from an ecological perspective, arguing, “works of art can themselves be imaginary states of nature, imaginary ideal ecosystems, and by reading them, by inhabiting them, we can start to imagine what it might be like to live differently upon the earth” (250-251). I would like to extend Bate’s ecological analogy further, and suggest that we can treat a wide range of poems as places, whether or not they are also “ideal ecosystems,” and that doing so allows us to inhabit temporarily both a time and place that are otherwise closed off to us. Lawrence Buell argues that one of the ways that people can form an attachment to place is through imagining them (72). For Buell, “[T]he fact that the imaginer hasn’t been there and maybe never will hardly lessens the intensity of such storied or imaged places to induce longing and loyalty” (73). Like Bate, Buell draws an ecological connection to this idea, though again, I would suggest the principle can be applied much more widely. Reading a poem can provide imaginative entry into another world, just as Cowper’s speaker in *The Task* enjoys imaginatively participating in the life of the metropolis by reading London newspapers. The poetry of place is especially suited to this possibility as it is fundamentally concerned with the textual reproduction of material space. Montagu’s *Town Eclogues*, Leapor’s “Crumble Hall,” Barbauld’s “A Summer Evening’s

Meditation,” and Robinson’s “London Summer’s Morning” are all examples of how the poem can act as a place, both a meaningful location and a way of being, for both poet and reader.

Though these four poets vary greatly from one another, one common motif that occurs throughout their poetry is the idea of mobility or movement. Montagu plays the role of a tour guide as she charts the movements of her characters through London, and Leapor similarly gives us a tour of the country house where she labors alongside her fellow servants. Barbauld imagines traveling through space on a pilgrimage to the divine, and Robinson reports on the bustle and activity of London’s streets. Both the material and textual spaces they create are not stable and rigid, but fluid and flexible. They create the possibility for movement, for the reader to enter the poem along with them and walk through the places they describe.

Montagu, Leapor, Barbauld, and Robinson are all walkers in the sense Certeau describes, and despite their separation in time and space, the texts they create intersect in the same manner as the pathways created by urban pedestrians: “Their intertwined paths give their shape to spaces. They weave places together” (Certeau 97). Their poetry not only gives shape to the spaces of eighteenth-century England, constructing it as a place, but it also gives shape to the spaces of literary history of the era. The places they create in their poetry have multiple identities that intersect, connecting and clashing with one another. They also act as meeting places for people to meet who otherwise would not. The boundaries of place are interrogated and challenged, and in some cases, reconstructed as entirely permeable and flexible—vast and expansive. Place is not a stable, fixed entity but constantly changing, made and remade on a daily basis—in a constant state of “becoming.” When this conceptualization of place is applied to literary history, these poets also find a way of writing themselves into the landscape, not as

tourist sites but as pedestrians walking the city, circumventing the planned pathways to create new ones: their own way of being.

I began this study with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, in which she searches literary history for women writers, for a "Judith Shakespeare" that could be her generation's genius. The recovery of women authors later in the twentieth century has confirmed that there were far more women poets and dramatists than Woolf was able to locate in her own time; but over a century before the publication of *A Room of One's Own*, Mary Robinson was already writing angrily of the erasure of women writers from the literary landscape. In 1799, she published the pamphlet *A Letter to the Women of England*, in which she defends the intellectual ability of British women, calling on their literary productions as part of her evidence:

There is no country, at this epocha [sic], on the habitable globe, which can produce so many exalted and illustrious women (I mean mentally) as England. And yet we see many of them living in obscurity; known only by their writings; neither at the tables of women of rank; nor in the studies of men of genius; we hear of no national honours, no public marks of popular applause, no rank, no title, no liberal and splendid recompense bestowed on British literary women!

(8: 150)

Robinson thinks of the literary public sphere in spatial terms; she wonders how it can be that these "exalted and illustrious women" are not invited to sit "at the tables of the women of rank" or "in the studies of men of genius." Robinson suggests women have both a social place (at the tables of London society) and an intellectual place (their writings included in the studies of brilliant men). She concludes the letter with a postscript, expressing her hope that the pamphlet may actually influence "the minds of those to whom it is addressed, so far as to benefit the rising

generation,” but also admits, “The critics, though they have liberally patronized the works of British women, will perhaps condemn that doctrine which inculcates mental equality; lest, by the intellectual labours of the sex, they should claim an equal portion of power in the TRIBUNAL of BRITISH LITERATURE” (8: 160). Robinson argues for women writers to be given the “place” they deserve, and she boldly imagines a literary history that includes them in “equal portion.” It is not just a matter of patronizing their works, but in reimagining textual space itself to include them—to find a place for them at the table and in the study.

Woolf concludes *A Room of One's Own* by returning to the sitting room analogy for women writers, urging, “if we escape a little from the common sitting room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky, too, and the trees or whatever it may be in themselves . . . then the opportunity will come and the dead poet who was Shakespeare's sister will put on the body which she has so often laid down” (113-114). The way we write literary history—the way we imagine its textual space—has often re-created this sitting room mentality. As Paula Backscheider, Catherine Ingrassia, and Claude Rawson all acknowledge, the study of women writers is “in danger of ghetto-izing itself through a degree of overassertive separatism” (Rawson 724). My aim has been to suggest one way this can be avoided is to take women writers out of their metaphorical sitting room, and reposition them in the actual places they occupied in their own time and then reconstructed in the textual spaces of their poetry. What emerges is a place that is far more expansive and varied than is often acknowledged, and that allows women poets to claim their “equal portion” in the literary culture of their time and our own.

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