Excavating the Obscure:
Labouring Women, their Writing, and Eighteenth-Century England

by

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Abstract

This study looks at the poetry of labouring women writers in eighteenth-century England, specifically, Susannah Harrison, Elizabeth Hands, and Ann Wilson, who contributed substantial literary works, but have remained mostly obscure. Their writing, along with the historical, social, and political climate of the period are discussed. Many other labouring women writers of the period have also made valuable contributions but have gone unnoticed, and although there has been renewed interest in labouring writers and their works over the past three decades, the majority, especially women, remain unknown. It is the intent of this author that the poetry of Harrison, Hands, and Wilson, along with other labouring women authors will be observed and recognized as significant contributions to eighteenth-century literature.

Key Words: Susannah Harrison, Elizabeth Hands, Ann Wilson, labour, eighteenth-century labouring writers, plebeian, eighteenth-century literature, labouring women, religious writing.

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“The unlikely, the overlooked,” succeed against odds ‘in a personal, often socially ambiguous way…”

Jeanette Winterson

Introduction

Given the obstacles and deterrents that must have made the labouring woman writer’s goal seem unattainable, one is left to wonder “why did the labouring woman write?” One can only imagine how many women of the period attempted to achieve their goal of publishing their writing, simply to share their thoughts with others, perhaps to elicit change, or to leave a tangible legacy, only to give up as the impossibility of the task overwhelmed them. Fortunately, through endurance, perseverance, determination, many women did reach their goals, producing literary works that not only warrant critical recognition, but also provide insight into the eighteenth-century era in England. The works that emerged despite the many hurdles are works of substance; those who produced them possessed the tenacity and strength of character needed to publish.

This study explores the lives and works of three labouring women, Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Anne Wilson, whose neglected poetry not only makes a significant contribution to literature, but also provides details that broaden our image of the labouring woman writer of the eighteenth century. This study argues that without their poetry, and that of many others, the labouring woman would remain an entity almost without a voice or personality since historical and social content alone does not provide the information needed to offer a complete representation. These women, whose social circumstances could hardly afford them the

basics in education, much less the opportunity to earn a reasonable wage, managed to rise above their oppression and contribute literary works that can be read and valued in the twenty- first century. The quality of their writing mirrors their strength of character, and as such, their works are beyond what could be expected of individuals faced with challenges that outweighed the few advantages available to them. Indeed, what is lacking in biographical information and neglected in critical analysis in recent scholarship can be at least in part uncovered and interpreted from their poetry. The absence of accurate records regarding the general population and employment in England over the eighteenth century makes it difficult to collect demographic information, especially where women were concerned. As there is little biographical information on Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Anne Wilson, much of the insight needed to reconstruct their social lives, comes from historical studies that relate to the sociopolitical climate of their time.

When contemplating the selection of women authors for my thesis, questions arose, many of which I could not answer, due to the obscurity of their lives. Details about their quality of life, education, religious beliefs, and of course, their reason for writing, were mostly unknown. For some, like Anne Wilson, basic information such as her date of birth is not known. It would be difficult to answer these questions without researching and reconstructing the past: that is, the era in which labouring women were born, worked in, and lived. Studying women in eighteenth-century society and their work in rural areas of England would begin to offer some understanding as to the labouring woman's motivations for writing. Situating the writer in her historical environment provides an understanding of the context for her works and of the possible reasons behind her need to write. But ultimately, an analysis of her writing invites the reader to listen to what the author says, in her own voice.

What connects Hands, Harrison, and Wilson are the challenges of poverty, oppression, and marginalization that they faced. They also wrote impressive works of poetry that were published while they lived, all within the period between 1778-1789. In addition, they earned their keep or their wage by working for others in positions of service or husbandry. In order to begin to find answers to my questions, it was necessary to recreate the period in which they lived, and to place them in the proper context, that is, to delve into the social factors that shaped them as women and as writers.

Methodology and Analytical Approach

It is not possible to investigate the writing of labouring women without studying the political, economic, religious, and social climate in which they lived and wrote. There were many aspects of eighteenth-century English society that helped shape the labouring woman writer. One example is the socio-economic climate that helped determine the social status of women. Another is religion, which influenced and guided education and contained women in their social ranks. Changes in agricultural work affected women and left them in vulnerable conditions, such as having to accept works in trades and domestic work at a much lower rate than men. A look at labour and women as workers is therefore necessary to explain the imbalances and injustices of English society. A holistic approach exploring both the external environment and the personal characteristics and voice of the labouring woman as a writer was thus implemented for a representation.

Eighteenth-century Britain was heavily influenced by the events of the Restoration and by the Glorious Revolution of 1688. In fact, Vivien Jones suggests that the latter initiated the "symbolic" start of the eighteenth century (xii). The unification of Scotland with England in

1707, and the acquisition of foreign lands from France and Spain helped forge the British empire as it fought and gained power and wealth. The methods by which wealth was previously acquired or inherited changed significantly. Income that had been previously acquired from the profits of inherited land was now also derived from investments in enterprises and financial institutions, which, in turn, reshaped the status and the role of the labourer.

What did it mean to be a labouring woman of the eighteenth century? How and what did women write, or more importantly, why did they write? What do they contribute to twenty -first century understanding of the eighteenth-century world? The authors chosen for this study were little known even while they lived. In order to understand how women from the labouring ranks were educated, where and when they worked, and how they fit into society as women labourers, it was necessary to collect information from various sources that provided information relative to the period. Therefore, a qualitative approach was utilized to gather any biographical material available, as well as historical, and sociopolitical information on the long eighteenth century. Furthermore, an analysis of the authors' literary works not only reflects their thoughts, but provides insight into what could be their life experiences.

A study of the religious world of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in England contributes an understanding of the influence religion had on women of the eighteenth century. The role of religion became evident as I researched the education available to boys and girls of the lower ranks. The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and the Methodist movement reached out to the poor and offered some form of education to both boys and girls. Since education was grounded in religion, it seems appropriate that I should combine both subjects into one chapter.

Similarly, research into the type of work carried out by women of the period necessitated an investigation into the circumstances that led women to work as servants and to perform the more tedious tasks in husbandry. I have therefore included background information on the effects of the land enclosures on women, since this event triggered changes in the areas of agriculture and the distribution of land, which in turn affected women and their work. Social injustice and control over the female sex in regard to the division of labour are discussed in this segment as inequality and discrimination against women becomes a more visible issue. Social control over women was increased by placing men in agricultural work that required both more authority and skill as well as sending women indoors to tend to duties that were less respected in the eyes of English society. As well as positioning the eighteenth-century woman in a working environment, this information also clarifies some of the passages in Anne Wilson's *Teisa,* along with some of the poetry by Elizabeth Hands.

Because representations of nature played a significant role in eighteenth-century poetry, I therefore deemed it necessary to include a review of the rudiments of the pastoral and georgic literary modes, since the authors discussed here incorporated the natural world in the form of pastoral and/or georgic poetry in many of their poems. For example, Elizabeth Hands may have written pastoral poetry as a means of feeling closer to her natural surroundings, since her work as a servant had her confined indoors. She also wrote pastoral poetry in observation of friendship and in appreciation of the countryside. Additionally, Anne Wilson's *Teisa* is narrated in the external natural world, and Susannah Harrison includes references to nature in her hymnal writing.

While this historical information was consulted to provide an analysis of what it meant to be a labouring woman, and also what was required of a labouring woman to become a writer

during the eighteenth century, it does not provide any insight into the woman as an individual. What of the writer herself? Where does one look for the presence of voice and character when biographical information is scarce? If there is little or no documented evidence of an individual`s thoughts, aspirations, views, or opinions—for example, in letters or diaries—fortunately in some instances one can resort to what they did write, their poetry. Knowledge of what women have experienced as individuals over generations and centuries of oppression has been instrumental in recognizing the level of oppression that also existed in various formations during the eighteenth century. Although the term "intersectionality" did not exist at the time, the subjugation of women was operational in various degrees, with women struggling not only based on their gender, but on their social rank, race, ethnicity, and ability. Stereotypes centered around women during the eighteenth century were created by specific circumstances. One example is the enclosure acts, which, as we shall see, gradually removed women from agricultural work and progressively confined them indoors to perform domestic duties. That labouring women were relegated to a secondary role as domestic servants was but one facet in a system that relied upon several strata of injustice, for even within the world of domestic service, multiple layers of oppression were present, and one's job description was dependent on factors set out by eighteenth-century society. For example, for reasons grounded in the social laws of service, the charwoman or maid of all work was rarely promoted to a lady's maid, or given the opportunity to acquire skills that would permit her to work in husbandry. The labouring woman could either identify with the constructs of society and conform to the stereotype or, in the other extreme—counter-identification—completely disassociate from these stereotypes, the likelihood of which I consider highly debatable given the social conditions that would have pushed her to conform to the rules set out by society. It is between these two extremities that lies the opportunity for the

writer to implement a balanced and more calculated approach to expressing herself. This process of disidentification by the author is described by Nina Lykke in her article "Passionate Disidentifications as an Intersectional Writing Strategy." Lykke quotes José Muñoz as describing the strategy as one "that tries to transform a cultural logic from within" (Muñoz 11 qtd. in Lykke 32). When this approach is recognized as part of the author's strategy, a clearer picture of the author's authentic voice and purpose emerges. I recognize this approach in the writing of Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Ann Wilson. The most obvious appears in Hands's poems, "On the Supposition of an Advertisement Appearing in a Morning Paper, on the Publication of a Volume of Poems, by a Servant-Maid," and its successor, "A Poem, On the Supposition of the Book Having Been Published and Read", where she mastered the strategy of disidentification in her addressing the social issue between servants and the higher ranks of society. Hands understood where she fit in as a woman servant in eighteenth-century society, and instead of attempting to reject her social position, chose to explore the options between the extremes of identification and counter identification in order to expose a picture of the labouring woman as perceived by the higher ranks of society. Rather than portraying an oppressed servant who bitterly accepted her lot in life, Hands expressed her understanding of this situation through her satirical poetry. When reading Hands's works in this fashion, what can be gleaned from her poetry is the author's consistency in relating commentaries in a witty and satirical fashion, while covertly disclosing her shrewdness on social matters. Hands anticipates the reaction of the higher ranks in regard to the publication of her works in these two poems, and exposes their polite but hypocritical behaviours. In *The Death of Amnon*, Hands dares to expose the dark side of human behaviour from the standpoint of the assailant as well as the victim. As a result, an image of an independent, insightful, and courageous woman develops. In addition to her superior writing

skills, Hands possessed the strength of character and moral standards required to produce such material.

When reading the limited biographical information on Susannah Harrison, however, what initially comes to mind is not strength of character, but weakness of the body and of the soul. Unlike Hands, Harrison's writing at first glance appears to reflect the thoughts of a submissive and subservient woman who battled illness and oppression for the better part of her life. In a close reading of Harrison's hymns however, one realizes that she needed strength of character to express doubt, fear, and resentment about what was unchangeable in her life. Not only does Harrison express these feelings in her writing, but she appears to solicit and receive answers to guide her along her difficult path. Had she followed the social paradigms of the period, Harrison would have composed hymns that were consistent in substantiating her religious faith only. Instead, the hymns in her publication of *Songs in the Night* are grouped primarily in accordance to her feelings of joy, faith, doubt, despair, and so on, thereby addressing her personal concerns though a specific literary genre. Harrison understood that between the extremities of conformity and rebellion lay a standard that could help her express her most profound beliefs while permitting her to raise concerns in a fashion that was most acceptable to her. A significant collection of hymns addressing a variety of personal and social issues, a brief biography, along with social and cultural background information supported the process of attempting to reconstruct Harrison's life. However, when the writer is so obscure that even a date of birth cannot be located, written works as well as relevant background information must be relied upon even more in order to help recreate the author's background. Such is the case with Anne Wilson, whose poem, *Teisa*, offers sixty-eight pages of locodescriptive poetry whose details merely offer clues for a biographical profile. The poem, which mirrors Pope's *Windsor Forest*, is an

indication that Wilson, despite the suggestion that she was from a labouring background, was well read and familiar with some of the established writers of the time. Both of her works discussed in this thesis reflect the use of the strategy of disidentification as Wilson finds a safe platform to effectively express her concerns about socio-political issues that have affected her and those before her. In recognizing the theory of disidentification along with the inclusion of cultural, historical, and socio-political background of the labouring woman, the authentic voice of the author can be discerned, thus helping to establish a more complete and accurate biographical profile.

Contextual Information

The first chapter reviews recent scholarship on the labouring writer. A description of the historical and sociopolitical background is also included as well as related background information on the labouring woman. Education, religion, and employment in service and husbandry in relation to the plebeian writer, as well as the influence of the natural world on the writer are also discussed.

The second chapter examines religion in seventeenth and eighteenth-century England with a brief history of the founding of the Church of England, Dissenting groups, and the Evangelical Revival. A look at some literary works of dissenters from the period helps to explain the impact of religious literature on society. The consequences of the control of the churches over education, especially that of women, is also examined. What biographical information is available on Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Anne Wilson is included in this chapter, as well as their literary contributions to religious writing. Four of Susannah Harrison`s hymns

will be explored, as will Elizabeth Hands's biblical story, *The Death of Amnon,* and *Jephthah`s Daughter* by Anne Wilson.

Chapter three discusses the plebeian woman as a representative of labour through the work of these women writers. The chapter looks briefly at the literary works of Mary Collier and Mary Leapor, two of the more prominent labouring writers of the period. The poetry of Elizabeth Hands takes a different angle in this chapter, with its unique and somewhat daring representation of the woman in service. Also, Anne Wilson`s georgic poem, *Teisa,* includes accounts of agricultural work performed by women, as well as events that affected agriculture and trade. *Teisa*, Wilson`s skilfully formulated locodescriptive poem echoes Pope`s *Windsor Forest*, from the vantage point of the Tees river.

Exploring the works of Hands, Harrison, and Wilson as well as studying the life of the labouring woman during the eighteenth century provides information that is both noteworthy and deeply thought-provoking. Because of the changes and transformation in the agricultural industry due to capitalism and the industrial revolution, the way of life changed drastically over this period, leaving the labourer with no choice but to adjust to mechanization and wage labour. This was more difficult for the woman labourer who, in many cases, was forced to give up work in agriculture and husbandry that was considered more valuable in order to work indoors in service. Despite these substantial changes, the lack of formal education, and the growing control from the bourgeoisie over the working classes that marginalized women even further, many labouring women of the period who chose to write poetry, published works that were significant in literary value. Nonetheless, despite the renewed interest in the poetry of the labouring writers over the past three decades, few of these works have been explored or studied, and many remain in obscurity. Other than Mary Leapor, Mary Collier, and Anne Yearsley, whose names appear in

most scholarship on labouring writers, and whose work regularly appears in anthologies of eighteenth-century writers, surprisingly little attention is given to the poetry of other labouring women.

This study investigates the works of three labouring women writers from the eighteenth century who are worthy of consideration even by twenty first century standards. The poetry of Hands, Harrison, and Wilson demonstrates that the better-known women alluded to above were not simply exceptions. Indeed, these women were talented writers, and their poetry provided a voice not only for themselves, but for all labouring women who experienced the injustices of society, and who longed to be heard. In reading these three women, we hear the suffering, rejection, and oppression associated with the life of the eighteenth-century labouring woman, and also discover the experience, wisdom, and knowledge that forged her very being.

Chapter 1 – Accessing the World of the Labouring Woman Writer

"The noblest acquisition of mankind is speech, and the most useful art is writing."

Thomas Astle, 1784

The names Mary Leapor, Mary Collier, and Ann Yearsley are amongst the most familiar women plebeian writers in the English eighteenth century, although more recent scholarship explores a wider variety of obscure writers. Publicity linked directly or indirectly to women of polite society brought these women out of obscurity during the eighteenth century. Mary Leapor's poetry was published after her death by Bridget Freemantle, a friend, confidante, and admirer, who had the connections necessary to solicit subscribers. Although a list of subscribers may have been in existence before her death, Leapor wrote for her own purposes, and did not want to rely on patrons for publication (Greene 18-23). As for Ann Yearsley, a falling out with her mentor, Hannah More, caused a public stir, but afforded her with publicity enough to maintain her financial independence as a writer. Although Mary Collier published her own material, her poetry gained publicity as a rebuttal to the once labouring writer, Stephen Duck who was brought to court by Queen Caroline. Eighteenth-century historians have studied and written about these women writers frequently; as a result, Leapor, Collier, and Yearsley have been given an opportunity to share their stories; their thoughts and experiences have had occasion to be read and analyzed. But what of other working women of the period who, through their writing, offer a glimpse into lives that were extinguished long ago? Certainly, labouring women writers had plenty to say about work, politics, the economy, society, love, friendship, and heartache. This thesis will explore what Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Anne Wilson had to say about these, and other subjects.

The Invisibility of the Labouring Woman

Bridget Hill's *Women, Work & Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (1989) explores the problem of the lack of historical records on women as contributors to the labouring market of the period. The study addresses the absence of women in the censuses, as well as in accounts of the trades in which women were disregarded because of the perceived insignificance of their work (Hill 148-52). Furthermore, Hill provides historical information on the role of the labouring woman in the days before the land enclosures, as well as an analysis of the consequences the enclosure acts had on labouring women. Published in 1989, Hill's book remains particularly insightful because it contains information specific to women during the start of the Industrial Revolution. Hannah Baker and Elaine Chalus's *Women's and Gender History: Women's History, Britain 1700-1800: An Introduction,* appeared in 2004, and echoes Hill's views on the apparent absence of women as contributors to the British economy, despite their obvious presence in the field of domestic labour. As well, Isabelle Baudino's and Jacques Carré's *The Invisible Woman: Aspects of Women' Work in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (2005), explores the exclusion of women on the labour market before and during the eighteenth century. Of particular interest is the first chapter dedicated to the history of domestic service among the gentry before the eighteenth century. This book focuses largely on specific groups of working women such as nurses, governesses, musicians and actresses who were disregarded as contributing to the labour market because of the instability of their work.

In 1990, Donna Landry endeavoured to revivify the voices of labouring women in *The Muses of Resistance*, *Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain 1739-1796*. She claims that labouring women, although occasionally acknowledged in eighteenth-century verse by male

authors (Gay, Goldsmith) usually as pitiful, marginalized entities, were also silenced with the accounts by male authors. Their descriptions of the vanishing countryside and rural villages also include women, but only as objects that evoke pity and are representative of need and want. What is missing in poetry written by men are the voices, the stories of the labouring women of the eighteenth century (1-10). Landry endeavours to recuperate the lost voices of the women labourers because they were also part of history.

One such voice is evoked by Richard Greene in his 1993 biographical account of Mary Leapor, which provides an in-depth account of the life of this “uncultivated genius” (23), along with the challenges that she and no doubt many other labouring writers faced. Leapor died at the age of twenty-four, and consequently, was not aware of the success of her work which was published posthumously. Also included in Greene’s book are obscure women writers who nonetheless made a substantial contribution to eighteenth-century literature: Constantia Grierson, Jane Wiseman Holt, and Ann Candler.

In keeping with the premise of the obscure woman, Moira Ferguson’s book on women writers, *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets: Nation, Class, and Gender* (1995), focuses on the poetry of 1770-1800, and the influence of emerging national identity on class and gender during the period. The subject of the obscurity of women emerges in Ferguson’s analysis of Mary Collier’s *The Woman’s Labour,* where she examines the socio-political issues surrounding women of the eighteenth century, with Collier’s description of a working woman living in poverty under male authority. Collier’s ability and courage to address class and gender issues by way of her poetry gives her a voice which otherwise may have remained silent. Ferguson also revisits the relationship and falling out between milkwoman Ann Yearsley, and her patron Hannah More, whose public rejection of her protégé, left Yearsley struggling to obtain

recognition without the help of bourgeois patrons. Ferguson explores the influence that national identity and political ideology had on labouring women of the eighteenth century by examining their writing as a means of helping to shape the social climate of the period. Ferguson's book is a dependable resource for situating the plebeian woman in eighteenth-century society. However, it does not examine the more obscure writers of the period, but revisits the lives and works of Leapor, Collier, and Yearsley.

More recently, Carolyn Steedman's *Labours Lost: Domestic Service and the Making of Modern England* (2009) provides an account of servants and labour history during the eighteenth century. In addition to exploring the relationships between employers and servants, Steedman's book provides solid historical background on labour, politics, and the social climate of the period. Chapter two, "Servants Numberless: Theories of Labour and Property," is particularly informative as it discusses the absence of women labourers as part of written history. Also of importance in Steedman's book is its discussion of women writers of the period, that is to say, the servants' poetry about their work and employers. For example, "An Ode on a Dishclout" provides an interesting behind-the-scenes account of the production of poetry by a cookmaid, along with the materials available to produce the writing. These could involve a cabbage leaf, a sheet of wood or a hand-sewn book made of wrapping paper. Some of these fabrications came complete with a cover, title, and epigraph (Steedman, 280-1).

Katrina Honeyman's *Women, Gender, and Industrialisation* (2000), also focuses primarily on women and labour history. Her views on the omission of women reflect the same problem we have seen in scholarship on labouring women writers. Honeyman reminds us that women, until recently, have been largely ignored as subjects of historical research, although recent efforts have been taken to uncover this lost history.

That women were excluded as significant members of British society and as contributors to the British economy has been established in the findings of Hill, Landry, Honeyman, Steedman, and Ferguson, whose studies underline the absence of labouring women in the histories of the period. Since biographical information on labouring women writers is also lacking, it is necessary to look at the labouring poetry which contributes to our understanding of the woman and of the writer.

In Search of Elusive Biographical Details

The challenges involved in reconstructing the lives of individuals that were hardly publicised, even in their lifetimes, are numerous. A recovery of biographical information is limited to genealogical resources such as ancestry databases and church registries. The British National Archives, The Victoria County Histories website, and county records offices in Warwickshire and Suffolk have helped with geographical locations and background as have the archives of the British Library. The overall absence of biographical details has impeded my research on the writers I have chosen for this thesis, and I have therefore had to rely on some of the more comprehensive studies that contributed primarily to providing the social and historical background information required to reconstruct the lives of labouring women of the period.

One name that often recurs when researching plebeian women writers is Paula Backscheider. In addition to the better-known writers—Collier, Leapor and Yearsley—Backscheider includes Elizabeth Hands, Constantia Grierson and Susannah Harrison in *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and their Poetry* (2005). From her research on hundreds of women poets, Backscheider features forty, whose writings contain background relevant to the period, and who influenced the course of eighteenth-century literature. Her close readings of the

verses of more obscure writers present new insight, and potential for renewed discourse apropos eighteenth-century society. The book is designed for future study of women writers of the eighteenth century, as Backscheider addresses all writers from Blue Stocking society to labouring women writers.

William Christmas's *The Lab'ring Muses: Work, Writing and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830 (*2001), explores Stephen Duck, James Woodhouse, Robert Bloomfield, and John Clare as some of the valuable male contributors to the eighteenth-century literary canon, along with the established women writers: Mary Leapor, Mary Collier, and Ann Yearsley. However, Christmas does dedicate some space to Elizabeth Hands as a labouring writer who he claims did not adhere to the social requirements of "honesty, industry, and piety" (229) that permitted the plebeian writer to be accepted as such. Instead, as Christmas states, many of Hands's poems are satirical and mocking in tone, setting her apart from society's expectation of the labouring writer. Christmas investigates her unconventional writing abilities and the absence of apologies for her natural genius (228-34). *The Lab'ring Muses* is a valuable contribution to the labouring writers' scholarship. The text is most informative in supplying background information on the labouring writer in eighteenth-century society, as well as providing knowledge on such topics as subscriptions and publication. The book however concentrates on the writing of male labouring writers and investigates very few female writers.

Among the selection of anthologies and databases that do feature female labouring writers, namely Janet Todd's *A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800 (*1984), Roger Lonsdale's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* (1989), Susan Stave's *A Literary History of Women\s Writing in Britain, 1660-1789* (2006), the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Orlando: Women's Writing in the British Isles,* the most comprehensive and updated

anthology is the 2003 edition of *Eighteenth-Century Labouring-Class Poets 1700-1800* edited by John Goodridge, William Christmas, Bridget Keegan, and Tim Burke. The three-volume compilation includes biographical information and sample poetry on each of its subjects including Anne Wilson, who is amongst the most obscure. An extensive introduction to each volume, as well as detailed notes and glossaries render this collection a necessity. Although these are the most recent and complete collections on the subject, the number of labouring women featured in these anthologies is less than substantial. Lonsdale's anthology, although a valuable compilation of women writers, contains only twelve labouring writers from a total of 105 writers. The compilation by John Goodridge contains forty-eight male writers and eleven female writers. Other anthologies that otherwise contain a comprehensive list of female writers of the period include only prevalent writers of the labouring class who have already been widely recognized in the field.

Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO), contains an extensive collection of eighteenth-century works of prose and poetry, as well as copies of original documents such as directories, registers, and court proceedings. In addition to accessing primary works of my chosen authors and other relevant publications, reports such as those on the Foundling Hospital, charity schools and workhouses have been useful in providing background information about the education of girls and boys from the lower ranks. Although the documents are from the eighteenth century and reflect the assumptions and biases of their authors, they nonetheless convey a sense of the sociopolitical climate of the period. Helen Jewell's *Education in Early Modern England* (1998), provides historical and political background on educating children and adults from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century. Jewell's book is especially effective in comparing the curriculum of girls and boys, information that is significant for my argument.

Also, John Rule's *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England* (1987), is valuable for its information on education and labour. Equally enlightening from Rule is *The Vital Century*: *England's Developing Economy, 1714-1815* (1992), which includes specifics on trade and the British economy as well as background information on the Industrial Revolution. The most notable resource on the subject of education however, is *Educating the Child in Enlightenment Britain – Beliefs, Cultures, Practices* (2009). This book offers a collection of various articles on the subjects of marketing religious identity, virtue as part of the educational curriculum, educating the Irish poor, and on Methodist culture and education that are particularly significant to my research. As for historical background on religion and religious writing, Isabel Rivers's book, *Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780 (2000*), covers the dissenting religions and sects that appeared over the centuries, as well as religious literature which was used to explain religious doctrine.

The writing of religious hymns was another method of explaining the meaning of biblical stories and psalms, as is evident in Susannah Harrison's *Songs in the Night*. Since Harrison is one of the authors selected for this thesis, J. R. Watson's article "Discussing Hymns: The State of the Art" (2003), as well as Margaret Maison's "Thine, Only Thine!' Women Hymn Writers in Britain, 1760-1835" (1986), and Bridget Keegan's "Mysticisms and Mystifications: The Demands of Laboring-Class Religious Poetry" (2005), contributed to some of the contextual information necessary for chapter two. Furthermore, Mary Clare Martin also provided an article conducive to my research, "Marketing Religious Identity: Female Educators, Methodist Culture, and Eighteenth-Century Childhood." Not only does this documentary article provide historical background on the establishment and growth of Methodism, but it also offers insight into the

beliefs and practices of the movement, which was responsible for educating many children from the lower ranks of society, and consequently helped shape the lives of many of its students.

Thanks to the surge of renewed interest in labouring writers that has appeared in the past three decades, recent scholarship now offers additional biographical information (albeit limited) and a fresh look at the works of those who endeavoured to reveal their thoughts through poetry. Since the three women authors whose works appear in this thesis are amongst the most obscure, some of the recent scholarship is valuable in its provision of updated information as well as offering insight for additional development. Donna Landry was the first to show renewed interest in Elizabeth Hands as a labouring writer, devoting almost an entire chapter to a discussion of her works and her style. Backscheider's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets* contains chapters that are particularly helpful in interpreting the works of Elizabeth Hands. For example, chapters five, six, and seven discuss friendship and retirement poetry, a genre that appears in an appendix in Hands's publication, as well as a chapter entitled "Women and Poetry in the Public Eye," covering Hands's *A Poem, on the Supposition of an Advertisement…by a Servant Maid*, which expresses the challenges faced by a labouring woman struggling to gain respect from the upper ranks as a writer. What is most helpful in Backscheider's study however, is her chapter on religious poetry, complete with evidence related to the influence of religion on the female writer. Similarly, Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia's *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century* (2009), provides sections on hymns and friendship and retirement poetry with reference to both Hands and Harrison. Indeed, the most comprehensive article dedicated entirely to Elizabeth Hands comes from Cynthia Dereli's "In Search of a Poet: The Life and Work of Elizabeth Hands." The article provides recently verified biographical information on the author, as well as Dereli's critique of her works, and a review of some recent scholarship. Although

renewed interest in Elizabeth Hands has lifted her obscurity somewhat, much more needs to be done to accomplish the same for Susannah Harrison and Anne Wilson. While there is mention of Harrison in some recent scholarship that discusses religious writing, such as in Backscheider's work and Bridget Keegan's "Mysticisms and Mystifications: The Demands of Laboring-Class Religious Poetry" (2016), Keegan's "Writing Against the Current: Anne Wilson's *Teisa* and Labouring-Class River Poetry" is the only study to offer any substantial scholarship on Anne Wilson.

The Labouring Woman

William Christmas explains the word "Custom" (52) as part of the cultural formation of the eighteenth century. It was a term for practices that kept those in power in control of the lower ranks, and also ensured a known level of order for all concerned. Custom, however, proved to be a detriment for women, who remained socially marginalized by its very existence. For women plebeian writers, the situation was even worse, as they were socially excluded by their gender and status. Some women, both plebeian and from polite society, recognized this oppression, and utilized it as a topic to provoke thought and to incite debate.

For example, Mary Astell in "A Serious Proposal to the Ladies…" personifies Custom as a "Tyrant," because it inflicts certain "pleasures" that are not necessarily of interest to another (women), but are tolerated out of tradition or habit: "'Tis Custom, therefore, that Tyrant Custom, which is the grand motive to all those irrational choices which we daily see made in the World, so very contrary to our present interest and pleasure, as well as our Future" (28). What had become natural to women was the internalization of what men actually desired (Christmas, 55).

Another example is Elizabeth Hands, whose satirical poetry illustrates the views of higher ranks of society towards the female servant. *A Poem, On the Supposition of an Advertisement…by a Servant-Maid* features women who react incredulously when they discover a published poem by their servant (50-5). How women were ranked socially determined their value in eighteenth-century society. Consequently, women were categorized by Custom, and the work available to them depended on where they fit in socially. Women who were not of the labouring classes generally managed the servants and the household once they were married. Women from the working classes on the other hand, were usually apprenticed as domestic servants or in husbandry. Outside the home, some of the more traditional occupations for women of the period included mantua-makers, milliners, seamstresses, spinners, lacemakers and tailoresses (Hill, 149-73).

It is a common misperception that women began to work outside the home during the Industrial Revolution only, dismissing domestic service entirely as gainful employment. Carolyn Steedman's *Labours Lost* cites Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* as stating that domestic servants' work was not considered as such because it "does not fix or realise itself in any particular subject or vendible commodity" (41). In other words, Smith felt that, unlike servants in husbandry whose work produced tangible things, the work performed by domestic servants had no lasting impact on the economy. Domestic service formed the largest percentage of employment for women long before the Industrial Revolution, but was usually not accounted for. Servants who lived in households were not counted in the 1670 hearth tax returns or the 1851 census. Although there were no official occupational censuses in the eighteenth century, records enumerating persons occupying households often did not specify the relationship to the owner,

leaving the impression that many of the inhabitants were counted as family. Also, because of tax exemption and tax evasion, many servants were not counted as employees (145-52).

Carolyn Steedman confirms Hill's findings in her 2009 study, *Labours Lost*. Her research states that one in eleven persons was in domestic service during the eighteenth century. Both Steedman and Hill speculate that, in 1806, out of 910,000 servants, 800,000 were women. Domestic servants were considered a taxable commodity between 1785 and 1792, compared to servants in husbandry who were not taxed. It is therefore not surprising that many heads of household tried to pass off their domestic servants as servants in husbandry; in the eyes of the government domestic servants were considered a superfluous service because their work was seen as not contributing directly to their employer's livelihood (Steedman, 41-5, 313). Hill cites Caroline Davidson's study, *A History of Housework in the British Isles* (1982), as suggesting that the purpose of the 1776 tax on male servants was to prevent them from performing any domestic duties (Hill, 128). Consequently, it was deduced that the majority of domestic servants were female, and formed the largest percentage of employment after the agricultural sector, though the lack of documentation makes it difficult to offer conclusive evidence. Hill also cites Ivy Pinchbeck's study of 1930: "The working women on whom Pinchbeck's study focused were almost always seen against the background of one particular occupation or employment. But everything we now know of working women in the eighteenth century suggests how often they were involved in more than one occupation." (Hill, 4). As proof of wearing several hats while in service, Hill includes a job description provided by Elizabeth Purefoy in 1737, wanting to recruit a female servant to perform duties in husbandry: "It included milking three or four cows, the entire work of the dairy, cooking, washing both the light and heavy wash, cleaning rooms, making beds, cleaning stairs, scouring all the iron and pewter ware…there is very good time to

do all this provided she is a servant & when she has done her worke [*sic*] she sits down to spin" ((Hill, 82).

With the acceleration of enclosure acts and the onset of the Industrial Revolution came a decline in service in husbandry. Consequently, job descriptions overlapped increasingly for both domestic and farm work as the century wore on, and it became easier to slot women into domestic work with less work outdoors. This changed the relationship between servant and employer, as, over time, the job of a domestic servant became inferior to that of service in husbandry. Also, a higher standard of living and an increase of female domestics accompanied the growth of the middle class near the end of the eighteenth century. While men were employed as valets, footmen, butlers, and gardeners, women were employed as kitchen staff, scullery maids, and maids of all work; hence the birth of the "feminization of domestic service," or the division of labour (Hill 128). Hill's and Steedman's studies indicate that, even within the realm of domestic service there was a hierarchy, with the more elite girls—that is to say those who were educated—working in positions of lady's maids and waiting women. Those who received a common education, or none at all, were employed as, washerwomen, scullery maids, and cooks, with the latter being the lowest in the order.

Pre-industrial Revolution: Enclosure Acts

Agricultural output increased dramatically over the course of the eighteenth century in England. It was still considered an agricultural country in the early to mid eighteenth century, and saw a rise in exportation to growing industrial towns. The focus of agriculture before then had been on supplying family and members of the community. The enclosure acts prevented many from accessing what used to be known as common land, hence the term "landless

labourers" (Hill 10) and were a huge blow to the labouring classes. The acts, coupled with an increase in demand for agricultural products, resulted in many labourers working for a set wage and being dependent on the new landowners for employment. Many landless labourers who were unable to find work in agriculture worked in rural industrial workshops to earn a living, a subject that will be explored later in this chapter.

The consequences of the Industrial Revolution on the labouring classes in Britain remain a contested and controversial subject among scholars. Historians have been debating the timeline itself, some believing industrialization began in some areas as early as the seventeenth century, and others claiming it took place in other areas as late as the twentieth century (Hill 12-3). John Rule, in *The Labouring Classes in Early Industrial England, 1750-1850* (1987), declares that the economic impact on the labouring classes cannot be analysed strictly from the working conditions of the period or from the accumulation of material goods. Rather, the economic impact on the labouring classes must be taken from a broader context, which is from the eighteenth-century culture as a whole. He also warns that it is not possible to account for all scholarly ideas in so broad a subject as culture, and that generalizing is often necessary (20). In an effort to maintain consistency regarding the timeline of the Industrial Revolution, this thesis utilizes the findings of Bridget Hill's study, as well as two of John Rule's studies on labour during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and Hannah Barker's 2004 study, "Women and Work." Hill's study also provides a practical reconstruction of what was considered the "pre-industrial" era up to the proposed onset of the Industrial Revolution. She claims that the process of industrialization was much longer than originally thought, and that the inaccuracy of available statistics from the period elevates the margin of error considerably. Furthermore, historians could only provide studies based on the statistics provided, and unanswered questions where no

information was available (12). It can also be assumed that the reason behind the rising poverty in the labouring classes over the eighteenth century was not due to the Industrial Revolution, but to the enclosure acts, and the rise of the population in urban centres that led to an increase in trade. The land was no longer common, but privately owned, and cultivated to feed the rising population of the urban centres, no longer limited to families and close communities.

Hannah Barker echoes Hill's findings and further states that enclosure denied women the means to glean common land for remnants of produce after harvest, for fire wood and any other natural resources that would contribute to the family income (129-30). Consequently, a rise in unemployment ensued, and occupants from the rural areas needed income. Many set up shop and worked as milliners, weavers, shoemakers, and many other trades that could offer some provision. Those who did not work in industry worked in such roles as carpenters, butchers, or masons. This is why industry flourished in the countryside, offering the unemployed another option to earn a living or to supplement their income. This theory would then make the term "pre-industrial" erroneous as industry had been in existence for some time, albeit not in factories. According to Hill, "proto-industrial" (13), a term coined in 1972 by F. Mendels, is the term utilized when referring to the time before the Industrial Revolution when individuals were hired to produce handicraft from their homes. Barker further asserts that proto-industrialization was a "largely rural phenomenon," and women, who received less work in agriculture, were hired by manufacturers to produce work from their home as spinners, lace makers, knitters, and silk throwers (131-2).

Women were not counted as employees in the census due to their servant's status, which makes it particularly difficult to track the employment of labouring women of the eighteenth century. Based on the hearth tax of the seventeenth century and the nineteenth century census, it

is estimated that approximately 80 percent were labouring men and women. Hill deduces that women made up a generous part of that statistic since they made up approximately half of the nation (23). What is certain however, is the extent to which women, who were already marginalized as the weaker sex, were affected by the fallout from the enclosure acts. The eradication of common rights to land access for the cottagers and smallholders was devastating, leaving men at the mercy of new landowners to provide them with a means to earn a living. Women of the labouring ranks who previously played a vital role in the family economy in either agriculture or through other means of contribution, were now left with no choice but to earn a wage while working for someone else.

The standard of living for the middle to higher ranks of society increased, and with it the hiring of apprentices and tradesmen. With the increasing number of women from the higher ranks withdrawing from the responsibilities of farming, supervising the household, and adopting a more genteel lifestyle, openings for farmhands and servants were augmented. As such, the division of labour between both sexes was much more pronounced with the majority of men working in husbandry, and women confined to the household as cooks, servants, and maids of all work.

The Plebeian Writer and Social Control

Bridget Keegan and William Christmas examine the concept of "natural genius" and its meaning in eighteenth-century society. Keegan describes nature as a physical space and as a state of being, as the labourer experienced it as a material substance, or more precisely, as a means to make a living, and also on a spiritual level. It is a term that could hold a dual meaning; "nature," that is to say, the physical realm of the natural world, and "natural," as in an inherent sense, or

not created by humans. The former lends a somewhat romantic feel to the labourer's proximity to nature, as the writer would be completely immersed and inspired by it, and consequently produce poetry in reference to it. Often, labouring writers were called "natural geniuses" because of their association with the natural world rather than from their own efforts at literacy (Keegan 2). William Christmas links the term "natural genius" to an eighteenth-century concept that poetry was instinctive rather than a vocation that could be taught. The labouring writer is regarded by the upper ranks as an individual who is able to accomplish written verse without the benefit (or detriment) of a formal education. In addition, the writer produces works of a calibre that will sustain the notion that he/she has been dealt a gift by providence and none other. Up to the seventeenth century, it was believed that natural born poets needed formal education to improve inherent talent. This changed however in the mid eighteenth century, when it was speculated that "formal education impedes innate genius" (Christmas 25-7). Consequently, many labouring writers took advantage of this perception and applied their writing skills to nature poetry.

Perhaps the most familiar case is Stephen Duck who was dubbed a natural genius and taken to court by Queen Caroline. The publication and promotion of *The Thresher's Labour* (1736), a poem describing the life of a labourer, gave Duck recognition as a writer based on social ideology pertaining to labouring writers. Duck was accepted mainly because he was marketed to the public under the banner of "honesty, industry and piety" (Christmas 62), and as a member of the "deserving poor" (76), qualities that were reflected in his poetry. Although Duck had many admirers (mostly because he remained humble and deferential to the upper classes) his fame did not sit well with established authors from polite society, mainly Pope, and Swift, and the plebeian writer suffered criticism from them as a result. Duck's fame provided an opportunity for washer woman Mary Collier to rebuke him on his famous poem. One section in

Duck's poem portrays women as idle gossips who are industrious when the Master is present, but otherwise need supervision to get the work done (19-21). Collier's *The Woman's Labour* refutes Duck's claims and recognizes women for their hard work, not only in domestic service and as gleaners, but as mothers, wives, and family caregivers. Collier's writing was noticed because of her bold rebuttal to an already famous poem, and because of her humble background as a plebeian woman.

Christmas also claims that many critics and patrons used their position to "mirror their own superiority" (28). Thus, polite society gained respect from their peers by appearing to come to the aid of the poor, all the while keeping the latter under their control and in their proper social sphere. Christmas argues that, in turn, some of the plebeian writers manipulated the situation in order to benefit from their patrons:

> The lack of formal education and the hardships of poverty thus became cultural tropes which authors from plebeian backgrounds could invoke in order to sell themselves to a reading public predisposed to support them—or at least tolerate them as curiosities. (27-8).

Christmas further argues that the writing of the plebeian poets may reflect a deeper meaning because they wrote to "replace the drudgery of their daily tasks" (23). In other words, the daily grind not only incited the labourer to write in order to escape the monotony of their work, but it further encouraged them to communicate their problems, ideals, or aspirations related to their work and more specifically, to their social rank.

Susan Kord perceives the poetic practice of labouring writers as "unconscious" rather than "premeditated" (33). In other words, Kord claims that the labourer had an innate association with nature and did not deliberately contemplate its presence. This association with the natural

world categorized the plebeian poet as such because they were inspired by passion and enthusiasm as opposed to reason or judgment. Kord examines the notion of “genius” in rural communities as “being absent or ignorant of poetic rules” (27), and focuses on the social importance of this concept in eighteenth-century society. She also raises the question of the manifestation of the genius as a form of control by the bourgeoisie.

Eighteenth -century society was fascinated with what it perceived as “primitive,” that is, those who “had lived outside normal society” (Greene 157). According to Richard Greene, society claimed that natural geniuses wrote without need of reference to books or other sources of knowledge. Instead, their work was produced on impulse. The following quotation from William Duff’s eighteenth-century essay attempts to explain this phenomenon: “The truth is, a Poet of original Genius has very little occasion for the weak aid of Literature: he is self-taught. He comes into the world as it were completely accomplished” (Duff 281-2). Greene further explains how the theory of primitivism was utilized as a method by which the social order could be preserved without having to explain the intelligence of the lower classes. In fact, the labouring writers resented having to rely on the genius label in order to be taken seriously by subscribers.

Opportunities for the plebeian writer improved during the course of the eighteenth century as the range of accessible print increased, and afforded them with additional reading material, often on current news topics. Vivien Jones’s *Women and Literature in Britain*, discusses the increased potential for publication for the marginalized, mainly for women and the poor. Furthermore, the added prospect for the lower ranks and for women to be able to publish their own work blurred the lines of social hierarchy. For example, public spaces such as clubs and coffee houses that were previously exclusive to the literate male population, were now open to the female sex. Although the participation of women was limited, and the majority were still

men, a culture willing to include the opinions of women emerged. Paula McDowell, author of "Women and the Business of Print," claims that the rise of print culture affected women of all ranks, not only the educated elite, and offered unprecedented prospects for all to access printed material and to publish one's works (136). William Christmas points out, however, that most plebeian writers were at the mercy of their patrons to open the doors to access print culture, as the latter often created and controlled the list of subscribers (161). This method of soliciting assistance from patrons was necessary to provide a means of support for the writer who otherwise would not have been able to publish his/her work. In fact, some of the most established writers had to seek the help of subscribers to publish their earlier works. *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* by Dustin Griffin poems discusses Mary Leapor and claims that, despite her talent, the likelihood of Leapor publishing on her own was highly unlikely (192-3). He further states that Leapor, Ann Yearsley, and Robert Woodhouse would not have been published had it not been for patronage (289).

For the labouring writer to be given the same opportunities as those in bourgeois society would pose a threat to polite society, which was already concerned with keeping the poor under its control. Social control was becoming more of a priority as the century wore on; with the looming revolution in France, the higher ranks of English society felt it necessary to keep the lower ranks in their proper place (Rule 4-5, 244; Wagoner 6-31). However, an increase in literacy permitted a higher percentage from the labouring ranks to express their views based on the written materials they accessed. Of course, this was much to the chagrin of the government and bourgeois society who, according to E. P. Thompson, took the responsibility of "putting the houses of the poor in order" (56). The political programming behind the reason for keeping the poor, poor, would also have been a necessary part of their instruction.

Educating the Eighteenth-Century Woman

Education offered the poor an instruction in occupational skills that was in line with their social standing, along with the moral and religious duties that accompanied their labouring class status. For girls from the labouring ranks, the difficulties faced in an effort to obtain an education must have seemed insurmountable. Society did not see the need for women to be educated in the same way as men, and the education offered in the higher ranks of society was not even intended for girls. Public schools of the eighteenth century offered a more comprehensive education than private schooling, and were intended for boys. For this reason, Vicessimus Knox argued that public schools were superior, and that girls who were inclined to learn languages be admitted to private schools that specialized in the subject.

Because virtue was considered to be essential to both sexes, it was thought better for girls to be taught these good behaviours in the comfort of their own home, while boys should be socialized (Woodley 31). Clarissa Campbell Orr's essay "Aristocratic Feminism, the Learned Governess, and the Republic of Letters," discusses the education of the elite, aristocratic female during the eighteenth century. How to conduct oneself in society was important for girls of the upper ranks; lessons in morality and virtue were central to female education. Campbell Orr maintains that some female educators, like Mme LePrince de Beaumont and Mme de LaFite, offered what may be considered as proto-feminist education in their teachings, as their literary materials helped cultivate a woman's place in a broadening society. Girls of the labouring classes, however, when part of an educational system at all, were trained in areas that would enable them to serve and maintain their position in their social rank (Cameron-Miller 110-11). Many girls were educated in the home, either by a parent or a sibling. Girls sometimes learned while listening to a family member home school their brothers, while others had access to

libraries in the homes where they worked in service. John Rule contends that because school was not compulsory, it is impossible to determine whether literary skills were acquired from home or from school. It should be noted that Rule's study is based on complete literacy; that is to say, reading and writing. Not only were educational resources limited, but children were often needed at home as farmhands or as caregivers for siblings and could not attend school on a regular basis. Children were more likely to go to school during a time of prosperity rather than in economic slumps. Heavy workloads limited the amount of time available to dedicate to even the basics of literacy (Rule 230-31).

A study conducted by Douglas Cameron-Miller on elementary schooling and literacy in three main areas of Britain during the eighteenth century states that although grammar schools and private schools were established during the period, charity schools were the best known institutions of the period to offer basic education to both boys and girls, including those from the working classes. That is not to say that grammar and private schools did not accept girls. The few that did however, accepted students from the higher ranks who met the reading and writing prerequisites. In addition, many charged tuition, which would have ruled out most from the labouring ranks (Cameron-Miller 92-154). *Education in Early Modern England* (1998) by Helen Jewell reports that some students who were destitute were educated in the workhouse, although the requirements for the time allotted to teach the children varied among institutions (Jewell 93, Cameron-Miller 93). Though both genders were admitted to the charity schools, the curriculum for boys and girls differed. Boys were usually taught reading, writing, and accounts, while girls were taught reading, knitting, and sewing. The information contained in Cameron-Miller's study is based mostly on Charity Commission Reports and the documents from the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The SPCK, which helped establish the charity schools,

also intended for them to offer room and board, clothing, religious instruction, and basic literacy. Most charity schools, for reasons of funding, could not meet these requirements, and consequently could not follow the SPCK model. Instead, they would substitute meals for clothing, or one meal instead of two, and so on.

John Rule claims that the charity schools received more credit than they deserved in regard to educating the poor. Although they did provide the basics in education, their primary goal was to instill values in children who, it was feared, were lacking in discipline, and needed the guidance of the catechism and the Bible in order to remain good, "God-fearing" citizens (232). In other words, the motive behind setting up the charity schools was to reform the young, a measure of social control. According to Rule, in addition to offering free education, the schools were meant to help the students accept their status, and not to encourage social advancement. Simply put, students of the charity schools were given the very basics in education in an effort to keep them poor; the system made it impossible for them to think otherwise. The following remarks by Davies Gilbert (Miller), delivered in 1807 represent his rank and age:

> However specious in theory the project might be of giving education to the labouring classes of the poor, it would in effect be prejudicial to their morals and happiness: it would teach them to despise their lot in life, instead of making them good servants to agriculture and other laborious employments to which their rank in society had destined them…it would enable them to read seditious pamphlets, vicious books and publications against Christianity. It would render them insolent and indolent to their superiors, and in a few years the result would be that the legislature would find it necessary to direct the strong arm of power towards them. (qtd. in Rule *Labouring* 235)

Gilbert, like many of his peers, feared that educating the working classes would lead them to debauchery. It was believed that ignorance kept them under control. In 1771, Arthur Young made a similar declaration with this statement: "everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious" (Thompson 358; Coleman 280-1). Young's statement suggesting that keeping the working class hungry and poor would motivate them to work was a view not challenged by the charity schools. In fact, the very existence of these institutions was justified because it was conceived that the children of the poor were given an opportunity to avoid prostitution or other forms of debauchery.

Sunday schools were also very much preoccupied with the morality of the labouring classes; the difference was that the lower ranks of society eventually managed the schools themselves. That is to say, that the students became teachers, thereby making the schools a product of working class culture. Nonetheless, Methodist teachings reared children for a life of arduous labour through discipline and order, while also instilling in them the acceptance of one's lot in life (Rule 248).

Social conditions were also influential in shaping the working-class women of the eighteenth century. As we have seen, the enclosure acts created a division between the work produced by both sexes, directing men to work outdoors, and women, indoors. In addition, the changes in living standards of the middling ranks secured women's positions in domestic service, as women were hired as servants, maids, cooks, scullery maids, and maids of all work. Parliament then imposed a labour tax on domestic service, deeming it unnecessary and superfluous. Eventually, work that was performed out of doors, such as in agriculture and husbandry, which were not taxed, were more respected and considered of greater value to the British economy.

Social control thrust women into a world of domestic service, keeping them from wider expanses and better opportunities. Similarly, religious instruction was also designed to direct girls towards what society expected of them as members of the labouring ranks.

Chapter 2 – Recasting the Mould: Religious Writing and the Eighteenth-Century Labouring Woman

Thrice happy she, condemned to move
Beneath the servile weight,
Whose thoughts ne'er soar one inch above
The standard of her fate.
Ellen Taylor – "Written by the Barrow side, where she was sent to wash Linen"

As we have seen, religious beliefs and practices in England greatly shaped the education of children. In fact, it could be said that education was based almost entirely on religion, especially in the case of the labouring poor who were usually offered an education for the sole purpose of reading their Bible. Much of the curriculum established by Protestant Christianity was based on morals established by religion, and was backed up by religious scripture. Furthermore, women from the labouring ranks who experienced discrimination based on their gender and their social status, and who may have wanted to express their frustrations in this regard, would do so by way of religious writing.

Labouring women could reach a wider audience by making use of religious poetry as a genre that was familiar and accessible to all ranks of British society.

The English Reformation dates to the sixteenth century when King Henry VIII broke ties with the Roman Catholic Church. The events transpired as part of the Protestant Reformation, a wider protest that took place during the same period across Europe. Religious practices that had been in place for centuries were questioned by religious leaders and members of the clergy, as

reason came to challenge the orthodox views of the Roman Catholic religion. Many religious leaders wanted reform, and broke away from the church to practice and preach their doctrines, resulting in different sects. The most prominent of these systems of belief arising from the Reformation era was Calvinism, which competed with Arminianism as the official form of Protestant practice in the early to mid-seventeenth century in Europe. Calvinists in England opposed the monarchy, and believed that salvation was acquired by God's grace alone, and only for a select few. The Puritans, founded during the sixteenth century and who wanted reform and stricter regulations regarding worship and doctrine, also became a powerful force during the seventeenth century. Latitudinarians were considered to be conformists (although they did not adhere to specific practice and doctrine), and gained power after the close of the Civil War in 1660. Nonconformist groups in England were described as "those who did not conform to all ceremonies of the Church of England but wished to purify it from within, not to separate from it" (Rivers 90). Amongst these were the Quakers, Baptists, Presbyterians (descendants of the Puritans), and Congregationalists.

Literary Works of Dissenters and Nonconformists

Many significant works were published to enable both conformists and nonconformists to state their views, as well as to refute those of their opponents. Richard Baxter was an influential, nonconformist preacher and writer who wrote over 130 books, of which *The Reformed Pastor; Call to the Unconverted* (1658) still inspires readers (Keeble). Another highly influential writer was John Bunyan, who wrote*'s Progress* (1678), "one of the most popular books ever printed" (Greaves). Amongst other well-known literary works of the seventeenth century were Lewis Bayly's *The Practice of Pietie* (1612), William Ames's *Medulla Sacrae*

Theologiae (1627), translated posthumously as *The Marrow of Sacred Divinity,* William Chillingworth's *The Religion of Protestants a Safe Way to Salvation* (1638), and Simon Patrick's *The Parable of the Pilgrim* (1665). These books, and many others like them, emerged over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and were written to represent, defend, and explain religious doctrine. The discussion that follows here is based on the findings in Isabel Rivers's book *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660-1780*.

Conformists argued that writers of nonconformist literature were employing language that was too specialised, thus generating more confusion than clarity. Richard Baxter, a rational Dissenter, was an exception to this claim, however. Although Baxter was an admirer of learning and books, he insisted that religion could not be defined in words alone, that unclear language will cause disagreement, and that scripture must be felt as well as read. Baxter did not attend university but read profusely and his works showed that he was well versed in theology, philosophy, and ecclesiastical studies. He also believed that those in the Christian ministry should be educated, as knowledge is essential to the understanding of the Scriptures. Baxter also declared his preference for those who are more educated in the matters of the heart than of the mind, while expressing his distaste for those who dislike education simply because they are not acquainted with it (Rivers 89-111).

John Bunyan, unlike Baxter, claimed that the Bible was the only book he needed to provide him with adequate knowledge in matters of faith. Although there is evidence of his literary knowledge in his works, Bunyan attempted to conceal his education and "despised learning" (Rivers 111). His own allegorical epic, *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), one of the most popular books ever written, was intended, among other things, to be a spiritual guide based on Bunyan's

own experiences (Greaves). Whereas Bunyan and Baxter differed in matters of education as a means to study Scripture, they held similar views regarding preaching, and were powerful speakers capable of captivating huge crowds.

Isaac Watts was also a powerful speaker, able to engage children as well as adults in his sermons and speeches. He is best known for his hymn writing, but also wrote books to educate children in secular as well as in religious matters. These books included instructional guides to coach parents on how to teach religion to children as young as three years of age. Watts was troubled by the growing division between rationalist and evangelical views, which resulted in his production of several works and sermons on the subject. His closest friend, Philip Doddridge, also a Dissenter and hymn writer, wrote *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul* (1745) at Watt's request. Both Watts and Doddridge worked to balance the rational and evangelical penchants of Dissent, the latter based on traditional Reformation principles of grace, and the former on reason and science.

The Evangelical Revival

What is known as the "Evangelical Revival" took place in the early eighteenth century, and gained considerable momentum throughout the century. Several groups existed under this umbrella, and shared some commonalities. One such commonality was the unconventional practice of nomadic preachers holding outdoor services, and another was their return to the Reformation doctrines of justification and regeneration in agreement with the Thirty-Nine Articles (Rivers 206). Two groups dominated the Methodist movement. One was headed by Howell Harris, lay preacher and founder of Welsh Calvinist Methodism, George Whitefield, clergyman, and the Countess of Huntingdon founder of a theological college in Wales, while

John and Charles Wesley led the second group called "The Societies of People called Methodists." John Wesley was especially concerned about the religion of reason as a direct attack on "true religion" (Rivers 206-7), with the deists denying the authority of Scripture, but more so with the moralists, who often misinterpreted Scripture, thus denying the meaning of feeling and experience in religion. Other groups like the Calvinists, the Moravians, and the mystics placed too much emphasis on experience and feeling, offending the dictates of reason. Wesley believed in the necessity of reason, but not on its own. He professed that God could not be known by reason alone, but that the journey to discovery must be accompanied by revelation and experience in order to be authentic. Wesley's views changed throughout his career, and he clashed with other religious groups, especially the Calvinists. He usually identified himself as an Arminian, and sometimes as a Pelagian (one who does not believe in the detrimental effects of original sin), possibly to elicit a response from his adversaries.

Wesley's writings appealed to the common person, the "unlearned" mainly, as he defended them, "because these are the far greater number" (Rivers 215). His advocacy for the common people did not translate into simplifying or demeaning the message behind his writing. On the contrary, Wesley expressed his preference for the unlearned audience to the polite audience, claiming that "*freethinkers*, so called, are seldom *close thinkers*" (Rivers 215).

This approach of reaching out to the common and unlearned person by John Wesley was extended to the very poorest members of English society, who were given a means of education with the establishment of Charity schools under the Methodist movement. It was important to John Wesley that both boys and girls be accepted in the Methodist charity schools, because, in his view, everyone should have the opportunity to produce the best work that would lead to their salvation (Martin 62).

Why Religious Writing?

Religion was such a deep influence in eighteenth-century society that the education of children was centred on religious beliefs, and young scholars were instructed accordingly. The education provided in charity schools was guided by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), whose goal was to promote piety and industriousness only, and not skills that would be required to improve one's social standing.

The same might be said of Methodist teachings. Although they offered an education even to the poorest of children, the Methodist approach was controversial to some because children were indoctrinated at a very young age, and were encouraged to conform to Methodist beliefs which involved control over the child, as is conveyed in Wesley's sermon "On Obedience to Parents":

> Break their wills betimes. Begin this work before they can run alone, before they can speak plain, perhaps before they can speak at all. Whatever pain it costs, break the will if you would not damn the child. Let a child from a year old be taught to fear the rod and to cry softly; from that age make him do as he is bid, if you whip him ten times running to effect it…Break his will now, and his soul shall live, and he will probably bless you to all eternity. (Wesley 41)

The Methodists were criticized for their rigid practices and staunch beliefs, but they were also known for providing an education to both genders and to all social classes. One example is Mary Bosanquet, a Methodist preacher, who in 1763 founded an orphanage referred to as a "community" (Martin 57), known for educating poor and destitute children, especially girls. Bosanquet was raised in an affluent Anglican merchant family who did not support her Methodist beliefs. She left a life of prosperity to pursue her calling, and proceeded to set up her community for orphaned children. In 1777, Bosanquet was credited with having placed 74

destitute young girls into service. Institutions such as these were instrumental in providing the poor with a sense of self-worth, which, on the other hand, was a concern for the higher ranks of society who grew more anxious that the working class was becoming increasingly restless. Nonetheless, Methodist teachings coincided with the moral concerns of the SPCK, and encouraged children and adults to become literate, which would at the very least enable them to read their Bibles. Furthermore, women participated actively in diverse activities associated with the Methodist movement, a point verified by Margaret Maison's essay, "'Thine Only Thine!' Women Hymn Writers in Britain, 1760-1835." Maison describes how many women, influenced by dissenters, experienced equality and freedom from conformity for the first time. Some, like the Countess of Huntingdon (1707-91), set up and controlled their own Methodist chapels, regardless of the ridicule they may have encountered (11).

Similar to Bosanquet, Hannah More also included both genders and all social classes in her Sunday schools. More felt that the poor should receive a basic education only, enough to read their Bibles, and was "horrified" at the thought of providing anything more. Nonetheless, she and her sister, under the umbrella of Evangelical Christianity, established several Sunday schools in the Mendips, with the purpose of teaching literary skills to thousands of children. The schools were not reported as oppressive, and More was known as a kind instructor who frowned on severity and harsh reprimand (Stott, 41- 53).

Since Protestant Christianity and the Bible were available to almost everyone, many women, especially those who were self-taught, were inclined to produce works that paraphrased passages from the Bible and to produce versifying scripture. In addition, many well-known poets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries wrote religious poetry in pastorals, elegies, or hymns. Poetry containing religious influence and nuances reached readers from all social ranks who had

easier access to printed materials. Some of the male influences included John Milton, Alexander Pope, and William Cowper. Anne Finch and Elizabeth Singer Rowe were among the most influential women writers of religious poetry, while Mary Masters, Anna Letitia Barbauld and Susannah Harrison's hymns can still be found in today's Protestant hymnals (Backscheider 126), and a brief biography of Susannah Harrison can be located in an anthology by Gene Claghorn entitled *Women Composers and Hymnists: A Concise Biographical Dictionary* (1984).

Due to its popularity, religious poetry has largely been excluded from literary history. Current historians, Margaret Doody (12) and Bridget Keegan (Mysticisms 473) claim that religious poetry continues to be unappreciated and should be recognized as significant to the development of Augustan literature. Religious poetry offered those from the lower ranks a means of expression that was not considered to be in direct competition with writers from polite society. Accordingly, marginalized members of society wrote religious poetry as a means of expressing their views on repression, social control, and social inequality in a safe manner. This is especially true for labouring women, who often utilized religious poetry to shape an identity that was often unrecognized in the social climate of the eighteenth century. This environment prompted labouring poets Elizabeth Hands, who wrote *Death of Amnon,* and Anne Wilson, author of *Jephthah's Daughter*, to express their views through poetry based on biblical stories. This style of rebellious religious writing has been much more captivating to historians and critics than the traditional hymn, and consequently received more attention as a religious literary genre.

According to J. R. Watson, author of *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study,* (1999), hymns have generally been regarded as "a second-rate poetic form, limited in its aims and expressions, and disfigured by sentimentality, inflexible metres, self-congratulations, and religiosity…It has been regarded as primarily religious and only marginally and accidentally as a

part of literature" (2). Watson indicates that the hymn was for the most part not accepted as a genuine composition by secular critics, and was often perceived as inferior to other genres of poetic writing. For centuries, the limitations imposed by hymns, such as metrical limits and repetition have been viewed by critics as both repressive and restrictive. Keegan argues that all forms of religious writing, including hymns, must be respected during the twenty first-century to fully appreciate what was being projected by the author during the eighteenth century, even though the subject matter may not be as engaging as that of the more rebellious literature. Backscheider adds that hymns, like other poetry, were also written with autobiographical purpose, as is the case with Susannah Harrison who related her own life to references she took from the Bible.

Susannah Harrison (1752-1788): Hymns of Faith and Solace

An initial look at the hymns and verses of Susannah Harrison reveal what may be described as monotonous and repetitive to the modern reader. A closer look at the quality of Harrison's works and the period and circumstances under which her hymns were written, may bring forth a different appreciation of her style.

According to Bridget Keegan, Susannah Harrison's *Songs in the Night* "was one of the best-selling collections written by a laboring-class poet in the late eighteenth century" (Mysticisms 471). The book was published in London, Scotland, and America. The first edition, published in 1780, included 120 poems and sixteen 'Meditations in Blank Verse," while the second contained an additional eleven pages, and in 1788, an additional thirty-four pages. By 1823, *Songs in the Night* had an astonishing six American and fifteen British editions (*Feminist Companion* 153).

The biographical information I have gathered on Susannah Harrison has been derived from three main sources which include some conflicting information.[1] For example, *Eighteenth Century Labouring-Class Poets 1700-1800* (375) gives the year of her death as 1788, while *The Feminist Companion to Literature in English* shows 1784 (Todd 153), which coincides with that in the 1802 American publication of *Songs in the Night* (202). What all sources verify is that Harrison was self-taught, impoverished, worked as a servant from the age of sixteen, and four years later was bedridden with an unknown illness. Her writing shows hymn writers Thomas Ken and Anne Steele (Todd 153) as influences, as well as Milton and Cowper (Goodridge, 375). The acrostic that revealed her name in the second edition of *Songs in the Night,* offers some understanding of Harrison's personality and private life.

Susannah Harrison – *Songs in the Night*

S hall I presume to tell the world my name? –

U p to this hour I glory in my shame: --

S o great my weakness, that I boast of might;

A fool in knowledge, yet in wisdom right;

N o life, and yet I live; I'm sick, and well:

N ot far from Heav'n, though on the brink of Hell;

A nd words, and oaths, and blood delight me well.

H ow strange! I'm deaf, and dumb, and lame, and blind,

A nd hear, and see, and walk, and talk, you find.

[1] I have consulted several sources including *Orlando* which regrettably has no entry on Susannah Harrison. There is no exact date of her death based on the information provided.

R obb'd by my dearest Friend, I'm truly poor,

R iches immense I always have in store.

I' m fed by mortals; but, let mortals know,

S uch is my food, no mortal can bestow.

O h! how I long to die, and wish to live! –

N ow, if you can, explain th' account I give.

The Reverend John Conder wrote a personal recommendation to the second edition of Harrison's book. He could have been the editor for both editions, although the editor`s name is not disclosed in the first edition. In the earlier edition, the editor (assumed to be Conder), describes the author as one of great modesty, who did not wish to share her writing with anyone until after her death. Her name, in the first edition, was therefore not revealed, but Harrison agreed to relinquish it in the form of an acrostic for the second edition. The acrostic contrasts her life as a mortal with her spiritual life, where she does not suffer: "No life, and yet I live; I'm sick, and well." It also contrasts her knowledge as a mortal with her spiritual awareness: "A fool in knowledge, yet in wisdom right." The line "Robb'd by my dearest Friend, I'm truly poor" differs from Harrison's other terms of expression. She suggests that God is responsible for her affliction, and claims that he took away what was rightfully hers.

In the preface of the first edition of *Songs in the Night*, Conder explains how Harrison's modesty prevented her from considering publication until she was faced with death, at which time she entrusted her writing to her benefactor. The opportunity to promote Harrison and to portray her as a destitute woman who conforms to society's image of the labouring writer did not escape Conder. In the following citation, he first apologizes for the lack of finesse in her writing, and then compliments her use of a vocabulary that is less familiar to the poor:

> I am sensible there may be several occasional escapes, as to her language, grammar, and other ornaments of exact writing, as well as some instances of her County phraseology; which, however, it has been judged proper to let stand, as coming from HER pen, rather than attempt corrections in those particulars. Nevertheless, I am free to own, that I have been greatly pleased with her uniformity of sentiment, the propriety with which she useth words less common, and the general smoothness of her verification. (vi)

Harrison's writing reflects her faith. Her works are generally introduced by a biblical citation, followed by her own hymnal composition. There is no evidence however, of the religious denomination she belonged to, but since her benefactor, Reverend Conder was a Congregationalist, it is reasonable to assume that she was one as well (Blain, 153).

Bridget Keegan suggests that writers like Harrison wrote less as a means of motivating or expressing political views, and more as a form of articulating one's devotion or expressing mystical experiences (472). Harrison's faith and spirituality alone inspired her and gave her solace, which set her apart from other religious writers who were often motivated by their political agenda, and used biblical themes as a framework for expressing their views. Donna Landry gives the example of Elizabeth Montagu who alleged that Ann Yearsley, as a labouring writer, was inspired strictly by religious material, when in fact she was most likely, like many other writers of the period, influenced by neoclassical mythology (35). William Christmas lists William Brimble, John Bennet, John Lucas, and John Bryant as examples of poor labourers who wrote verse with religious undercurrents to attract more subscribers. Their poetry was almost always of a pious nature, and charitable donations subtly requested (215). Harrison on the other hand, does not ask for contributions, does not have a list of subscribers, nor does she claim to be

devoted unconditionally to God. In fact, Harrison questions her plight in some of her psalms, as well as her own faith (*Songs* 54, 70, 72).

Harrison's devotional meditations, soliloquies and poetry may have been therapeutic for her, indeed perhaps the only therapy available. According to Paula Backscheider, most women who wrote religious hymns, did so to thank God for a recovery from an illness, a common practice in the eighteenth century. Harrison was likely influenced by Anne Steele (1717-78), a prominent hymn writer who was resigned to God`s will and based her writing on her suffering. Steele provided solace to many afflicted and isolated women of the period who, like herself, were beyond the help of the medical professionals and put their entire faith in God as their healer (Maison 16). Susannah Harrison thanks God, her benefactors, and it seems whomever she encounters from her position of convalescence. In addition to her offering thanks, almost every hymn and devotional meditation speaks of her faith and the sheer joy she derives from it. "Lord's-Day Morning" is a hymn situated at the beginning of *Songs in the Night*, and demonstrates Harrison's unyielding faith and her appreciation for the sublime:

Awake, my heart! my soul, arise!
This is the day believers prize:
Improve this Sabbath then with care:
Another may not be thy share,

. . . .

Go with me to thy house to-day,
And tune my heart to praise and pray;
Like dew command Thy word to fall,
Refreshing, quick'ning, saving all.

Call forth my thoughts, and let them rove

O'er the green pastures of Thy love;

O let not sin prevent my rest,

Nor keep me from my Saviour's breast.

Give to Thy church a large increase,

Send her prosperity and peace;

May all saints in Zion say,

O happy, happy, happy day! (5-6)

Not only does this hymn embrace a new day, it addresses the possibilities of what this day can bring: "This is the day believers prize." For Harrison, who was confined to her bed, the ability to be able to visualize and to articulate the sublime enabled her to feel joy: "Call forth my thoughts, and let them rove / O'er the green pastures of Thy love." Even as she is enveloped in unspoiled environmental beauty, Harrison does not lose sight of her devotion: "Like dew command Thy word to fall / Refreshing, quick'ning, saving all."

Not all of Harrison`s writing expressed feelings of joy, however. When one is faced with endless pain, it is to be expected that fear, melancholy, and despair will surface and attempt to break one's faith. Harrison is no exception in that she feels desperation, desolation, and hopelessness, which she expresses in several of her poems. Where she never falters is in her unrelenting quest to serve God, regardless of the anguish she is faced with. Although she expresses some bitterness and questions her predicament, and God, Harrison never fails to

proclaim her devotion. Most of Harrison's hymns are based on a verse from the Bible; the following, from the book of Job:

I will speak in the Bitterness of my Soul. – Job X 1.

In this extreme distress of soul

How can I but complain!

I can no more my speech controul,

No more from tears refrain.

Great is my anguish, deep my grief,

O whither shall I flee?

Far is my soul from all relief,

No help on Earth I see.

. . . .

Why so mysterious are Thy ways,

And dreadful in my sight?

Shew me, that I may lisp Thy praise,

And serve Thee with delight,

O chase this darkness from my mind,

And raise my thoughts above,

That I may full salvation find,

And celebrate Thy love. (93-4)

It is clear in this hymn and in many others in this segment of *Songs* that Harrison questioned her faith. Terms like "extreme distress," "Great is my anguish," and "No help on

Earth I see," are pleas of utter desperation, of losing, or lost hope. Yet, Harrison appeals to God to have her faith restored to "serve Thee with delight" and "celebrate Thy love." There is no question of her failing in her readiness or commitment to serve God. Rather, in her limited opportunities to confide in someone or to ask for guidance, she turned to God, the constant presence in her life. Writing her thoughts, no matter how oppressive, enabled Harrison to ask questions and perhaps to find answers to assure divine salvation. Regardless, writing was instrumental in keeping her faith as is proven in many of her subsequent hymns.

Although the majority of the religious writing produced by Harrison was strictly devotional, one of her works can be considered an exception. *A Call to Britain* was published as a broadside at the time of the American Revolutionary War, and was advertised in the first edition of *Songs in the Night*. It appeals to British citizens to trust in the glory to make things right. She then appeals to God for prosperity.

XVII.

O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now Prosperity*

Psal. Cxviii. 25.

O WHAT are all the best designs

To work upon rebellious minds!

'Tis not by might, or pow'r, or word,

But by the Spirit of the Lord;

'Tis only His own pow'r that can

Subdue the stubborn will of man:

Then let my faith address His throne,

And ask success of him alone. —

Bless this attempt, O God of grace!

To ev'ry soul, in ev'ry place,

Do Thou prosperity ordain,

That none may read or hear in vain.

This I request in Jesu's name;

His glory is my highest aim:

O for His sake let sinners be

Converted from their sins, to Thee?

Do Thou my warm desires succeed,

And make THIS CALL – a call indeed! —

Weak as it is, Thy pow'rful hand

Can make it useful to the land.

Pity the nation's deep distress,

And work its peace in righteousness.

Now for prosperity I pray: --

Send it, O Lord, without delay! – (185)

This poem has all the devotional nuances customary to Harrison's writing, but is different in tone. A close reading of the poem indicates that Harrison acts as a messenger on behalf of both Britain and God. The first stanza claims that God alone can make things right, and all efforts coming from man are futile: "'Tis only His own pow'r that can / Subdue the stubborn will

of man." She then suggests that her faith is strong enough that she may intercede, and asks for divine intervention on the nation`s behalf. In the second stanza, Harrison`s focus changes from saving Britain with God`s help, to serving God through the conversion of souls: "His glory is my highest aim: / O for His sake let sinners be / Converted from their sins, to Thee?" Her closing statement claims that both she and God, through her prayer, can alleviate the plight of the nation. Harrison addresses worldly issues and attempts to solve them in the manner with which she is most familiar.

Elizabeth Hands (1746-1815): Challenging the Status Quo

As much as Susannah Harrison's poetry was almost entirely devotional, Elizabeth Hands wrote religious poetry to challenge issues of social control and social injustice. Poetry based on biblical stories, usually of considerable length, was enjoyed by readers of the eighteenth century. Paula Backscheider has classified Hands's religious poetry as "subversive narrative" along with that of Elizabeth Singer Rowe (née1674) who likely influenced Hands as a writer of religious epic poetry (152, 173). Hands could well have read John Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophel* (1681), given his reference to the same biblical story that Hands wrote about. She published her poem *The Death of Amnon* in 1789; it is divided into five Cantos and written in blank verse. Based on the Second book of Samuel, Hands's poem is about the incestuous rape of Tamar by her half- brother Amnon. When their father, King David, hears of the rape and does nothing to punish his son, Absalom, Amnon's half- brother, avenges Tamar and has Amnon murdered. The subject of incest made the poem controversial, and had Hands and her supporter, Rev. Henry Homer, concerned about the public's reaction to its content. In 1787, Homer wrote a letter to a Mr. Richard Riland, asking for assistance in obtaining subscriptions for the publication of *The Death of Amnon.* In his letter, Homer states his concern about the topic of the poem, and

proceeds to quell any uneasiness by promoting the expert way in which Hands wrote the story (qtd. in Bedford 113). Certainly, the list of over 1200 subscribers was impressive, and impelled the reviewers to recognize its high calibre of writing despite the low social ranking of its author. Hands's dedication of her book is addressed to Bertie Greatheed, poet and playwright of Guy Cliffe, near Warwick (Russell), and also mentions "particular friends" who helped realize the publication. Cynthia Dereli points out that, based on the evidence found in the list of names of subscribers who were friends and family of the Homers, there is a strong possibility that the Homer family was instrumental in acquiring the extensive number of subscribers (172). According to the Birdingbury Local History Group in Warwickshire, Rev. Henry Homer was an influential member of the community and remains a prominent historical figure of the area. The group's website states that Homer was an avid supporter of social issues and includes one of his published remarks on the enclosure acts: "the taking away from the poor by the rich of privileges which the poor are too weak to retain" (www.birdingbury.org).

In 2001 Dereli produced the most comprehensive study of the author to date. She was successful in uncovering some of Hands's background with what little historical material is available, and from what she could infer from her poetry. Dereli suggests that, based on the expertise of her verse and understanding of her subject matter, Hands fits the profile of someone who was formally educated. Dereli's research confirms that Hands had access to her employers' books, and she further concedes that marrying later in life gave Hands the opportunity to enhance her literary abilities. Nonetheless, her duties as a female servant would have been extensive, leaving Hands little time to devote to reading and writing. Yet, there is evidence in her writing that she was influenced by some of the great poets of the period and earlier. "Critical Fragments, on Some of the English Poets" appears as the last item in her publication. The work features

allusions to Shakespeare, Milton, Pope, Young, Prior, and Swift, whose individual writing styles and patterns are impersonated by Hands. Donna Landry comments on this remarkable skill, and describes Hands as “an agile ventriloquist of the masculine canon” (193). She also mentions that the absence of chronological or patrilineal order in her poem gives Hands the opportunity to focus on style. Furthermore, that *The Death of Amnon* is written in blank verse suggests that Hands read Milton, to whom she also alludes in her poem: “Milton, in pond’rous verse, moves greatly on, / Weilding [sic] his massy theme; with wond’rous strength / He labours forward (Hands, 126).

Like Backscheider, Donna Landry defines Hands as rebellious in her approach to some of her poetry, and observes the presence of a “subversive animal energy,” specifically in Hands’s poem about a heifer wreaking havoc in a village (192). It is this style of rebellious writing, and the satire visible in much of her other poetry, that entices Landry to infer that Hands was a Dissenter. Grace Isobel Clark *in A Dictionary of British and American Women Writers 1660-1800* also alludes to Hands as a Dissenter (149). More specifically, as indicated by Donna Landry, her description of the Rector in her poem, “On the Supposition of the Book having been Published and Read”, may be an indication of Hands’s true opinion of the established Church of England: “The Rector reclin’d himself back in his chair/ And open’d his snuff-box with indolent air” (Landry 189; Hands 94-5). The Rector continues in his critique of Hands’s poetry in a haughty manner, while ensuring the author remains in her proper station: “To some of her equals they may be a treasure, / And country lasses may read ‘em with pleasure” (100-01). One might expect a labouring class poet of the period to write about a member of the clergy in a more respectful manner. To portray a Rector as pretentious and arrogant was not attempted by many writers in Hands’s position.

Dereli on the other hand, does not consider Hands to be subversive. She defines her as a working-class woman writing about rural life issues, and living in a world influenced by upper-class tradition. This she does expertly in an entertaining, albeit mocking manner, without direct offense to her audience (180). Landry faults Hands in *The Death of Amnon* for not committing fully to Tamar as a victim of rape. Landry claims that Hands reinstates patriarchal ideology by keeping the emphasis on the relationship between the servants and their masters, and minimizing the event that took place between the victim and her perpetrator (41). While Landry makes an interesting point, it is important to recognize that cultural formations from the past are different from our own. Since the subject of incestuous rape is an uncomfortable one, even today, is it not possible that it was more so three centuries ago? That Hands ventured to write about such a sensitive topic at all, certainly puts her in a category where few other women dared to venture. Although Hands may not have discussed violence against women as extensively as public discourse would now have it, the fact that she broached the subject at all during the eighteenth century is remarkable.

Saiward Pharr's 2006 thesis, "Hands's Own Tamar," argues that Hands does not diminish the role of Tamar, but enhances it by contrasting her behavior with that of the men in the story. Contrary to her father and brothers, Tamar remains silent, calm and focused in the wake of the event, a detail that is not lost on Hands. To portray Tamar as a vengeful and bitter person would not be convincing; to portray her as quiet and submissive would be characteristic of her patriarchal and oppressive milieu. Pharr questions the lack of resolution for Tamar when Absalom abandons her after Ammon's murder. Yet, Hands wanted to represent Tamar in accordance with the reality in which she existed. There is no closure for Tamar; she is left to

mourn the loss of her innocence without the help of the men who, instead of protecting her, robbed her of her worth:

> Ent’ring his mansion, to where Tamar sat
> In the most striking attitude of woe;
> Her head, bestrew’d with ashes and reclin’d,
> One trembling hand supported; th’other hid
> Among the fragments of her robe, which she
> In the first agonies of her grief had torn. (25)

This scene takes place when Absalom finds Tamar after the rape. Her pain is reflected in her posture, along with the appearance of ashes on her forehead, a sign of mourning. Absalom then attempts to console her by telling her that she is still pure of heart. In her state of extreme grief, Tamar relates her torment to her brother:

> O injury unparallel’d ! O deed
> More cruel than the murd’rers deadly blow!
> He takes our life, ‘twas lent but for a time;
> Perhaps some years—perhaps a day—an hour:
> But he that robs a woman of her honour,
> Robs her of more than life;--a brother too
> Still aggravates the guilt.—O purity,
> Thou first of female charms, to thee we owe
> Our dignity; which, if in meekness clad,
> Gives us insuperable pow’r; but, if
> Of this depriv’d, our most presumpt’ous claim

Is cool compassion. O dejected state!

That humble homage we receive from men,

In such proportion as our virtue fails,

Diminishes. (26)

Here, Hands captures the feelings of shame and hopelessness felt by Tamar, who voices her injury as "unparalleled" and worse than death. She brilliantly reflects her own views of patriarchal society through her portrayal of Tamar, who knows she will no longer live up to the standards of male ideology as a symbol of innocence and purity.

But Hands first successfully captures the aftermath of the crime from the point of view of the criminal. The perpetrator does not go unscathed as she describes Amnon as a suffering pitiful being who cannot live with his actions:

Heav'n gave to man superior strength, that he

The weaker sex might succour and defend;

But he that dares pervert this giv'n blessing,

To ruin and destroy their innocence,

Shall feel pursuing vengeance, nor escape

Her rod uplifted, nor avert the stroke.

Conviction's sword shall pierce him, and remorse

With all the tortures of the mind assail,

Till he a victim falls to grim despair;

Except repentance timely to his aid

Come with her tears, to sooth, to mitigate;

While her attendant hope extends a ray,

To point where mercy spreads her healing wings.

Nor e'en with this is vengeance satisfied,

She'll still pursue with some external ills,

Exhausted health and spirits; --drooping—drear,

An outcast of society he roams,

Alike discarded by his friends and foes;

Perhaps assassination proves his end. (18)

. . . .

Jonadab experiences Amnon's wrath as the former attempts to congratulate his friend on his achievement. Amnon rebuffs Jonadab's praises and blames him for the rape of Tamar. Amnon voices his pain to his former friend: "I'm lost, I'm irrecoverably lost" (19), and proceeds to lament the pain and regret he suffers: "An hell within me burns, and deep remorse, / That never dying worm, now gnaws my soul (20).

There is no pity in her words. Hands does not hold back as she characterises Amnon's remorse in stages, first by defining men as the protectors of women, and then by portraying them as beasts should they renounce their responsibility and hurt their charge. And just when the criminal may think that repenting has soothed his soul, vengeance disguised as despair will once again prevail. As for Tamar, her role in the poem ends with her exile into Absalom's home, where she behaves as is expected of her, and is committed to silence and mourning for life.

When reading the *Death of Amnon* for the first time, one is reminded of the similarities between the eighteenth and twenty-first centuries, or to be more precise, what social issues still exist despite the evolution and progression into a seemingly more responsive society. The issue

of violence against women persists in the twenty-first century. Even though there has been considerable progress in discussing and exposing the problem, sexual violence continues to plague women worldwide. When Elizabeth Hands first encountered the biblical text, and read about the rape of a young girl, was she alarmed as well by the similarities that survived between two societies that were centuries apart? Was she surprised that a dilemma concerning women that existed in the Old Testament persisted into the eighteenth century? Her decision to write about a subject as controversial as an incestuous rape indicates that the subject was clearly of concern. Producing a work of this calibre during the eighteenth century certainly required a substantial measure of confidence and bravery along with a set of skills that would present the content without causing a public stir. Hands possessed the skills necessary to produce such work; not only did she write about what was offensive to polite society, she also unlocked possibilities for other women to broach the unmentionable. Similar to Hands, Anne Wilson wrote a poem based on a biblical story, *Jephthah's Daughter,* and goes so far as to change the ending in order to reflect her personal views on the oppression and injustices surrounding women.

Anne Wilson: An Unidentified Prodigy

All available biographical information about Anne Wilson stems from *Teisa*, a 68-page, locodescriptive poem about the River Tees published in Newcastle in 1778. Although Wilson indicates in her poem that she is marginalized, and describes herself as being part of a "humble lot" (381), and "servile" (383), John Goodridge suggests that her status as a labouring class writer is arguable since many women considered themselves to be deprived and uneducated, regardless of their circumstances (363). However, as Goodridge clarifies, there are observations in *Teisa* that strongly suggest Wilson was a labourer, since she describes specific occupations in

detail. (This will be explored further in chapter three). Wilson`s literary influences include Milton, Cowper, Denham, and particularly Pope, who made use of locodescriptive poetry in *Windsor Forest*.

"Mrs. Ann Wilson" published *Jephthah's Daughter* in 1783. It is a poem based on a biblical story in the Book of Judges about a father sacrificing his daughter in exchange for a military victory. There is no conclusive evidence that the author of *Jephthah's Daughter* is the same author of *Teisa*, but Goodridge claims that it is a possibility, since the writing style and time lines of both works coincide. Roger Lonsdale, on the other hand, argues that there is nothing to link the two other than "an occasionally uncertain grasp of metre and grammar" (354). However, the *Orlando* database shows Anne Wilson and Mrs. Anne Wilson as the same person and author of both works. This is also the case in the *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* database, which lists both entries of the published works under the name Ann Wilson.

Goodridge points out that many labouring class poets wrote about the biblical account of Jephthah and his daughter. One in particular is Anne Yearsley who published *On Jephthah's Vow* a few years later in 1787. Yearsley exposes the patriarchal ideology of religion, and chastises a father and a society who puts no value on women and children: "Hence, dupes! Nor make a Moloch of your God / Tear not your Infants from the tender breast / Nor throw your Virgins to consuming fires (138).

Wilson's rendition of the biblical story has some similarities to Yearsley's; although they both use blank verse, the style and structure differ. Wilson's *Jephthah's Daughter* is a 55-page dramatic poem in five scenes, whereas Yearsley's poem is eight pages in length. The similarities lie in how the authors commit to the victim in the story, Jephthah's daughter herself, who will be sacrificed in the name of Jehovah. While Yearsley reproaches Jephthah and his culture for

considering human sacrifice, Wilson concentrates less on the protofeminist concept, and more on the virtues attributed to the daughter. In order to preserve her father's honour, the daughter has agreed to the sacrifice before the first scene. Although this is a representation of unquestioning filial servitude within a patriarchal society, it can be argued that the daughter acts on her own moral code.

In the preface of her poem, Wilson discusses her reasons for not adhering to the biblical version of the story. Although, as Wilson states, the biblical text strongly indicates that Jephthah's daughter was in fact sacrificed "many learned and pious persons have sufficiently proved that she was not" (2). More recent academic assessments of the biblical text (Mehlman, Reiss), suggest that it is questionable whether or not Jephthah's daughter was put to death since it is not stated clearly in the text. That "he did to her as he had vowed" offers other options, one of which is the possibility that the daughter relocated to the mountains, alone, where she would remain for life (Reiss 59). Wilson so admired the daughter's virtues that she could not condemn her to death or to a loveless existence: "…my intentions were to have made it a tragedy; but this my feelings would not suffer. The more I contemplated the virtues of Jephthah's daughter, the greater my aversion to her death" (iii). She fabricated a new ending, where the daughter is spared through divine intervention and marries her love. Wilson names her Jemima (likely after Job's eldest daughter) whereas Jephthah's daughter remained nameless in the biblical story.

Wilson portrays Jemima not only as virtuous, but as wise and self-confident. She is aware of the powers of men in the society in which she lives, of which she warns her friends when her death looms near:

Jem. Mark their looks, eyes will tell
What words deny.

Strange perfidy of the superior sex,

That force the maid to actions insincere!

Nor when, with ardent tears, the lover sues,

Dare the soft tender pitying maid

Own the feelings of her conscious heart.

For men, like the Lamia, soft tears will shed,

When female innocence they wou'd devour,

And often boast that they have gain'd an artless

Virgin's heart—

If she has consented to surrender

Her honour to your base ignoble lust,

You do well to boast, that succeeding maidens

May profit by her loss.

But if when, with looks of seeming innocence,

You gently did solicit for her love,

And she did own the soft movements of her heart,

If through pride, and folly, then ye boast;

You are strangers unto the congenial,

Unto the divine harmony of souls;

By no soft gentle mother were ye nurst;

But amidst dark savage woods were bred,

Where deep howling wolves, and fierce

Tygers prey! (3-4)

Jemima warns of men's deceit, of their need to boast after capturing a female's innocence and then ridiculing her naïveté. She cautions such men that their lack of scruples

makes them no better than beasts in the forest. When Ebineezer, Jephthah's servant, attempts to dishonour Jemima, she stands up to her offender and, in turn, humiliates him:

> *Jem*. Get thee hence, sly foolish man, fly from my sight.
>
> Jemima has been courted for to live
>
> By a form as fair as thine is foul;
>
> Go put ashes upon thy hoary head;
>
> Spend thy few remaining years in penitence,
>
> Ere thou art call'd before that Judge
>
> Who cannot bear impurity. (16)

Jemima renounces Ebineezer's advances and reminds him that she is being courted by someone far superior. She then banishes him into exile with a warning that he will be judged by higher powers. Even when she forgives Ebineezer, Jemima does so out of pity for him, and speaks in accordance with her own virtue:

> Think not, Ebineezer, that rancour now
>
> Can reign within my breast:
>
> My soul already seems an unison of those fair abodes,
>
> Where, like Aaron's rod, love all other passions does devour.
>
> Thou has my pity for thy gross offence,
>
> And may all-gracious Heaven thy pardon seal. (37)

Jemima agrees to forgive Ebineezer based solely on her integrity, just as she concedes to her father`s sacrificial offering. Wilson commits to her opinion of Jemima throughout the poem, and

portrays her as an individual who makes decisions based on her virtue and not merely from obligation.

This chapter has explored three authors whose works have been highlighted because of their religious content. All three have their own style and their reasons for producing religious poetry. Susannah Harrison wrote with unquestionable faith, and, judging by the number of publications of *Songs in the Night*, offered hope and comfort to many in need. Elizabeth Hands and Ann Wilson chose to write about biblical texts as a venue to voice their opinions or concerns about the sociopolitical issues surrounding women during the eighteenth century. In both instances, Hands and Wilson modified their story from the original; Hands, in *The Death of Amnon* by changing the focus of victimization, and Wilson, in *Jephthah's Daughter*, by changing the outcome of a tragedy. Regardless of their approach, all three women, who were part of a system that shunned those who did not meet the standards set out by the higher ranks of eighteenth-century society, overcame the odds by learning to read and write and, finally, had their works published while they lived to bask in their accomplishments.

Chapter 3 – Voicing the Struggle: Women Writing about Work

Labour while Heaven allows you Strength,

Let all your Work to God be done;

A sure Reward shall come at length,

And everlasting Life be won.

Susannah Harrison, *Songs in the Night*.

The first chapter discussed the absence of historical records on women and work during the eighteenth century, based on the findings of studies by Hill, Landry, Honeyman, Ferguson, and Steedman among other scholars. Hannah Barker in "Women and Work" suggests that, although women were not counted in the hearth tax of the sixteenth century or the census of the nineteenth century, their presence as domestic service workers was quite visible. Barker reminds us, as do Bridget Hill and Carolyn Steedman, that domestic service was the most widespread mode of employment for women during the period. In her comparison of men and women in service, Hill concludes that most domestic servants were, in fact, women (125). What's more, in "Poetical Maids and Cooks Who Wrote," Steedman explains how domestics who could write poetry were considered "fashionable," and employers recognized their ability to write as being helpful in the day to day management of a household. Hiring a cook or a maid who could write had its benefits for the employers. For example, a written recipe or some culinary instructions that could be passed on to new kitchen staff was convenient considering the high turnover in staff in some of the households (9). Because of their social rank, domestic servants who wrote were not considered a threat to writers from the upper ranks, and therefore did not offend members of polite society. There was the added possibility of a connection, either through work

or by reference, between the labouring writer and members of the upper ranks, leading to the acquisition of patrons for publication. As for the patron, there was a certain level of satisfaction in helping domestic plebeian writers achieve publication that would most likely not have been possible without their charitable donation. In addition, keeping domestics, especially those with talent at their mercy for financial security, was much to the satisfaction of the employers who did not wish to give too much opportunity for financial freedom to the working classes. Nonetheless, even with the restrictions, conditions, and criteria set out by polite society, women in domestic service, although marginalized by their gender and social standing, managed to write poetry that got noticed by members of the higher ranks of society.

Poetry written by the labouring writers sometimes expressed socio-political views from the perspective of the working ranks. Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck*,[2] was published in London in 1739. Collier, a washerwoman from Hampshire, wrote the poem as a rebuttal to Stephen Duck's, *The Thresher's Labour* in 1730. Sections of Duck's poem refer to women as "prattling Females," and imply that women labourers are more concerned with gossip than with work: "Ah! Were their Hands so active as their Tongues / How nimbly then would move the Rakes and Prongs!" (20). Collier's thirty-page poem addressed to Mr. Duck, involves a description of a day in the life of a labouring woman. Collier attests to women in service and in husbandry as labouring as much as men, with the added responsibility of a household and children to care for. Her response to Duck's statements about women labourers is courageous, and was perhaps even considered by some as foolhardy, coming from a woman of the lower ranks. Collier received the support of her friends who verify in the advertisement to the 1739 publication of "The Woman's Labour," that Collier, whose life was "toilsome, and her Wages inconsiderable," was indeed the author of the publication. If Collier

[2] See discussion on Mary Collier's *The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr. Stephen Duck* in Chapter 1.

felt that justification of the authenticity of her writing was needed, it is likely due to the suspicion often encountered by labouring women writers regarding the legitimacy of their work (Lonsdale, 172).

Another example is found in Mary Leapor's *Crumble Hall* which depicts an old manor house from the servants' perspective. Leapor reveals in her satirical poem, the ravages of modernity when fashionable landscaping substitutes for natural beauty: "Shall these ignobly [trees] from the Roots be torn / And perish shameful, as the abject Thorn" (173-4). Richard Greene in his analysis of Leapor's poetry explains how her deep connection to the natural world is expressed in her writing (141). Leapor also takes the reader through the manor where her words provide a nostalgic view of its grandeur: "Then step within—there stands a goodly Row / Of oaken Pillars—where a gallant Show / Of mimic Pears and carv'd Pomgranates twine" (113). Leapor's imagery indicates her fondness for the manor as she invites the reader to share an imaginary rendering of its glory. Greene dubs Crumble Hall as Leapor's "boldest statement on landscape" (137), hereby acknowledging her concerns over the use of the land. Unfortunately for Leapor, all her poetry was published posthumously, and she therefore did not reap the personal or financial rewards from publication.

This was not the case with all female labouring writers, however. Some published their work while they were alive, and Ann Yearsley was amongst the few who benefitted, albeit indirectly, from her work as a labourer. Yearsley found her patron, Hannah More, through her dealings with More's kitchen staff. Although the relationship between Yearsley and More became publicly controversial, it is questionable whether or not Yearsley would have been remembered based solely for her writing, without the (good and bad) publicity surrounding her association with More. Nonetheless, Yearsley did not continue to promote herself as a labouring

writer, or more specifically as the "Bristol Milkwoman," and did, in fact, make a living from her writing.

Genres and Influences

Women of the eighteenth century who wrote were largely influenced by what they were exposed to during the period, more specifically, the pastoral genre. According to Paula Backscheider, writers experimented with new adaptations of the pastoral genre during the eighteenth century, and it was given renewed critical attention and interest. (Women Poets 251-53). It is therefore not surprising that women from all ranks wrote poetry addressing friendships, romantic relationships, or soliloquies using the pastoral genre. Pastoral poetry dates back to the third century 70 BCE when Theocritus produced *Idylls*, and to the first century BCE when Virgil produced *Eclogues*, the *Georgics,* and *Aeneid.* The genre survived the middle ages and was a favourite literary mode during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Anthony Low, in *The Georgic Revolution* (1985), considers the lack of georgic representation in the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as surprising, since acquiring land was of significant importance to the English. In fact, the goal of the middling ranks was to work diligently at their respective professions, in order to acquire land from which they could reap the benefits. Whether the land was managed by themselves or by overseers, the end result was to obtain its produce, which was necessary for everyone's survival. Yet, the description of the shepherd in the pastoral is much more pleasant than the ploughman's in the georgic. Visions of a shepherd observing his sheep while sitting idly in a sun drenched green landscape is much more appealing than visualizing a farmer waking at daybreak to tend to chores involving back breaking labour until sundown. Low argues that poets preferred to maintain their idyllic scenes without cumbersome

equipment and dirty ploughmen, and thus ignored the labourer completely. Instead of praising agricultural work in literature, writers of the period and even of the subsequent eighteenth century experienced difficulty in relinquishing the pastoral genre to the georgic (21-3). Eighteenth-century writers endeavored to preserve the pastoral, perhaps at the urging of established writers like Alexander Pope, who alleged that the enchantment transmitted through pastoral was meant to be preserved and that pastoral poetry was simple, making it comprehensible to all (Rogers 105-17). Perhaps Pope's urging could have had an effect on poets of the period, as he was, by any measure, the most influential poet in the first half of the eighteenth century, but it can be argued that the pastoral vision was soothing, and writers feared losing it to the more realistic georgic approach.

In *Rural Life in Eighteenth-Century English Poetry,* John Goodridge explores the English mixed georgic, and the anti-pastoral, newer genres of the pastoral and georgic that portray more realistic aspects of the English countryside. For example, mixed georgic poetry was meant to instill a sense of responsibility and refute idleness while revealing the "real" English countryside, whereas some anti-pastoral poetry complained about stormy weather and backbreaking labour, portraying a more realistic view of rural England (2). Goodridge's account of pastoral defines the genre as it must have appeared, a literary method utilized to fuel the fantasy of the eighteenth-century reader:

> Pastoral is a manifestation of an apparently universal, pre-conscious, human desire for an ideal and simple world. Because this desire cannot usually be fulfilled in the 'real' world it is the natural territory of art and literature. But, one way or another, the real world always seems to intrude on the fantasy. (3)

The intrusion Goodridge alludes to is the advent of georgic poetry, a rational representation of agricultural labour in rural Britain during the eighteenth century. Contrary to pastoral scenes that entailed visions of nymphs and idle shepherds at peace with the inactivity in their surroundings, georgic poetry conveyed the physical involvement of the farmer working the land. David Fairer describes the georgic poem as "more engaging with the British landscape" (*English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, *1700-1789*, 2003), and giving the impression of growth and innovation, while conserving what was traditional (79-80). In this literary fashion, labouring writer Robert Bloomfield, wrote *The Farmer's Boy* (1800), a poem that offered an appreciation for the natural world while exposing the hardships, ordeals, and physical strains of farming. Its style is similar to that described by Goodridge as the English mixed georgic of the eighteenth century. Along with the anti-pastoral, the mixed georgic emerged to reflect the transition in the British economy, when land enclosures and trade replaced common land and the family economy (2). Goodridge also utilizes Stephen Duck's earlier work, *The Thresher's Labour* (1736), as an example of anti-pastoral verse. The poem illustrates the dehumanization of the farm hand as he is controlled by the farm owner. Like Bloomfield, Duck describes the farm work associated with every season, along with the role of the Master who is disconnected from the farmhands, and sees them only as a means of maximizing productivity. Although Bloomfield does refer to his employer as the "Master" (121), he is portrayed as less of an entrepreneur, and more as the traditional farmer who fears harsh weather and rejoices in a good crop. In other words, the land owner portrayed by Bloomfield is one who is concerned with the bounty of the land for his own purpose and for those in his care, rather than focusing on what it produces for the sake of profit (119-21). Both employer and employee work for the same goal, and both delight in the fruits of their labour. Furthermore, Bloomfield's Master is appreciative of the help

he receives from his servants, and generously shares his bounty with them. However, Bloomfield also discusses the deep divide that exists between master and labourer, and warns against the harshness and dangers of class division (121-27). The georgic and anti-pastoral poetry of Bloomfield and Duck illustrate the contrast with pastoral poetry, whose illusive qualities and images of fantasy are not representative of the realities of life in rural England during the eighteenth century. Despite the literary critics' growing disenchantment with pastoral poetry however, many labouring writers continued to favour it. For example, *The Death of Amnon* by Elizabeth Hands, includes an appendix featuring pastoral poetry, and "other poetical pieces" referring to mock-georgic and anti-pastoral poems. Likewise, several of Susannah Harrison's hymns are written in the pastoral genre, as are many sections in Anne Wilson's *Teisa* presented in both pastoral and georgic forms.

Alexander Pope admired pastoral poetry, seeing it as the first stage in the poet's literary journey towards the epic. Fearing the genre would lose its lustre, he composed *Discourse on Pastoral Poetry* in 1704. Pope urges the writer to preserve the simple and peaceful life of the shepherd in their poetry, which was the ideal of the golden age. He warns against ambiguous language that requires too much thought, and advises the writer to adhere to "the old way of writing" articulating thoughts that were brief and basic. According to Pope, to show the "best side of a shepherd's life" (19) meant to represent its innocent, unspoiled side. The preference was to utilize modest vocabulary that did not take away from the simplicity of the genre. Part of the charm of the pastoral is the illusion of simplicity, of contentment with one's natural surroundings. Perhaps because of the simplicity of the pastoral genre, it was adopted by many writers of the period. Some writers of pastorals utilized names related to the genre. Notably, Elizabeth Hands, who wrote several pastorals, was in fact published in *Jopson's Coventry*

Mercury under the pseudonym 'Daphne.' Daphne, in Greek mythology is a virgin goddess, quiet and shy, who refused all suitors. Although this is not biographical information as such, one can speculate that Hands chose her pseudonym to reveal some characteristics about herself. It is worth noting that Elizabeth Hands did, in fact, get married at the age of thirty-eight, and was referred to in parish records as the "parish spinster".

Pastoral poetry became more closely linked to women during the eighteenth century, and, according to Ann Messenger, women were even encouraged to write using the pastoral genre. Women, being of the "fairer sex" were often associated with the softness and gentleness of the pastoral (4). Also, pastoral poetry did not pose a threat to the male writer, who increasingly wrote about other prevalent topics related to politics, history, and business. Women were safely categorized as writers of pastoral poetry and did not intrude on the male writer's territory. Over time, pastoral became an inferior genre, and was referred to as "the art that is artless," and women themselves began to refer to their writing as "artless" (Messenger, 8).

Some of the best-known literary representations of the natural world appeared at the end of the seventeenth to mid-eighteenth centuries. Works by Aphra Behn, James Thomson, John Gray, and Mary Leapor epitomized the natural world in all its beauty, power, and splendour. Behn's "Golden Age" (1684), is a poem containing ten stanzas, and could be considered as a tribute to pastoral life since she contrasts this idealistic life with labour, war, the accumulation of property, and imposed codes of conduct. Behn's poem begins with customary pastoral scenes, a "Purling Stream," an "Eternal Spring," "Wreaths of Flowers" in the first stanza, followed by phrases describing peace in the next stanza: "Calm was the Air, no Winds blew fierce and loud, / The Sky was darkened with no sullen Cloud; / But all the Heav'ns laughed with continued Light" (17-19). As the poem continues, toil and labour intrude on the pastoral scene with reference to

machinery as a means to cultivate the earth: "The stubborn Plough had then / Made no rude Rapes upon the Virgin Earth (32). Pastoral images of shepherds peacefully watching their flocks have been replaced with those of work and sweat. Despite discussing war, power, and the destruction of the land, "The Golden Age" is still considered a pastoral poem. It concentrates on life in a pastoral setting, before the introduction of "Honour" destroyed love, peace, and natural beauty (Messenger, 18).

James Thomson's *The Seasons,* considered a masterpiece by critics, is known for its portrayal of nature as both nurturing and tormenting: "shatter'd forest, and ravag'd vale" give way to spring's "softer gales" and "mountains lift their green heads to the sky" (6). Thomson describes the elements and wonders of the seasons meticulously, exposing both their kindness and brutality. *The Seasons* was an influential work during the eighteenth century, not only for its interpretation of the elements of the natural world but for its structure of blank verse as opposed to heroic couplets (reminiscent of Milton), which gave the poem a more meditative, spiritual tone.

In "An Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard," Thomas Gray contrasts both the georgic and pastoral modes. The combination of the "lowing Herd wind slowly o'er the Lea," and the "Plow-man homeward plods his weary Way" (2-3), give two different images of agricultural landscape, the former, relaxed and peaceful, and the latter, industrious and toilsome. Gray's elegy also employs natural elements to illustrate the darkness, emptiness, and starkness of death in contrast to comforting images of serenity and joy.

Mary Leapor's *Damon and Strephon: A Pastoral Complaint,* is a dialogue regarding the death of a loved one. The "Pastoral Complaint" referred to in the title is directed towards the pastoral itself, and contrasts its ideology with the stark reality of death. Strephon personalizes,

questions, and even challenges Death on his choice of victim: "…wou'd none but Sylvius do? … Why didst thou take (and leave the baser Tribe) / The Flow'r of Shepherds and the Muses Pride?" (19). Leapor utilizes the pastoral ideology to contrast the emptiness and darkness brought on by death. Her words reveal that all is not well in a world idealized with "Garlands" and "Beauties of the early Spring" (20), when a laurel from her father's garden will be placed on the grave of a man she loved instead of placing it on the brow of the more glorified *Amyntas*.

Not all nature poems received such acclaim, however. Some authors wrote poems which, although obscure in comparison to those of Behn, Thomson, and Gray, employed imagery of the natural world. The women discussed in this study lived and laboured in the countryside, which is reflected in their poetry. For example, Elizabeth Hands employs the pastoral, in traditional or mock form, whereas Susannah Harrison wrote hymns, also considered a form of pastoral poetry. Anne Wilson combines both the pastoral and georgic modes in *Teisa*, her sixty-eight-page loco-descriptive poem about the River Tees.

Judging by the works of Pope, Thomson, and Gray, the natural world often invoked feelings of peace and pleasure, and was indeed a source of inspiration to the writer. It is not surprising then, that friendship poetry is often situated in a pastoral setting. Perhaps it was because friendship evoked the same feelings of peace and contentment as natural surroundings did that women writers chose to associate the two. The natural world did not judge women, nor did it discriminate against, or marginalize them. Instead, it offered a sanctuary where women could sit in quiet contemplation and enjoy their own physical space. Friendship between women worked in a similar fashion. They formed alliances where, in companionship, they could exchange stories, opinions, and ideas. Amongst friends, women found a sense of belonging and could at least stand together in silent solidarity. Furthermore, women often lacked the closeness

and sincerity in their relationships with men. Domestic responsibility, whether in servitude or motherhood often left them alone and longing for friendship (Backsheider, 301-3).

Elizabeth Hands's 1789 publication of *The Death of Amnon*, contains an appendix with pastoral poems dedicated to friendship. "An Epistle" is a dedication of love from Belinda, who laments the absence of her friend, Maria:

> 'Tis you, Maria, and 'tis only you,
>
> That can the wonted face of things renew:
>
> Come to my groves; command the birds to sing,
>
> And o'er the meadows bid fresh daisies spring:
>
> No! rather come and chase my gloom away,
>
> That I may sing like birds, and look like daisies gay. (92)

Belinda is bereft in Maria's absence, cannot sleep, and wanders about visualizing the presence of her friend:

> At sultry noon retiring to the groves,
>
> In search of you, my wand'ring fancy roves,
>
> From shade to shade, pleas'd with the vain delight,
>
> Imagination brings you to my sight;
>
> Fatigu'd I sink into my painted chair,
>
> And your ideal form attends me there. (91-2)

The depth of feeling Belinda expresses in her epistle to Maria exists beyond common friendship. Belinda attempts to convey the magnitude of her emptiness by emphasizing the absence of Maria. Belinda's emptiness turns to unbearable anguish when she encounters a landmark of Maria's home town:

When I walk forth to take the morning air,

I quickly to some rising hill repair,

From whence I may survey your village spire,

Then sigh to you, and languish with desire. (91)

Hands showed little reticence in the poem about her friend. The author's emotional plea for the return of Maria conveys a deep sense of loss, establishing the relationship as one of true friendship and love.

It was likely difficult for Susannah Harrison to form strong friendships with other women since she was confined to her bed for fourteen years of her life. She does not mention a close friend other than God in her poetry:

Nothing shall fright my soul from God,

Should He the skies this moment rend,

He is my only safe Abode;

My Rock, my Refuge, and my Friend. (33)

In hymn CIX of her publication, *Songs in the Night*, Harrison begins her dedication with: "My God" and "My Father and my Friend." The remainder of the forty-four-line hymn contains "my" in reference to God, sixteen additional times (109). Similarly, hymn XIV at the beginning of the poem addresses God as: "My Lord, my Guide, my Shepherd, and my Friend / My Righteousness, my Wisdom, and my Strength." In this hymn, Harrison makes reference to God as a shepherd, and she alludes to this Christian theme numerous times: "Rich are the pastures of His Bleeding love; / O lead me, Jesus, to the sacred field / Where Thou by night and day dost watch Thy flock" (160). In hymn VII, Harrison asks the question: "Is God my Father and my Friend." She

then substantiates that God is indeed her friend, and professes his loyalty to her over the remaining eight stanzas (172).

Harrison did not dedicate a hymn to a specific female friend but did express gratitude to those who showed her kindness. Hymn XVI relates the Old Testament story of Ruth who was shown kindness by Boaz. Harrison compares the kindnesses bestowed upon her to the biblical story, and refers to her benefactors as friends:

> Then, --O my friends! ---permit me to confess
>
> That I receiv`d your gifts with thankfulness:
>
> Like Ruth, I would be grateful, and declare
>
> How much I prize your tenderness and care. (183)

Harrison does thank one person whom she recognises as a friend in a poem dedicated to the Rev. Mr.____ (181). She likely wrote the poem for Reverend Conder, who is identified as the editor in the second edition of *Songs* (1781). In addition to thanking Conder for his kindness, Harrison requests a continuation of his friendship while she is still on earth: "But while I sojourn here, I hope to be / Still honour'd with your friendship, pure and free" (182). The second edition of *Songs* contains a segment entitled "A Remarkable Scene in the Author's Life," where Harrison is interviewed over a period of several weeks by a concerned "neighbour" (188) who also noticed that she was "serious and attentive at public worship" (189). This interview was conducted in 1773, one year after Harrison left her employment because of her illness. Given the timelines of the interview and publications of *Songs*, as well as numerous discussions on faith and religion between both participants, it can be deduced that the writer is indeed Rev. Conder. The gift of her time, as well as insight into the life of a dying woman with tremendous faith, was the only gift Harrison could offer a friend. Conder describes renewed faith after their

conversations: "After prayer I departed, finding my own soul refreshed" (191). Conder's interview with Harrison was published posthumously, and the preface to the tenth edition of *Songs in the Night* includes a short poem, presumably written by Conder himself:

Pause here one moment thou that readest this:
She still would point thee to eternal bliss.
Her soul betimes THE FRIEND OF SINNERS sought;
She found him gracious, and his grace she taught:
Her state was humble, but her faith was true,
And what she sung, she sung from what she knew
Her themes, her songs, were full of love divine—
Reflect,--and make,--like her,--religion thine?

Expressions of friendship are frequently framed within retirement poetry. It was customary for non-labouring people of the eighteenth century to spend time in the country. Quite often, men of the middling ranks who worked in the city would "retire" to a country house with their family to find peace and relaxation. However, as Ann Messenger points out, the term "retirement" was mostly directed to men, as one had to have work or a career to retire from, and as women were not considered as part of the labour market, their need to rest was less important than men's (59). Most women from the middling ranks did not work outside the home, and however much domestic or social duties occupied their time, these were not considered to be activities that required an exodus to the country. Women who worked in the city also tried to get away to the country for a rest from time to time (Messenger 60), whereas those who did work in the country, were not likely to have much time or opportunity to enjoy it. Nonetheless, women wrote poetry about retirement, or a natural retreat as a means of escape from responsibility

and/or a place to exercise their literary creativity. A poem featuring a woman looking for a place of solitude was not new. Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea wrote “The Petition for an Absolute Retreat” in the early eighteenth century, requesting a simple place that would take her away from the intrusions of the world. The author wishes to leave her life of luxury and replace it with the modesties of rural life:

Give me then, in that Retreat,
Give me, O indulgent Fate!
For all Pleasures left behind
Contemplations of the mind. (49)

Elizabeth Hands also longed for a retreat, and wrote poems expressing her gratitude when her wish was fulfilled. In “Observation on an Evening,” she alludes to a poem on retirement at the end of a work day:

We faint beneath the sultry sun,
But when the day is o’er
We gladly meet the ev’ning shade,
And think of toil no more. (96)

The last two lines reflect the liberating experience of time spent outdoors after a day of toiling.

The narrator in Anne Wilson`s *Teisa* expresses the need for a place to call her own. In her study on nature poetry, Bridget Keegan claims that the passage alluding to the acquisition of a retreat, is autobiographical (109-10):

Oft have I wish’d my humble lot was cast
In some such blest retreat, where I at last,
Abandoning all servile hopes and fears,

Might quiet pass the few remaining years. (381-84)

The countryside and natural environments in general were considered a source of inspiration for many writers of the eighteenth century, including labouring women. Perhaps it was because one could easily access the beauty and peace associated with the countryside and benefit from its physical and psychological comforts that made it a popular choice. Regardless, it represented the innocence of the pastoral, the robustness of the georgic, and the emotions conveyed in friendship poetry, hence playing the role of muse and refuge for the writer.

Elizabeth Hands - Satire and Sentiment

Elizabeth Hands's two main poems on labour are favoured amongst the critics, and are most often quoted and analyzed. Although "A Poem, On the Supposition of an Advertisement appearing in a Morning Paper…by a Servant-Maid" and "A Poem, On the Supposition of the Book having been Published and Read," are both set in a servant's place of work, they do not speak of work directly, but play out the hypothetical responses of employers when they learn about the publications:

I suppose you all saw in the paper this morning

A volume of *Poems* advertised— 'tis said

They're produced by the pen of a poor servant-maid.'

A servant write verses!' says Madam Du Bloom:

'Pray what is the subject—a Mop, or a Broom?'

'He, he, he,' says Miss Flounce: "I suppose we shall see

An Ode on a Dishclout—what else can it be?' (47)

Instead of writing poetry from a servant's point of view, which might be expected to contain references to tedious chores, endless work days and social injustice, such as we see with Mary Collier, Hands produces the unexpected and writes a satirical poem from the perspective of polite society on the success of a servant. This was indeed a bold and valiant move on her part. Critics Donna Landry, William Christmas and Carolyn Steedman also praise Hands's unconventional approach, as well as her writing skills, her wit, and her honesty. Landry compares Hands's satirical skill to Swift's (186), and Christmas commends her candour on the subject of household relationships, using her poem "On an Unsociable Family" as an example (230).

Steedman praises Hands's ability to manipulate satire into a comical read, with both full intention of offending and, an entertaining twist (12). Since her poetry does not contain any direct biographical information, the reader can infer that Hands's poetry about an employer's views on the work of a servant, or more specifically about the writing of a servant, could be based on her own reflections. Although these satirical poems are favoured amongst the critics, Hands implicates work and labour in her other works as well, albeit in pastoral and not georgic style. Hands's pastoral style surfaces in her works on love, friendship, and retirement, where life in general among the rural poor is, as Landry declares "defiantly pleasurable" (190). Her literary expressions on these topics are sincere and void of the irony that is present in some of her other poems, such as "Lob's Courtship," "On an Unsociable Family," "A Poem, On the Supposition…of the Publication of a Volume of Poems, by a Servant-Maid," and A Poem, On the Supposition of the Book having been Published and Read." Her poems, "Absence and Death" and "Damon, Laura and Daphne, A Pastoral" portray "virgin nymphs" and young shepherds who experience life "where daisies grow," and walk in "pleasant meadows" and along

a “crystal stream” (Hands 56, 62). These expressions of pastoral life are an indication that Hands perceived her own life in rural England as agreeable, despite the opinion of polite society, who often disparaged the life of the labouring poor. As Landry points out, Hands’s acknowledgement of rural life as a pleasant experience also means that she comes to its defence, perhaps as an act of “resistance” towards those who did not share her views (191). Some of Hands’s works contrast the conventional differences between life in court and life in the country as well as the false sense of security associated with riches and social status, as is described in the following excerpt from her poem, “Contentment”:

Let those who have in courts been bred,
  There still in splendor shine;
Their lot of bliss may not surpass,
  Perhaps not equal mine,
While no unwelcome visitants,
  My solitude invade;
The monarch is not more secure,
  Than I beneath this shade. (103)

Some of Hands’s pastorals refer to work, whether directly or indirectly. For example, “Observation On An Evening,” speaks of the calming effect the countryside has on one who has worked all day: “We gladly meet the ev’ning shade, / And think of toil no more” (96). In “On Contemplative Ease,” Hands refers to being away from “the ranting crew” (100) while rejoicing in the solitude of dusk, a scene portraying a stark contrast from the bustle of her daily work. The epistle “The Rural Maid in London, To her Friend in the Country,” contrasts rural and village life, where Hands admits to the city as alluring: “These strange disorders they do pleasures call”

(89). However, she states her preference to remain in the country: "Such tinsel joys shall ne'er my heart obtain, / Give me the real pleasures of the plain" (89). As a servant, the narrator describes from her point of view the lives of people living in urban centres. She does not comment on personal experiences involving living in a city, such as shopping and the theatre, where money would be required to partake in most activities. Instead, she speaks of her longing for the country where its beauty can be admired at no cost. In short, despite the perception and opinions of others on rural life, she is happiest holding the title of a "nymph" to win over her "swain," as opposed to becoming "a belle, to win a beau" (88-9).

The representation of servants and their work also appears at different intervals in the main poem of Hands's book, *The Death of Amnon,* but more specifically in the last Canto (Canto V). Servants are part of the story, and are in fact instrumental in executing Absalom's plan. When Absalom wants to kill his brother Amnon, he questions himself in regard to carrying out the execution. While looking at his hands, Absalom affirms: "Must these be dy'd in blood? a brother's blood? No, I have servants, they shall give the blow" (39). As Absalom questions the loyalty of his servants, he concludes that they are in fact, loyal and trustworthy: "Great proofs I've had of their fidelity" (40). Cynthia Dereli argues that the servants follow their master's orders to commit murder based on their love for him, and because he is a loving and just employer, rather than simply following orders out of obligation. It is true that the story specifies that the servants obeyed their master "more by love than duty bound" (Hands, 41), and, although coerced, are given the final choice of whether they will carry out the crime. I do however, question Dereli's suggestion that Absalom is portrayed by Hands as a "good master" (Dereli, 177). His morals come into question when he decides to have the servants carry out his deed and then reassures them:

Why tremble ye? Said Absalom, fear not,

'Tis I command you—all the deed is mine

Ye are but instruments within my grasp

And of his blood are spotless: if there's guilt

In taking vengeance for the atrocious crime,

Let all that guilt be mine. (40-1)

Absalom's comments certainly do not reflect the qualities that define a good master. First, he "commands" his servants and refers to them as "instruments within my grasp," and further claims that he will assume the guilt that will accompany the act of murder itself. Since Absalom does not commit to executing the murder, it is unlikely that he would commit to absolving his servants of the crime should he be faced with persecution.

Dereli does not specify if Hands portrays the servants as valued because of her own personal experience as a servant, or that mutual respect is being proposed as something desirable to her. Perhaps this part of the story was overstated to contrast the relationship between master and servant in eighteenth-century England, or to illustrate the severity of the oppression associated with the labouring class. Nonetheless, the relationship between master and servant in the story is comparable to the master/servant arrangement of the eighteenth century with which Hands was very familiar.

Hands's poetry of women's work is not limited to domestic service, agriculture, or to labour in the form of accomplishing specific tasks in exchange for money or goods as we have come to know it. Dereli`s research shows that Hands was married in 1784, which suggests that the birth of her first child coincides with her poem, "On the Author's Lying In," written in 1785. In this poem, the only one of Hands's that is clearly autobiographical and which contains the

most explicit religious contemplations, she thanks God for the birth of her daughter and for sparing her own life: "I live! my God be prais'd, I live" (123). In her declaration: "My tongue did almost ask for death" (123), Hands attests to the level of suffering that would have driven her to request death from the God she now praises for providing life to her and her infant daughter. The lines "I live within my arms to clasp / My infant with endearing grasp" express Hands's gratitude towards God for sparing her life as she rejoices at having survived what was likely the most difficult work of her life.

Hands does not limit her repertoire to pastoral, religious verse, or satire. Her poem about a heifer running unchecked through the village where she lives has been classified as an anti-pastoral and counter-georgic by Donna Landry. Gone are the nymphs, swains, and peaceful pastures of the pastoral, as frightened villagers armed with broken pitch forks and rakes emerge to herd the stray cow. As Landry points out in her analysis, the villagers preparing to wage battle with broken farming tools could represent the simple and poor financial state of rural farming, or the long-term effects of capitalism on agriculture in the rural regions. The poem is fast paced, giving the reader a sense that an event of great proportion is imminent. However, the end brings us to the mock-heroic surrendering of the heifer under the pressure of the villagers, and peace reigns over the village once again.

> At last the beast, unable to withstand
> Such force united, leapt into a pond:
> The water quickly cool'd her madden'd rage;
> No more she'll fright our village, I presage." (116)

Since the poem can be interpreted as representing the decline of a rural life threatened by industrialization and capitalism, it can also be inferred by the last four lines that, regardless of

what the agricultural labourers were faced with, they could prevail as long as they remained a united force.

Anne Wilson – Reflections from the Tees

Anne Wilson also wrote about work, albeit not in as direct a fashion as Mary Collier. Wilson's 68-page poem was, like Collier's, unsupported by subscribers. Wilson wrote in georgic style, unlike Elizabeth Hands's pastoral, and her focus on labour was grounded in socio-political issues related to agriculture over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Despite producing such a substantial work as *Teisa*, Anne Wilson remains obscure. Recent scholarship on Wilson includes Bridget Keegan`s "Writing Against the Current: Anne Wilson's *Teisa* and Labouring-Class River Poetry." Keegan proposes Wilson's *Teisa* as a parallel to Pope's *Windsor Forest*, and stresses the importance of rivers as places of personal retreat and inspiration for writers of the eighteenth century as well as for economic growth, portrayed by both Pope and Wilson, albeit from different perspectives. The obvious differences between Pope and Wilson existed primarily in their social backgrounds: Pope was a male writer with access to education, whereas Wilson was a labouring woman writer with very little possibility of obtaining any education. However, what they did have in common was unjust treatment shaped by societal constructs that did not accept Pope's faith as a member of the Catholic religion or Wilsons's status as a labouring woman.

Windsor Forest was a change from the pastoral genre to the georgic for Pope, as his writing steered away from the fantasy of gods and woodland nymphs to discuss economical conditions and political events that threatened his beloved home in Binfield in Windsor Forest. Pope discusses the stark reality of the politics and prejudices that eventually stripped the haven

from himself and his family (Rogers 105-17). *Teisa*, like *Windsor Forest,* begins with the narrator requesting the presence of woodland nymphs, and proceeds to follow the course of the river, adding historical information and moral reflection as she travels. *Teisa* opens with a meditation on the natural beauty encountered along the river where the water "Fresh, airy, bubbling, lifts its chrystal head" (6), mingles with scenes that obscure the vision but alert the senses: "The wand'ring eye is lost in mists, that frown / Suspended o'er th' extensive horizon (11-12). Wilson's writing mimics Pope's where idyllic pastoral settings contrast georgic scenes of toil and labour. Wilson's use of pastoral imagery is utilized to convey the contrasting beauty of nature to its harsh realities, in which case she employs the georgic genre; along with wonders and indescribable beauty come the threat of danger and peril. Wilson makes the distinction by first describing the natural beauty of the rocks protruding from the river. The scene gradually takes on momentum as the waves grow, and "from rock to rock they flow along / Soft murm'ring as the poets vernal song" (27-8). The opening passages in *Teisa* are comparable to those in *Windsor Forest*, which Pope equates to Eden in the opening lines (7-11). He later alludes to discord where "There, interspersed in Lawns and Opening Glades / Thin Trees arise that shun each others Shades" (21-2), suggesting conflict is imminent where peace once reigned. Comparatively, the scene in *Teisa* changes abruptly from the languid movement of the water to a site that alludes to destruction and danger:

> The dauntless miners, men of nought afraid,
>
> O'er this amazing cataract, have laid
>
> A leafless trunk, torn up by furious winds,
>
> From where the bog vast trees collected binds:
>
> They venture o'er this roaring Sylla's head,

And, bold as mariners, no perils dread. (29-34)

The image changes from one of tranquility where solitude can be found in the landscape, to one of menace and risk, where men venture despite the dangers for economic gain.

While Pope broaches social and political events from the vantage point of the natural landscapes from his home in Binfield, Wilson narrates *Teisa* while navigating a river with evident familiarity, and discussing past and current events that affected both the landscape and the author. Although both authors had concerns regarding political and social change, and the future of Britain, their perspectives and views differed widely because of the differences in their social rank. For example, where Pope refers to “Monarchs” (1) and “Kings” (46), Wilson alludes to “shepherds” (45), “peasants” (74), and “miners” (29). Though the Greek gods of Olympus do not reside in Windsor Forest, Pope sees their presence in the forest’s natural beauty (33-6). Wilson, from her vantage point, observes the “stupend’ous height” of High Force waterfall, and remarks that nature “scarce can add a single beauty more (50-55). Pope’s river is personified as “Old Father *Thames*” (328), whereas *Teisa*, the lesser known and smaller River Tees, is female (4). *Teisa*, like *Windsor Forest*, references Greek mythology, lost prosperity, death, war, and British history, but unlike Pope, does not cover these subjects from an elevated geographical standpoint, but speaks consistently from her position on the river.

Wyman Herendeen’s *From Landscape to Literature* discusses the use of the river as a way to express one’s views on socio-political issues during the Renaissance. His chapter on the river poem in the seventeenth century focuses on the development of the genre based on Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*. This new genre gave many poets the opportunity to write from a new perspective. John Denham was one of the earlier locodescriptive writers of the seventeenth century, producing *Cooper’s Hill*, a descriptive poem depicting the Thames Valley. Denham

established a new genre for other topographical writers who wrote poetry from the perspective of a specific river (Kelliher). Some examples are, Robert Bloomfield, *The Banks of Wye*, Charlotte Smith, *Arun, the River,* and Coleridge, *To the River Otter*. Preceding Denham was John Taylor, waterman of the sixteenth century, who could have been an influence for Anne Wilson. Taylor was dubbed "The Water Poet" as he wrote verse from his own perspective, immediately from the river and not from above (Capp). Similarly, Anne Wilson's *Teisa* is written from the vantage point of the water, giving the reader the impression of the narrator navigating downstream.

What is speculated about Wilson's life is derived from what could be autobiographical references in *Teisa*. Bridget Keegan, as well as Goodridge's anthology, *Eighteenth-Century English Labouring-Class Poets* and *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Eighteenth-Century Writers and Writing* derive the same biographical information, taken from lines 381-412 of Teisa. The following lines are an indication of Wilson's labouring class status:

> Sequester'd thus from bus'ness and from noise,
> The contemplative find substantial joys;
> Oft have I wish'd my humble lot was cast
> In some such blest retreat, where I at last,
> Abandoning all servile hopes and fears,
> Might quiet pass the few remaining years: (379-84).

She further states that "in a hir'd-house all my days are spent" (386), suggesting that she was not a land owner, nor did she work the land, as she was confined to the house. Wilson writes of her grief related to the loss of a "friend no more consoles my cares, / Nor pain, nor pleasure, more with me now shares" (393-94). These lines suggest that Wilson's departed "dear friend" could have been a spouse, hereby leaving her a widow. This analogy is supported with the following:

While care and hopeless woe alternate roll

Like day and night, in my sad alter'd soul,

Grief, in all its vicissitudes, pursue

My thought, My dear Lycidas! since thou

Was pluckt from that sad heart which bleeding lies. (397-401).

Wilson's sincerity in this passage leaves little doubt that her grief comes from a wound caused by the loss of someone very close to her. Her loss is palpable in her manifestations of "hopeless woe," "sad alter'd soul," and "Grief, in all its vicissitudes," which are heartfelt expressions of bereavement. Loss is a recurring theme is *Teisa*, and presented, as we shall see, in different contexts.

Critics have questioned the authenticity of Wilson's status as a labouring writer, since there is little evidence on which to base this claim. However, as Goodridge points out, the manner in which Wilson describes certain agricultural trades with such precision leaves little doubt that she was not only exposed to this type of work, but that she likely performed it (363). She describes the fabrication of cheese from its inception to the finished product. Cheese-making was usually performed by women. However, by mid-century, many dairy farms had been replaced by more profitable agricultural farms, leaving many women out of work (Hill 50). A study conducted by Deborah Valenze on the dairy industry argues that women lost their work in the dairy because of the belief that their submissive manner prevented them from introducing and implementing new scientific methods effectively (146-65). Men were therefore thought to be better prepared to manage the dairies, leaving women in the positions of dairy maids. This caused further labour division between the sexes and discouraged women from taking part in any future scientific advances in farming.

Wilson explains the process of cheese-making in detail: it involves milking, fermenting, coagulating, draining, and boiling the ingredients, which must then be left to ripen.

> Yon busy house wife, from her grateful cow
>
> Rich streams of milky juice, with both hands draws,
>
> Until her pail with bubbles overflows
>
> …………………………………………
>
> See th'earning homogeneous parts attract,
>
> As frost on water, on milk here see it act!
>
> The cheese by its own gravity descends,
>
> Its motion at the kettles bottom ends;
>
> ……………………………………….
>
> With sacred salt then sprinkle it all o'er,
>
> Taking a cloth with wide and open ore;
>
> In which the cheese now carefully is born. (253-55, 263-66, 271-73)

The whey can then be converted to a cooling drink called "whig" which requires a mixture of fresh herbs picked from the garden and in the woods.

Not only does Wilson attest to the agricultural tasks generally performed by women of the eighteenth century, but she describes tasks of a more robust and industrial quality as well, such as drainage and mining. Mining is mentioned early in the poem with the miners described as "dauntless" and "nought afraid" (29). In the lines that follow, Wilson describes the terrain that Teisa trails, where the waves encounter many rocks, "rough" and "angular," and Teisa continues to flow until she reaches a vantage point from which Wilson comments on the elaborate beauty observed below: "Nature has sure exhausted here her store / She scarce can add a single beauty

more" (52-2). But with the sublime beauty of the mountain come the dangers it presents for the workers who mine it and for the inhabitants of the mountain mining village. Wilson warns polite society about discriminating against these peasants who she describes as "humble" (71), with "capacious" and "clear" minds (78), who perform "honest" work (81) and "drudge" (84) for polite society. According to John Rule, lead miners of the North Pennines lived at an elevation of up to 1411 feet above sea level. In spite of the hazards involved, miners preferred this location, especially during the eighteenth century when mining was often combined with agriculture. Landowners were eager to house miners since they were aware of the high rents tenants were willing to pay to obtain land in remote areas. Also, many of the tenants lived on the land leased from mining companies, who preferred to have their employees attached to their mines. Wilson's observation point is also from an elevated location, which coincides with Rule's information on the North Pennines: "From this stupend'ous height, the streams that flow / Are swiftly chang'd to flakes of falling snow / As down its ragged sides, they pour along" (53-5). Wilson also reflects on the villagers and the height of the bridge they have constructed from "rocks immensely high" (68) where peasants cross regardless of "th' amazing depth below!" (72).

In spite of its beauty, the mountain presents many dangers for the miners who enter it every day. Wilson makes reference to these dangers in the following lines:

> For you, what perils here they undergo,
>
> By delving in the dreary mines below:
>
> Oft has the patient miner in the morn,
>
> Left a beloved wife, and babes at home;
>
> Happy in the thoughts of returning eve,
>
> But fate, alas! Does each warm hope deceive;

Perhaps, he, by some vapour lost his breath,

His wife and helpless infants mourn'd his death. (84-92)

Wilson's account of loss includes the loss of life, of husband and father, and of a family's financial support. Surprisingly, Wilson neglects the inclusion of women and children as miners in this segment of her poem. Both Rule and Barker confirm that it was common for women and children to work underground during the eighteenth century. They were often employed as part of a family team, with the male members of the family in charge. In spite of an increase in mining production however, women gradually left the mining industry, opting for less hazardous and more manageable employment (Barker 130). As for children, their presence gradually decreased by 1750, especially in the northern Pennines lead mines, where the use of young boys did not meet the strength requirements for the increased demand for lead production (Rule 201).

Another laborious and physically taxing task was drainage, a technique utilized to rid the wetlands of the excess water that made it difficult to cultivate and to feed cattle. Drainage was controversial, however. The process of draining the fenlands began in the seventeenth century and continued into the eighteenth century. The land that was once too sodden to yield a decent harvest was drained by outsiders in an effort to make the fenlands more profitable. The procedure was costly, and investors were given the land providing they paid for the work to set up the drainage system, leaving the local people without access to what had been common land. What ensued was unrest and an effort by the local farmers and fishermen to reclaim the lands; but the new landowners proved to be too powerful, and as a result, the land enclosures proceeded over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, leaving many locals without the agricultural means to make a living (Taylor 179-80).

In spite of the controversy associated with the land enclosures, Wilson endorses drainage, claiming that if every land-holder would drain their land, much more of it would be available to cultivate, thus creating work for all "throughout the circling year" (676). Where the locals saw drainage as the loss of common land, Wilson sees new opportunity for cultivating crops and feeding farm animals that otherwise could not be sustained with the meager offerings of the fens:

> Where the dejected sheep all bleating stood,
>
> Benumb'd with chilly damps and starv'd for food,
>
> Behold firm land appear, with wholesome grass;
>
> The cattle's looks proclaim it as we pass:
>
> Death, which so oft in tainted rots appear'd,
>
> Is by the farmer now no longer fear'd. (665-70).

Wilson describes the process of building the drains in such detail as to leave little doubt that she either witnessed the laborious work or helped with the procedure. The depth and height of the trenches are specified, as is the construction of the wall that encloses it:

> Let a broad trench, three feet in depth, be made;
>
> Observe that with descent your conduit run,
>
> Whether to the rising or setting sun;
>
> Let in breadth about a foot extend,
>
> And with a wall you must its side defend;
>
> This wall in height at least must be a foot (682-87).

She then explains the importance of keeping the water contained within the trench, as any seepage could cause sinking and prevent the water from proceeding to the main stream.

Although Wilson saw an opportunity for agricultural growth and improvement in land enclosure and drainage, it is important to note that women also experienced loss because of these changes. As we learned previously in this chapter, many women were no longer part of a family economy as their husbands did not have access to common land. Consequently, men were most often employed as agricultural labourers, leaving women to work in domestic labour, segregated from outdoor work and advancing the sexual division of labour (Hill 61).

Men who could not find employment in agriculture sought to make a living in other trades, often taking work away from the women. Hannah Barker also mentions the sharp decline in spinning as an employment opportunity for women, but does not mention the increased involvement of men in the trade (128). John Rule, on the other hand, claims that, in the "golden ages" of weaving men who worked in the trade made a decent wage in the late eighteenth century, while women spun the yarn that was required for production. Increased urban industrialization eventually announced much leaner times for weavers and spinners in rural areas, resulting in the trade becoming a family business, with women and children joining in production in an effort to compete with the factories (36-7). Wilson looks upon a town (likely the Spitalfields area of London), and traces the origins of the art of weaving to the Huguenot weavers who migrated from France in the late seventeenth century:

> The starving hugonots thus Britain fed,
>
> When France made them (strange policy) to leave
>
> Their lives, their dear religion, or to breathe
>
> A foreign air and trust a neighbour king;
>
> Behold, along with them their arts they bring. (580-584)

Although Wilson recognizes the efforts of the weavers in urban factories, and the employment offered to the many unemployed, she nonetheless voices her concern over the negative impact of industrial weaving:

> Fair indust'ry its people all employ;
>
> And did not envy sometimes them annoy,
>
> Their labours, grateful plenty wou'd reward;
>
> But selfish views they only here regard:
>
> Emulous of engrossing all they strive,
>
> Selling too low their woolen wares, to thrive. (571-76)

The rural weaver is then left to compete with the factories that produced at a faster rate and at a lower cost per unit. This left the rural weaver as "…forc'd to seek from other looms his bread," (578), suggesting that the rural weaver was driven into mechanization.

Where certain industries experienced loss during the pre-industrialization and industrialization periods, others flourished. With the land enclosure acts came the specialization of farmland. Consequently, an increase in demand by mid-century saw many farmers specializing in corn production (Rule *Vital Century*, 47-51). This took the place of other types of farm work, a change which affected women considerably. Wilson may have been alluding to the enclosure movement when, from Towler Hill, she observes the "Ripe ears of corn, to tempt the reaper's hand" (466). Wilson's hand of death could symbolize the enclosure movement itself as well as the eradication of farmland for the purpose of industrialization. Wilson contrasts industrialization and profit with modesty and contentment later in the poem when she describes a corn mill where the owner is not influenced by industrial development, but remains loyal to his modest rural occupation:

Unconscious of the pangs ambition brings,

The honest miller sits, and cheerful sings;

Meagre poverty he need never dread,

His occupation still assures him bread;

Proud science never lead his mind astray,

He loves to read his bible, and to pray. (1362-67)

This passage illustrates a pastoral scene with an "honest miller" who "cheerful sings" and prays in comparison to the georgic style featured in the agricultural scenes of cheese making that focuses on production. Both the pastoral and georgic styles contrast with industrialization, which meant loss of employment and an altered standard of living for many.

The last segment of *Teisa* is devoted to war-- another type of labour and loss. Here Wilson covers the American Revolutionary War, where thousands of sons, brothers, husbands, and fathers fought and died. But for Wilson, when William Pitt, Earl of Chatham died, he took with him any hope for Britain to remain united with its colonies:

Britain expected Chatham wou'd arise,

To scatter with his light her enemies:

But there her hopes are frustrate,

And she is left to struggle with her fate. (1610-13)

Wilson mourns the loss of William Pitt, along with the loss for Britain, whose labour, productivity and industriousness will now belong to a new state:

While peaceful peasants with the plow-share tear

The fallow grounds, they to the wars are prest,

The late useful looms amidst lumber rest,

While their industrious own'rs, interr'd, now lay

In America's hospitable clay. (1603-07)

The last lines of the poem describe the death of Pitt: "When he could no more, the patriot cry'd, / "O Camden! Save my country – and died!" (68). Pitt did not experience sudden death as is suggested in the poem. Rather, he died some weeks after a public collapse during a speech defending the greatness of Britain during the American Revolutionary War. Pitt, known as a gifted public speaker, was struck by illness, and convalesced in seclusion for long periods, losing attention as a political figure (Peters).

Wilson, like Pope, employs georgic and pastoral elements in *Teisa* to discuss past and present British history and politics. In addition, with the use of both genres as contrasting instruments, Wilson takes the opportunity to transmit her personal thoughts on society and events that have contributed to the reshaping of the land, an alteration that affected many lives adversely, primarily those of labourers and women.

When reading Anne Wilson's *Teisa*, Elizabeth Hands's satire on her work in service, and Susannah Harrison's unfailing religious dedications, it seems all the more unjust that the value of the work of eighteenth-century women was not visible to eighteenth-century society. The introduction of the wage economy set women and men apart. Women, who had traditionally worked alongside male workers in the family economy, were forced to relinquish their place to men, whose work was considered more valuable. What seems to have been a concerted effort by eighteenth-century society to keep labouring women obscure and unnoticed, indoors, and away from outdoor work, must indeed have contributed to their oppression. On the other hand, the dedication that was required from women, the intensity of the labour performed compared to the wages earned, were certainly real for them. Writing about the realities of their work, how they

were perceived as servants or labourers, or using their work as an opportunity to remark on social injustice, empowered labouring women to prove their value as writers and as worthy individuals.

Conclusion

Recent scholarship revealed more about the labouring woman of eighteenth-century society than I had originally anticipated, although my research resulted in less biographical information on Hands, Harrison, and Wilson than initially expected. Fortunately, the poetry of these three obscure authors was substantial and proved to be valuable to the reconstruction of their lives. Although much of the recent historical scholarship utilized for my research was valuable in interpreting the labouring woman of the eighteenth century, a complete representation of the labouring woman, including voice and individuality would not have been possible without the written works of the women authors. What has been gleaned from the scholarship regarding the social rudiments that shaped girls into women indicates very strongly that, from a young age, women were meant to be silenced. However, that is not to say that the process of silencing women was deliberate. Rather, it is possible that a concept that was initiated centuries ago and considered to be appropriate, evolved and strengthened, thus securing the secondary place of women in society and reinforcing their silence. What started off as convenient or useful became customary, relegating women to positions of oppression. Established social norms shaped by organized religion taught their followers the benefits of obedience, discipline, and order, thereby discouraging any rebellion against social injustice. Likewise, the SPCK and Methodist groups offered the poor an education mirrored polite society in regard to morality, but educated their students in tasks suitable only to their social standing. Boys therefore, were taught to read, write, and do basic arithmetic, while girls were generally taught how to read and sew. The work of the labouring woman was undervalued in many instances, as the Enclosure Acts pushed them further from work in husbandry to work indoors in domestic labour. When taxes were imposed on domestic servants, who were considered

unnecessary by the British government to the maintenance and growth of the economy, women were once again ostracized and silenced as marginalized members of society.

Despite the efforts of those who worked to extinguish the identity of women as individuals of value and to mould them into social beings deemed powerless to speak or to be acknowledged, some labouring women managed to find their voice through writing. The simple task of writing, a function that is taken for granted during the twenty-first century must have required an elevated level of dedication, determination, and tenacity, given the lack of time, money, and resources available to labouring women. (Where, one wonders, did they even get paper and ink of their own?) It is the quality and depth of this writing, more specifically from Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Anne Wilson, that has made the greatest contributions to this thesis. Without the analysis of their poetry, the social portrait of the labouring woman would have remained faceless and impersonal. Their writing, in addition to contributing to the literary canon, portrays the labouring woman as an individual, complete with reflections and opinions. Indeed, Elizabeth Hands and Susannah Harrison rose above the social constraints and defied the odds in the successful publication of their works. Judging by her overwhelming number of subscribers, Hands was almost certainly well liked, or was simply admired for her talent, as the satirical poetry she wrote regarding the perception of the higher ranks toward servants could have sparked controversy. However, the tremendous support from the local clergy in the publication of those poems would minimize that possibility. As for Susannah Harrison, who could no longer work in service, she laboured in her own way by writing diligently and faithfully from her sick bed. Her hymns, while affirming her devotion to God, also reflected her personal thoughts and emotions, allowing her own voice to emerge. The reader accompanies

Harrison in her faith, joy, bitterness, and doubt, as her hymns form a portrait of an ailing young woman determined to keep her faith regardless of how dire her circumstances.

Although there is some question as to whether Anne Wilson was in fact a labourer, her written accounts, as specified in the third chapter, of digging trenches for drainage, and of making cheese and whig, prove that she was either a participant in or a close observer of these forms of labour. Furthermore, her concerns over occurring and imminent changes in rural Britain and in the British economy are expressed at several intervals, suggesting that these issues were alarming to her, as they would be to someone whose livelihood was threatened by such actions. The narrator's references to land enclosure, industrialization, and war are other indications that these matters were of significant importance, as was the discrimination against the working poor, who laboured for the benefit of polite society. Indeed, when considering Wilson's numerous references to agriculture and labour, there is little doubt that she was from the labouring ranks or that she had close ties to the labouring classes. Perhaps Wilson chose to echo the work of an established and admired writer of the period simply to substantiate a connection between both classes.

Despite the renewed interest in labouring writers over the past three decades, and the scholarship available on the topic, there remains much to be explored. Indeed, the poetry of Elizabeth Hands, Susannah Harrison, and Anne Wilson has proven to be substantive and valuable literary work. However, although their writing is of the same sophistication and calibre as that of Leapor, Collier and Yearsley, they have not received the same level of interest. Yet, my initial research easily revealed Hands's *The Death of Amnon* and Wilson's *Teisa*, two significant works that are still worthy of consideration and investigation in the twenty first-century. Furthermore, *Songs in the Night* by Harrison contains hymns that are sung in religious

services to this day. If works of this calibre that have been obscured for centuries are now worthy of investigation, it is reasonable to assume that the same is possible for others. For example, three women of considerable interest based on their remarkable lives and writing are Ellen Taylor, Ann Candler, and Jean Glover. Taylor was an Irish washerwoman whose collection of poems was published by friends who were concerned with her financial situation and endeavoured to generate some income through the publication. One of Taylor's poems, allegedly composed while she washed clothing by the river, explains her frustration about her ability to write poetry, as it makes her work in service seem monotonous in comparison. Ann Candler wrote the majority of her poetry while housed in a workhouse, where she and her family lived intermittently throughout the course of her life. Her writing was largely autobiographical and addressed her life of poverty and heartbreak as a mother and as a spouse. Jean Glover was a singer and actress whose musical composition was published by Robbie Burns, although he later labelled her a "thief and a whore" and claimed that she had been in jail on several occasions. These are but three examples of labouring women of the eighteenth century who wrote poetry to share their thoughts and opinions, or to leave a legacy. Their writing is sophisticated, valuable, and worthy of consideration. If the work of the labouring woman writer remains neglected, the poetry from these authors as well as others will also. Continuing the investigation into the works of labouring women writers that have been neglected for centuries will not only reward the literary historian with poetry of value and substance, but will further open the broader world of women and their lives in eighteenth-century England.

CODA

My first encounter with labouring women writers was during my first year of undergraduate studies when I was introduced to Leapor, Collier, and Yearsley. If I had to explain my attraction to their lives and writing, it is that I simply identified with their personal struggles in regard to the want of an education and their inherent need for writing. When searching for labouring women to be part of my MA thesis, I discovered Hands, Harrison, and Wilson, who wrote exceptional poetry, and who, despite their personal difficulties and social constraints, managed to accomplish during the eighteenth century what I wish to accomplish today.

What I knew of their lives was very little, as has been expressed several times in my thesis. Other than a copy of Hands's marriage certificate, and what could be a copy of Harrison's birth certificate, and an 1802 publication of her book *Songs in the Night* acquired from eBay, I have scant evidence that three writers that I have been connected to for so long actually existed. Anyone who has researched the lives of individuals under any context understands how the subject takes on a life of their own and my research was no exception. Perhaps that is what led me to England—to witness for myself the little that I was able to glean from the information that I gathered; or perhaps it was to discover new evidence, further proof of the existence of three women I have so come to admire. My attempts were not entirely futile, as two scheduled trips to the British Library in the "rare books and music" section delivered the original reviews for Hand's *The Death of Amnon* in the 1790 edition of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, as well as in *The Monthly Review.* As for Susannah Harrison, an original copy of her first publication was available for my perusal, as well as a later 1810 edition. I also located a short biography in an anthology of women composers and hymnists.

The highpoint and most rewarding part of my trip was my visit to St. Peter's parish in Bourton-on-Dunsmore, where I located the headstone of Elizabeth Hands, her grandson, and her daughter and son-in-law. There is also a large headstone located at the back of the cemetery with a Herbert family inscription, very possibly Elizabeth's relatives. Further up the country road in Birdingbury, a local pub is also the meeting place of the Birdingbury Local History Group, who contacted me shortly after receiving my hand-written message. To date, the group has not been able to provide me with additional information, but remain committed to forwarding anything that may be uncovered in the future. I have also promised a copy of my thesis once it is complete.

After an exhaustive search, Anne Wilson remains elusive, and my limited time in England did not allow me to fulfil my wish to explore areas of the banks of the River Tees, more specifically, the High Force Waterfall. The possibility of uncovering additional information on Anne Wilson is slight however, as my communication with Bridget Keegan, who produced the most comprehensive scholarship available on Wilson, confirmed. One of my future goals is to add to the very limited scholarship on Anne Wilson, since *Teisa* and *Jephthah's Daughter* are comprehensive works that merit additional study and analysis. It is not my objective to limit further research to Wilson, Hands and Harrison, however. My research has revealed other names that I wish to explore, labouring women whose writing shows promise of talent, commitment, struggle and endurance. Anne Candler, Ellen Taylor, and Jean Glover await further exploration, and it is my intent to oblige.

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