UMEÅ UNIVERSITY
Umeå Centre for Gender Studies

Through the Lens of Poetry and Intersectionality

Uncovering Early Traces of Multiple Oppression in the Literary Works of Labouring-Class Women in the 18th Century.

Mastori Eirini

Master thesis, 15 hp
Gender Studies, Gender, Justice, and Society
Spring term 2024, Supervisor Tamara Andersson

Abstract

This study explores the oppression faced by 18th-century labouring-class women through poetry and intersectionality. By employing Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality and Beverly Skeggs' theory of respectability, it examines how gender and class intertwine to create unique challenges. Analysing the lives and works of non-canonized women poets, the research unveils enduring patterns of overlapping oppressions, highlighting the significance of intersectionality in understanding women's experiences. This study offers fresh insights into their struggles, contributing to both literary analysis and women's studies.

Keywords

Labouring class, intersectionality, respectability, oppression, gender inequalities.

Table of Contents

Contents

Abstract **2**

Table of Contents **3**

Introduction **4**

"The women never see themselves as just women; **4**

***it is always read through class." (*Skeggs 1997, p.191)** **4**

1. Social Hierarchies in the Eighteenth-Century Britain and Political Context **6**

1.1 Labouring Class Women in 18th-Century Society **7**

2. Previous research **9**

3.Method. /Material **10**

4. Understanding Intersectionality **11**

4.1 Respectability **12**

5. Case studies: Labouring-class women poets as Proto-feminists and subjects of oppression **13**

5..1 Mary Collier (c. 1688 – 1762): The Initiator of the labouring women's poetry **13**

5.2 Mary Leapor (1722–1746) **16**

5.2.1 Intersectionality and respectability in Leapor's poetry. **16**

5.2.2 Women's position in Leapor's poetry **18**

5.3 Ann Yearsley (1753 –1806) **22**

5.3.1 Life and Work **24**

6. Conclusion **28**

Works Cited **31**

References **31**

Introduction

"The women never see themselves as just women;

*it is always read through class." (*Skeggs 1997,191)

In the course of literary history, the voices of female poets often emerge as testimonies to both the struggles and triumphs of women in societies marked by systemic oppression. This essay delves into the narratives of three notable female poets—MaryCollier, Mary Leapor, and Ann Yearsley—whose works reflect their experiences within patriarchal structures. Through their verses, these non-canonical poets shed light on the intersections of gender, class, and power dynamics, illuminating the multifaceted nature of oppression faced by women in the 18th century and the constraints placed on female identity and agency, primarily for labouring but also upper-class women.

Mary Collier's seminal work, "The Woman's Labour," offers a raw and unfiltered portrayal of the hardships endured by labouring-class women, highlighting the exploitative working conditions and social injustices pervasive in her time. Similarly, Leapor's poems, characterised by their stark realism and keen social commentary, delve into the complexities of female identity and agency in a society rife with gender-based constraints and deal with the issue of oppressive patriarchy, which she features as common for all women. Furthermore, the narrative extends to the remarkable story of Ann Yearsley, whose journey from a humble milkmaid to a celebrated poet and retrospectively a feminist icon highlights the transformative power of literary expression in challenging conventional notions of femininity and societal roles serving as a means to emancipation and reclaiming of her autonomous identity. Through examining their poetry, this study focuses on their early feminist views, how different social identities intersect and are associated with oppression and how theseissues still matter in today's discussions on gender equality.

The selected poets are not the sole British female labouring-class poets whose works have survived, but they are distinguished by the profound and exceptional social commentary evident in their works. Their poetry dealing with the social injustices, restrictions, and prejudices experienced by labouring-class women provides valuable insights into the intersection of gender and social class in shaping women's subjectivity and highlights diverse modes of oppression that have shaped their experiences.

Poetry serves as a means of expression through which these women articulate their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. It has been used in this research as a tool to testify to their lived experiences and express their voices. Intersectionality provides the broader contextual framework within which issues of gender and class are intertwined and jointly contribute significantly to women's subjugation. Many parts of this essay stress its importance in understanding women's multiple oppression, as intersectionality appears to be at the core of their experiences.

The aim of this study is to illuminate the historical struggles of 18th-century labouring-class women and the unique challenges they faced as women and labourers at the same time within an established hierarchical system that placed labourers at the bottom of the social strata in 18th-century Britain and women workers in particular, at the fringes of respectable society. I will use this concept of respectability introduced by Beverly Skeggs as a critical element in understanding the intersection of class, gender, and identity. Skeggs' analysis reveals how respectability functions as a mechanism of social control and a means of negotiating social status, particularly among working-class women, although actually being imposed from the middle class (or here, the bourgeoisie) and internalised by the labouring one. Through their verse, these female poets both challenge and adhere to social class norms informed by the bourgeoisie, constructing their own identity to achieve respectability and proving that the subjectivity constructed through this reciprocal process of challenging and internalising social patterns and societal gender expectations is informed by class (Skeggs, 1997, p.75).

The research questions this study aims to answer can be summarised as follows:

- How do these female poets construct their subjectivity by challenging norms through their poetry?
- How, simultaneously, they appear to have consolidated and adhered to prescribed norms to gain respectability.
- How is respectability intertwined with gender and class, and what different meaning does it take for each female poet?
- In conclusion, how is respectability contemporary and important for gender studies in understanding multiple facets of oppression women still undergo?

As Judith Butler argues and Skeggs cites, women is a term that marks a dense intersection of social relations that cannot be summarised through the terms of identity (Skeggs, 1997, p. 166). Following this string of thought, this essay argues that being a woman alone is not the sole reason for oppression, but the different social structures and ideals of respectability prevailing

in each historical era intersect with gender, form women's experiences, promote their categorisation and contribute to their subjugation, since pursuing respectability means from the start the individuals lack or feel that they lack this quality.

The research methodology comprises two distinct components. One approach to understanding women's experiences in their time is to conduct brief historical research into the socio-cultural and economic background of these women. Another approach is to analyse their literary works, which can shed light on issues of oppression and the complex interplay of gender and class. The intersectionality framework is applied retrospectively in historical, cultural, and literary contexts to examine the power relationships formed by overlapping gender -class categories.

1. Social Hierarchies in the Eighteenth-Century Britain and Political Context

The union of Scotland to Britain in 1707, which led to the formation of Great Britain, marks historically the eighteenth century. It was also a period when Britain was "involved with the world beyond its shores than ever before" (Burns 2010,125). The British ships sailing the oceans developed the trade and created great economic benefits while at the same time, British dominion was rising. The vast colonies in the Barbados islands, the Caribbean and Jamaica produced large amounts of sugar from local sugar cane plantations where enslaved people worked and amassed significant wealth for the country's treasurers, turning the former agricultural England into a trade power. Nevertheless, the economic benefits were directed primarily to the upper classes, while the ordinary Britons still had a poor quality of life.

During the reigns of the Hanoverian monarchs George I (1714-1727), George II (1727-1760), and George III (1760-1820), British governance was dominated by two major political parties: the Whigs and the Tories. The Whigs, ascendant during George I's reign, represented great landowners, bankers, Dissenters, and urban interests (Black, 2001, p.99) and supported the Hanoverian succession and anti-French policies. The Tories, popular and recognised for their support from influential Church of England clergy (Burns 2010, p. 129), were associated with Anglicanism and the landed gentry, while Whiggism was linked to the aristocracy, affluent landowning families, and the financial interests of the prosperous middle class.

British society's development occurred within this historical and political context. The rise of the bourgeoisie, an upper middle class consisting of merchants, bankers, and goldsmiths, was attributed to the growth of trade. Simultaneously, the aristocracy,

comprising the Earls, Dukes, Countesses, and Duchesses, began to lose their monopoly on power and wealth. Although there were no significant conflicts between the gentry and aristocracy during the 18th century, British society, comprising numerous classes, remained strictly stratified throughout. The aristocrats were positioned at the top of the hierarchy, followed by the gentry, comprising gentlemen, distinguished merchants, and other affluent members of society who owned vast plots of land and houses. Beneath them lay the middle class, which represented a smaller proportion of the population, followed by yeomen, who held substantial land that they cultivated and were responsible for tilling. Although yeomen were not as economically or politically powerful as the gentry, they nevertheless enjoyed a certain degree of independence and were considered respectable members of society. The lower strata of the social hierarchy during the period under study comprised individuals belonging to the labouring class, encompassing labourers, servants, artisans, and factory workers. Unfortunately, these groups were often subjected to a state of poverty, working for extended hours for meagre wages in arduous conditions. The labouring poor found themselves in a precarious position with limited opportunities for social mobility and a conspicuous absence of a platform to voice their opinions on political and social matters. In fact, the majority of the population during that time was classified as labouring poor (Black, 2001, p.104).

1.1 Labouring Class Women in 18th-Century Society

In 18th-century society, women were subject to dominant beliefs that postulated their financial dependence on their husbands, confinement to the household, and acceptance of their intellectually and spiritually subordinate roles. This approach was underpinned by the tradition of patriarchy, which extended its influence into the legal systems of the time. According to English common law, a woman's personal property became her husband's upon marriage, falling under his jurisdiction. This practice was grounded in the law of coverture, which subsumed a woman's legal identity within that of her husband. Moreover, the tradition of primogeniture meant that daughters could only inherit land estates if there were no living sons in the family (Ramsbottom, 2002, pp. 209-210).

The primary duties of women, regardless of social class, were centred around household chores and childbearing. Women belonging to the upper classes could employ servants or maids and were primarily concerned with their supervision. In contrast, the lives of women belonging to the lower classes revolved around survival. These women were allowed, if not compelled, to work in various jobs, among others in the fields alongside men. However, the enclosures severely impacted fieldwork, gradually reducing cultivable and

common land (Ferguson 1995,1) and their jobs were afflicted. During the harsh winters, women sought employment in upper-class households, where they worked as maids, cooks, and washers. They also had to care for their own households, children, and domestic animals, which were crucial to the family's survival. Changes like enclosure and the agricultural revolution had begun to undermine the patriarchal family economy as well and made it hard for families to live off the land. To survive, many turned to domestic industry, doing spinning and weaving work provided by merchants in exchange for cash.

During the textile industry's brief boom in the late 18th century, families benefited as women worked on looms. In places like Glasgow and Lancashire, the family labour system was common, with fathers earning wages for the whole family's work, including children and sometimes wives. However, this could lead to self-exploitation. Women and children were often paid very little because their main value was seen as providing domestic support (Clark, 1995, p.14)

The culture of the skilled artisan flourished at the time in large cities like London, yet their job-among others, tailors and shoemakers, which were occupations primarily exercised by men- were seasonal and required “a wife’s earnings to feed the family” (Clark, 1995, p. 16). Nevertheless, until the end of the eighteenth century, it was uncommon for wives to assist their husbands in their trades. Trade organisations strictly prohibited wives from helping their husbands because they wanted to maintain their own skills and status by excluding women from their professions. Women were only allowed to work in the "dishonourable" or poorly paid branches of artisan trades. Opportunities for formal apprenticeship were not open to women who could only undertake minor tasks to earn a living, like needleworking, chairing and cleaning.

Plebeian women created their own networks -not to keep their professions closed or socialise at the local pubs like male artisans-but to survive hunger. Neighbours offered aid to each other; females working in the textile industry would share their resources, supported married women in handling paid work and household chores, coping with the challenges of childbirth, and even dealing with irresponsible husbands. Plebeian women also appeared to take pleasure in public life, and drinking was accepted for their social strata, providing them access to public space where a labouring woman might be found drinking alongside a man. These liberties shocked middle-class society (Clark 1995,35), and issues of morality and respectability according to the norms and habits of the bourgeoisie were raised against labouring class women.

Towards the end of the century, women also played a critical role in the country's industrialisation. Although industrial development further subordinated women to men and even restricted their movement within the household-since some automated positions were primarily occupied by males- women still received marginal positions at work (Webster 2003,458).

Within this social context, the labouring class female poets presented in this work wrotetheir verse. In this essay, I use the term labouring class in the same sense Christmas introduces it in his work Lab'ring Muses (Christmas 2001, p.42) as interchangeable with "plebeian" to emphasise the prevailing view of the time that linked labour with social status, without introducing the theoretical and historical complexities associated with nineteenth-century termslike "working-class" or "proletarian", which were coined later and bear a different meaning. Working class, after all, is a term that refers broadly to wage workers and is linked with the Industrial Revolution, which occurred later.

2. Previous research.

Scholars specialising in 18th-century British literature and feminist studies have scrutinised the lives and works of the female poets presented in this essay. M. Ferguson (1995) researched how labouring-class women in the 18th century navigated intersections of gender, class, and national identity in their writings. However, Leapor is not included in her work.

W. J. Christmas (2001) also investigates labouring-class literary tradition, however, from a broader scope that includes both male and female poets. The up-to-date analysis has generated two conflicting viewpoints regarding the interpretation of female poets' verse:

In the 1970s and 1980s, feminist scholars re-evaluated writers such as Leapor, Collier, and Yearsley, shedding light on these women whose literary works and biographies had been obscured, primarily due to their gender and social class. This re-evaluation was conducted through a contemporary feminist and Marxist lens, as exemplified by Landry's works on Mary Leapor (Greene & Messenger, 2015, p.30). Moreover, numerous scholars have examined the dispute between plebeian female poet Ann Yearsley and her patron Hannah More within the context of gendered class dynamics, emphasising Yearsley's speech as a form of political discourse—a catalyst for challenging masculinised oppressive values and patriarchal stereotypes that contributed significantly to her oppression. Nevertheless, some scholars contest the portrayal of these female poets as feminist pioneers,

arguing that the contemporary lens through which their work is presented as feminist discourse is a retrospective imposition designed to serve 21st-century socio-political objectives (Felsenstein, 2002, p. 347).

The present research aims to bridge a gap between conflicting traditions and offer a different perspective on the subject. Although intersectionality once again provides the broader context for the analysis, the poets are examined individually to explore and highlight different kinds of subjugation. The female poets analysed here were carefully chosen to pinpoint this diversity of oppression experienced. In brief, Collier expresses her perspectives of oppression, which are primarily relevant to the workplace. Leapor adopts a more radical view, speaking explicitly about matrimony as an exploitative institution for women. Ann Yearsley reveals how the subjugation of working-class women can also emanate from women in the bourgeoisie who have internalised patriarchal patterns, persisting regardless of gender. Complementarily, this essay uses the concept of respectability to illuminate their incentives and to provide a missing link between them as subjects of oppression and the upper class's standards, functioning implicitly as an ideal worth pursuing and a means of social control towards lower classes.

3. Method. /Material

In this essay, the poems of specific female figures are analysed using discourse analysis and historical research to reveal traces of the various forms of oppression they experienced at the intersection of gender and class. Excerpts of their poems will serve as primary source material revealing the constraints and subjugation they endured. The poems were selected among others in their collection to align with the aim of showing different kinds of oppression experienced. Intersectionality is utilised as the broader framework, encompassing multiple social identities to provide insights into how inequalities are generated. Additionally, it will draw upon historical references to shed light on the lives of these individuals, as documented by biographers and scholars who have previously engaged with these figures, to offer an overall perspective on
the women's works and lives.

The concept of respectability introduced by Beverly Skeggs will also be considered to demonstrate how females are reproduced as subjects through a dynamic process in a constant dialectic process to the upper-society milieu and ideals. In the following two sections, a brief analysis of the concept of intersectionality and respectability is attempted to help the reader comprehend their relevance to this study.

4. Understanding Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a concept explaining the interplay of various social identities and systems of oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal scholar, coined the term in the late 1980s to show that women of colour face multiple injustices, which should be considered collectively to understand and explain how this shapes their everyday lives. Their experiences are moulded by various factors such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and more. This framework highlights the interconnectedness of social categories and their impacts on individuals' experiences. It suggests that gender alone is not the primary source of marginalisation. A blackwoman faces discrimination not only due to her gender but also due to her colour, which results in compounded forms of social exclusion. Examining these factors in isolation fails to grasp the complexity of such experiences. Intersectionality underscores the need to acknowledge individuals' unique struggles at the intersections of multiple identities and powerstructures perpetuating inequality.

Despite the significance of the term intersectionality for gender studies, a clear definition of it has not yet been achieved. Whether the term refers to a theory, a heuristic device, and a method of identifying overlapping inequalities (Lutz 2015,39) or a concept is debated. Questions were also raised regarding whether intersectionality should be treated as a crossroad where inequalities coincide and, therefore, be conceptualised as a static or a dynamic process (Davis, 2008, p. 68) that evolves further as new social needs and/or identities and, consequently, power relationships emerge.

After the term gained popularity, it expanded to disciplines beyond feminism and sociology. This led to the emergence of different definitions. However, what all these had in common was the fact that they no longer referred to specific groups or social identity structures. Instead, the term became all-inclusive of multiple identity categories such as age, disability, education, ethnicity, occupation, sexual orientation, etc. The focus remained on themultifaceted nature of intersectionality, which aims to uncover the compounding effects of oppression (Gopaldas 2013,91)

In this essay, the concept of intersectionality is used to reflect on how labouring women poets with diverse social identities have faced oppression. It is considered a broader framework through which gender inequality has been examined historically.

4.1 Respectability

Beverley Skeggs' concept of respectability serves as a crucial framework for comprehending the interplay of class, gender, and identity. Her analysis illuminates how respectability functions as a tool for social regulation and a method for navigating social status, particularlyamong working-class women.

Respectability has historically been tied to moral and social judgments imposed by the middle on the working class. Working-class women were often judged based on their adherence to middle-class behaviour, morality, and appearance standards. This historical and social context highlights the role of respectability in maintaining class distinctions and controlling the behaviour of working-class individuals (Skeggs, 1997, p.7).

Skeggs draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital to explain how respectability is a form of this capital that grants social legitimacy. Symbolic violence, an essential aspect of her theory, refers to the subtle ways social hierarchies are maintained, often through internalising their standards. In striving to be respectable, working-class women often internalise middle-class norms and values, perpetuating their subordination in their effort to become "respectable subjects" (Skeggs,1997, p.12)

The concept of respectability is highly gendered, with women facing more scrutiny regarding their behaviour and appearance than men, who are traditionally seen as "legitimate knowers" (Skeggs, 1997, p. 18). These standards are influenced by broader social and economic conditions, leading to working-class women being judged more harshly and held to stricter standards than men. Respectability is not just an abstract idea but is embodied in everyday practices like dress, speech, manners, and lifestyle choices. These practices serve as a way for women to resist stigmatisation and assert their worth, reinforcing existing social hierarchies. By adhering to these practices, they attempt to gain social recognition and legitimacy (Skeggs, 1997, p. 95).

This essay's concept of respectability is crucial for understanding how and why class, gender, and identity intersect to contribute to women's oppression. It reveals how respectability functions as a mechanism of social control and a means of negotiating personal social status among labouring-class women.

5. Case studies: Labouring-class women poets as Proto-feminists and subjectsof oppression

5.1 Mary Collier (c. 1688 – 1762): The Initiator of the labouring women'spoetry

Mary Collier, also known as the Petersfield Washerwoman poet, is considered to be the first published labouring female poet in 18th-century Britain (Donna 1990, p. 560) and is the one that opened the subgenre of labouring poetry in Britain to women. Born in Sussex, she received some non-institutional education from her mother until her death. Collier moved to Petersfield after losing her father, presumably seeking better work opportunities. She was a washerwoman,a brewer, and a field worker for many years and remained unmarried. Her most iconic poem is"The Woman's Labour: An Epistle to Mr Stephen Duck," written in response to Duck's poem"The Thresher's Labour,"which was published without authorisation in 1730.

Stephen Duck, an agricultural labourer, became a unique cultural figure and initiator of labouring class poetry when his poem was read at Queen Caroline's court, attracting her attention and leading to his receiving royal patronage. This allowed him to become the first peasant poet to live off his writing and achieve social mobility as he was first appointed to various positions attached to the royal household (Batt, 2005, p.452); later, he was even awarded a pension by the Queen and eventually became a clergyman after her death. In his poem, Duck describes the toils of male field workers in heroic terms and adoptsa particularly scathing stance against female field labourers, initiating a distinctively gendered discourse and attributing to women socially constructed stereotypes that persist in modern times, diminishing their work and marginalising them, disregarding their common class origin:

> Our Master comes, and at his Heels a Throng Of
> prattling Females, arm'd with Rake and Prong;
> Prepar'd, whilst he is here, to make his Hay;
> Or, if he turns his Back, prepar'd to play:
> But here, or gone, sure of this Comfort still;
> Here's Company, so they may chat their Fill.
> Ah! were their Hands so active as their Tongues,
>
> How nimbly then would move the Rakes and Prongs? (V.162-169)

An avid reader, Collier read Duck's poem and wrote her own as a critical response to his sexist discourse of idle, superficial, cunning, labouring women.

"Duck's Poems came abroad, which I ſoon got by heart, fancying he had been too Severe on the Female Sex in his Threſher's Labour brought me to a Strong propenſity to call an Army of Amazons to vindicate the injured Sex" (Collier,1762)

Initially not intended for publication, Collier's poem subverts Duck's arguments of female idleness. Through her writing, she sheds light on the multiple burdens experienced by women labourers, particularly highlighting the triplet of low-paid wage work, housekeeping, and motherhood. Her work serves as a reminder to modern readers that women's oppression has a long historical root and is often compounded by multiple factors, many of them remaining contemporary.

Collier confronts Duck in her poem, directly tackling the challenge he presents and exposing the subordination of women. She uses powerful language, referring to herself as a"Slave" (v.6), a term that carried significant weight in the 18th century when slavery was prevalent in England. Collier's approach is noteworthy for rejecting the idea that gender inequalities are inherent and biological. Instead, she emphasises their social and cultural roots and also addresses the lack of educational opportunities for women.:

No Learning ever was bestow'd on me;
My Life was always spent in Drudgery:
And not alone; alas! with Grief I find,
It is the Portion of poor Woman-kind.
Oft have I thought as on my Bed I lay,
Eas'd from the tiresome Labours of the Day,
Our first Extraction from a Mass refin'd,
Could never be for slavery design'd;
Till Time and Custom by Degrees destroy'd
That happy State our Sex at first enjoy'd. (v 7-16)

Collier's perspective of the oppression of women perceives this reality as socially initiated by patriarchal customs and traditions, thus featured as artificial in comparison to the older matriarchal and natural state of society; she stands in contrast to the assumptions that underpin Duck's work, which may be seen as implicitly endorsing a biological basis for such inequalities, primarily referring to women's innate cunningness and natural speech, which is presented as a conglomeration of noises, without logic and meaning:

All talk at once; but seeming all to fear,
That what they speak, the rest will hardly hear;
Till by degrees so high their Notes they strain,
A Stander by can nought distinguish plain.
So loud's their Speech, and so confus'd their Noise,
Scarce puzzled ECHO can return the Voice. (V.176-181)

Duck marginalises women not only in terms of their work or gender but also casts them outof the symbolic order of language altogether (Donna, 1990, p.62). Donna associates the women's speech as presented by Duck with the Ovidian figure of the Nymph Echo from Metamorphoses Book III. The myth discusses the talkative goddess admired by Venus

for her beautiful voice but sadly later cursed by Juno to be unable to articulate a whole sentence herself unless someone else had already begun it. Language turns that way into a symbolic prison for Echo, who loses her most significant power. Equating language with power and featuring women as unable to partake in it since all they produce is noise in Duck's poem, Donna sees femininity as excluded both from language and power (Donna 1990, 63). Gender and class as two inextricably combined factors contributing to women's marginalisation and subordination are identified by Collier in a plain yet full-of-meaning sentence: "poor woman-kind". This statement makes it prominent that her poetry does not simply respond to a gender conflict but raises issues of discrimination where the combination of socioeconomic class and gender prevails. The labouring class women are separated from the bourgeois ladies, who, although not privileged towards the men of their era, do not face the intersection of oppression working class women do. Furthermore, as work for the labouring women shifted in the winter from the fields into "chairing" (v.138), they would seek employment in the bourgeois households, where they worked from morning till dawn washing the ladies' linens, rubbing their skillets until "not only sweat but blood" (v.185) would trickle down from their hands, while they were also faced with the house mistress's disdain towards them, a distinct sign that gender was not the sole source of oppression.

Class is the additional factor that adds to subordination and applies even to same-sex individuals. Decades later, a similar perspective emerges in the verse of Ann Yearsley, confirming the existence of a discrimination pattern that extends beyond the male-female dichotomy.

In pursuit of respectability as a labourer who puts the same effort into work as men do, Collier produced this poem as a response to Duck. What is interesting is that she used the same tools he did. Her poetry uses the same literary form, the heroic couplet, and she applies the same neo-classical conventions (i.e. references to ancient Gods, myths, etc.) popular in that era's poetry, through which labourer poets in particular, tried to reach out to a more intellectual audience and attract their attention to receive benefits and subscribers to their poetry: the bourgeoisie. To put it simply, Collier seems to have already internalised the conventions imposed by the upper class and to get poetic respect and prove herself as a worthy literary figure; she adopts them. Moreover, by referring to women as "the injured sex" or using the term "slave" for herself as a labourer, she projects herself as a subject to men's power, legitimating through her discourse the inequalities she seeks to subvert.

5.2 Mary Leapor (1722–1746)

Mary Leapor was an 18th-century English poet whose work was collectively published by her friend, muse and patronage, Elisabeth Freemantle, after her tragic death of measles at the young age of 24. However, there is evidence that two of her poems, which constituted her literary debut, and were published shortly after she died in The *London Magazine* in January 1747 under the title "The Rural Maid's Reflexions, Written by a Gardener's Daughter. Inscribed to a Lady" and "Sylvia and the Bee" in The Museum magazine in February (Batt 2017,97) were sent out by Leapor before passing (Greene 1993,22-23), revealing a strong literary ambition.

Born into a working-class family as the daughter of a gardener, Leapor spent most of her short life in Northamptonshire, in provincial England. Her access to education and financial resources was limited, though she likely attended the local school, where she was taught to read and write (Markidou, 2009, p.164). She worked as a kitchen maid (Christmas 2001, p.23) or as a cook (Landry, 1990, p.78) for most of her life and served at two aristocratic mansions, ultimately being fired from the one because she spent most of her time writing rather than doing housework. Despite these challenges, she educated herself and wrote poetry that drew the attention of prominent literary figures of her time, such as Samuel Richardson (Markidou, 2015, p. 165). Her "apparent cultural and geographical isolation" (Batt, 2017, p.3) contrasted with her poetic intelligence and introduced her work to the readership in terms that worked to her advance, attracting almost 600 subscribers to her first volume of a posthumously published poetry.

Nevertheless, her work fell into obscurity soon after that. It was only rediscovered in anthologies published in the 1980s and 1990s (Markidou, 2015, p. 165) due to the rising interest in female literary figures of the past within the rise of second and third-wave feminism.

5.2.1 Intersectionality and respectability in Leapor's poetry.

Mary Leapor's poetry predates the formal articulation of intersectionality; however, her workresonates with its principles by addressing issues of social inequality, gender roles, the struggles of the working class, and women's disadvantages and by highlighting how these factors intersect to shape women's experiences of oppression and privilege. She achieves that in three distinct yet interconnected ways: Through her paradigm, by managing to obtain education despite her low socioeconomic status, being the daughter of a gardener in rural Britain, and managing to produce noticeable poetry although, for a woman and particularly

a labouring class one, this was a difficult achievement. Second, she responds directly with her pen to prominent literary figures whose works she rewrites, like Pope and Swift, and finally, through her verses.

In did Leapor proves herself to be the model of what she preaches. She is a woman and a labourer, but this does not prevent her from claiming her share in education and literary writing. We know posthumously from her friend Fremantle that she had collected several books during her lifetime -about 17 volumes- including works by Pope and Dryden (Markidou, 2015, p.164) and educated herself. However, consuming knowledge was not enough for Leapor. She wrote verse herself, despite her family's opposite opinion, who tried to prevent her from writing verse or what she calls "the darling crime" in her poem "Crumble-Hall" because they believed she could pursue more "profitable employment" (Greene, 1993, p. 9), which was after all the purpose for a labourer of her time. Although women writing poetry was not a unique phenomenon, and despite their also narrow educational background, many of them belonged to the bourgeoisie, which was an asset justifying their literary pursuits.

Through her verse, Leapor recognises that women's experiences are shaped both by gender and socioeconomic status, highlighting the interconnectedness of oppression faced by working-class women, like, for instance, in her poem Crumble-Hall, as well as aristocrats or bourgeois ladies who are also portrayed as victims of the patriarchy and subjugated to its power relations.

Regarding respectability: "To not be respectable is to have little social value or legitimacy" (Skeggs 1997,3). It seems that Leapor was striving to gain both social value and legitimacy. The provincial labouring woman, experiencing geographical and cultural isolation, endeavoured to overcome these barriers. Literary fame would allow her to earn both the social acceptance she lacked as a cook maid and would prove her work -and its author to be worthy of the attention of the literary London establishment and thus legitimate. Achieving such fame required publishing and reaching an audience not available in Northamptonshire. This is why, prior to her death, Leapor had already submitted two of her poems to be published in London magazines. London, being the cultural centre of her time, provided the platform to reach a larger and more educated audience, despite documented evidence from Leapor's letters to Freemantle indicating that she felt reserved about the triviality of magazines publishing verse (Batt, 2017, p.22). Publishing in a London magazine was not just synonymous with publicity; moreover, it was significant to establish relationships with London-based publishers and booksellers, which definitely added to Leapor's literary ambition. To establish the literary

identity that would bring her out of her low social status and into a dialogue with the literary stage of her era, she chooses to rewrite the most famous poets of her time Swift, Pope, and Dreyden and at the same time, demonstrates through her verse familiarity with the classics of the antiquity (Homer, Virgil etc.) as well as the English classics, among others Shakespeare, and Milton (Batt, 2017, p. 3)

5.2.2 Women's position in Leapor's poetry

Leapor's poetry focused on women's struggles and the injustices they were confronted with, taking into account both the labouring class woman and the bourgeois. In her poem "An Essay on Woman," she criticised the societal expectations placed on women and argued for their equality and intellectual capabilities. This poem, based on its title, seems to refer to the iconic poet of the era, Alexander Pope and his poem "An Essay on Man," yet in terms of content, Leapor most likely wrote having in mind Pope's "Epistle to a Lady". Not only the characters' names in the two poems are similar (Papillia and Simplicius in Pope, Pamphilia and Simplicus in Leapor) but furthermore, Leapor responds rto Pope's allegations that women lack depth of character and are superficial: "Most Women have no Characters at all. / Matter too soft a lasting mark to bear,/And best distinguish'd by black, brown, or fair." (Lines 1-4)

The female poet addresses the issue of gender inequality straightforwardly from the first verses of her most well-known poem, "An Essay on Woman", responding to Pope while bringing forth the issue of commodification of women's sex through marriage, adopting a critical stance against this institution and raising a voice that argued for womanhood regardless of the social class they belonged to, revealing the collective suppression women in her era underwent.

Woman, a pleasing but a short-lived flow'r,
Too soft for business and too weak for pow'r:
A wife in bondage, or neglected maid;
Despised, if ugly; if she's fair, betrayed.
'Tis wealth alone inspires ev'ry grace,
And calls the raptures to her plenteous face.
What numbers for those charming features pine,
If blooming acres round her temples twine! (Lines.1-8)

The woman is depicted as a natural ornament that exists to please others, primarily meant by that, men. As she is considered to be too weak and soft to do any business in a male-dominated society, only two paths are available in life: She will either live a life in the bondage of marriage or become a domestic worker if she has no dowry or belongs to the lower classes, disregarded by everyone. Her beauty only seems to play a secondary role in

her destiny because the dowry she brings into a prospective marriage weighs as being more critical.

The imagery of "blooming acres round her temples" evokes a sense of abundance and prosperity, symbolising the allure and prestige associated with wealth, only this wealth is engraved on the woman's face, turning it into a "feminized landscape" (Landry1990, p. 82). The woman's beauty is equated with her wealth and land possessions, which she will bring to her husband after marriage. Leapor uses a well-known literary technique commonly used in her time, established initially by Petrarch and utilised further on by Shakespeare, the Blason, to create imagery of women connected to their surroundings.The female is compared body part -by body part and line-by-line to nature. Her eyes might be compared to the stars, her hair to the wind, etc. The poet ends by finding that the beloved woman is superior to nature. Leapor here blasts this convention by using it to illustrate the commodification of women. They are no longer compared to nature to prove their superiority; rather, they are nature themselves, however, not in a lyric way.

They count to men as acres of land, and even if they are beautiful, they are destined to end up betrayed and unhappy, as it was a common belief that after a woman was "married and bedded" (Yates, 2023, p. 4), she lost value to her husband.

Her Lip the Strawberry; and her Eyes more bright
Than sparkling *Venus* in a frosty Night.
Pale Lilies fade; and when the Fair appears,
Snow turns a Negro, and dissolves in Tears.
And where the Charmer treads her magic Toe,
On *English* Ground *Arabian* Odours grow;
Till mighty *Hymen* lists his sceptred Rod,
And sinks her Glories with a fatal Nod;
Dissolves her Triumphs; sweeps her Charms away,
And turns the Goddess to her native Clay.

The beauty of the woman, initially even compared to Venus herself (though at the same time, this line can be understood as a mockery to the exaggerative lyric poetry) soon turns to a lament rather than being celebrated; the lilies fade, the snow turns black and breaks into tears, her beauty is fleeting and the lust that she emanates and is compared to an exotic Arabian fragrance, all are utterly dissolved by marriage, symbolised here by the ancient Greek God Hymen. His effect is catalytic. When he raises his sceptre, all the woman's glories vanish; his nod is fatal. The woman turns from Goddess to native clay, the earthly material people were made from, according to the Christian Bible. All her divine features are lost, and only her earthly and thus associated to death existence remains. Leapor presents here the conventionality of the institution of marriage with the darkest colours and rejects matrimony

for women, denouncing it as a path to their distraction. The fact that women appear to be under the hierarchy of a mighty male God, an image further strengthened by him raising his sceptre (a phallic symbol of male power) upon women, indicates Leapors perspective on marriage. She manages to present poetically all the gendered hierarchies that prevailed in 18th-century Britain and to which women were subsumed and lived under oppression. Though herself a disregarded maid, she raises her voice and criticises heavily the conventions of her time that wanted women's property to be handed in to their husbands after marriage, while even their own legal identity was resolved and became integrated into that of the legal spouse.

Neither beauty nor intelligence and wit are sufficient values to ensure women a prosperous life:

> What small advantage wealth and beauties bring.
> Who would be wise, that knew Pamphilia's fate?
> Or who be fair, and joined to Sylvia's mate?
> Sylvia, whose cheeks are fresh as early day,
> As ev'ning mild, and sweet as spicy May:
> And yet that face her partial husband tires,
> And those bright eyes, that all the world admires.
> Pamphilia's wit who does not strive to shun,
>
> The damsels view her with malignant eyes,
> The men are vexed to find a nymph so wise (V. 20-29)

Both Sylvia's beauty ends up in her husband's boredom, and Pamphylia's intelligence, the name serving as a personification for the poet herself (Greene, 1993, p. 65), is seen by men as a spreading disease that is rather to avoid. Leapor is conscious of the patriarchal system and raises awareness of it but cannot find a solution to it. She finds solace in the only way she can achieve personal independence, by abstaining from marriage and seeking freedom in the company of "A Fire to warm me, and a Friend to please", which is the only thing she asks from the Muses (Line 52). This request aligns with Wollstonecraft's later demands for individual empowerment (Yates, 2023, p. 4)

Leapor highlights and simultaneously criticises the gendered hierarchies constructed and puts the blame for women's subordination on men. She could not be more explicit in her poem Man the Monarch (1746). The female poet "rewrites Genesis and replaces initial Paradise by male tyranny" (Meyer, 2004, p. 68). The Man is directly addressed as the Tyrant, a holder of absolute power to whom all animals are submissive and from whose "despotic Sway" are running to hide when Heaven recognises the restrictive behaviour of man over the other creatures and attempts to contain his power. The primary sin is the male thirst for power,

which leads to his abusive behaviour.

Amaz'd we read of Nature's early Throes
How the fair Heav'ns and pond'rous Earth arose:
How blooming Trees unplanted first began;
And Beasts submissive to their Tyrant, Man:
To Man, invested with despotic Sway,
While his mute Brethren tremble and obey;
Till Heav'n beheld him insolently vain,
And checked the Limits of his haughty Reign.
Then from their Lord, the rude Deserters fly,
And, grinning back, his fruitless Rage defy; (V.1-10)

Although the word Man could be referring to humankind as a whole, the fact that there is a distinct reference to women later in the poem, leaves no room for doubt.

But where! ah! where, shall helpless Woman fly? (V.23)

Unlike her predecessor, Mary Collier, who saw the burden of oppression on both women and men labourers as a societal and historical tendency (Landry 1990, p. 86) and took a critical stance towards the subjugation of female workers in particular, Leapor's language and views are far more aligned with what centuries later would be characterised as radical feminism, since through her poetry gender is projected as a system of male dominance extending to all parts of life that needs to dissolve (Doude & Tapp, 2014, p. 1)

The critique and her perspective on heterosexuality are impactful. The power dynamics shaped by patriarchy dictate the complete subordination of women, for whom no other path exists but unconditional surrender to the man, the ruler, the monarch, and his authority. It is a straight line towards the destruction of women, according to Leapor, regardless of their social class or economic status. The causes of this asymmetry in gender relations, which have marginalised women, are directly attributed to men. Gendered power relations are perpetuated through institutions such as monarchy in society and patriarchy within the family, and Leapor explicitly refers to both, turning her poetry into a strong political speech. The man's thirst for power is the ultimate reason for the direposition of women in Leapor's analysis in the poem Man the Monarch:

He view'd his Consort with an envious Eye;
Greedy of Pow'r, he hugg'd he tott'ring Throne;
And, better to secure his doubtful Rule,
Roll'd his wise Eye-balls, and pronounc'd her Fool.
The regal Blood to distant Ages runs:
Sires, Brothers, Husbands, and commanding Sons,
The Sceptre claim; and ev'ry Cottage brings
A long Succession of Domestic Kings. (V. 57-64)

Leapor supported her fierce arguments against patriarchy and the institution of marriage with her personal life stance. We know that she remained unmarried, and we see in her poetry how much women's friendship is valued and how this relationship exceeds the significance of matrimony for women from her perspective: "A fire to warm me and a friend to please" (Line 52) is all she longs for in her Essay on Woman. In the poem Crumble-Hall, Artemisia, a code name for her friend and supporter Elizabeth Freemantle, is featured as the one who gives her courage to go on with her poetry when everyone turns her down. In that same poem, she delivers a hefty criticism of the patriarchal norms and the gendered hierarchy established through them, indirectly and symbolically, by contrasting the once emblematic and now deserted mansion, a symbol of the vanity of patriarchy, to the grove outside representing "female companionship, memory and literary production" (Markidou, 2015, p. 72) and thus resurfacing the everlasting antithesis culture-nature where the first one is recognised as a male -and destructive- quality and the latter as a female and creative one.

Leapor speaks on behalf of women but in a different way than her predecessor, Collier. She does not seek for the audience to recognise the women labourer's toils and hardships in the work field, not even to trigger sympathy for a hard-working mother that tries to survive against all odds. Leapor engages primarily in criticising matrimony as women's commodification. She speaks of the dowry being handed over to husbands who, after marriage, did not care anymore and fading beauty. However, labouring women did not have riches to bring to the prospective husband or the means or time to preserve their beauty. This means that Leapor addresses the bourgeoisie through this poem. She seeks to establish connections through her poetry with the upper class. This same class that has exploited her as a labourer and discouraged her from pursuing literature (let's not forget she was fired for writing rather than doing housework) is the object of her concern and the receiver of her severe critique on gender inequalities. This signalises Leapor's unconscious pursuit of respectability. To achieve this, she addresses the audience that traditionally disposes of this quality and speaks about suppression that bourgeois ladies rather than workers primarily experienced.

5.3 Ann Yearsley (1753 –1806)

The discourse on women writers in the eighteenth century is inherently bound with issues of gender and social class, as noted by Lonsdale in the introduction of his 18th-century anthology and cited by Landry in 1990 (Landry, 1990, p. 185). It is essential to recognise that gender alone does not account for the marginalisation and discrimination experienced

by women, as already argued in this essay. Feminist movements, particularly those led by women of colour, have highlighted the need to consider the complex intersections of factors such as class, race, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality that shape women's experiences. In this context, Ann Yearsley's literary works and personal story serve retrospectively as an early record of the significant role played by class, politics and personal economic status in a woman's social exclusion and marginalisation, even at the hands of other women, more than a century before the issue became prominent and drew the attention of academia, within the framework of west female and feminist scholar discourse of the "Third world woman" (Mohanty, 1984, p.333). These women were featured in Western scholarship as always needing to be saved from patriarchy, a controlling approach often disregarding the cultural specificities of these women's homelands and their personal attachment or respect to it. Similarly, Hannah More and Elisabeth Montague, Yearsley´s patrons, undertake the role of her saviour from poverty and speaking for her, not just by offering financial help and assistance with publishing but also restricting her from full access to her money earned, or from claiming full authorship of her work.

Among the female poets studied in this essay, Yearsley is more entangled with matters of class distinction and offers the opportunity for a post-structuralist feminist approach to her life and works, allowing the deconstruction of patterns considered fundamental in feminism and feminist literary analysis like the "patriarchal top-down form of power" (Canon et al., 2015, p. 670). Deconstructing the dualities and putting power relationships in the centre of attention, following the Foucauldian paradigm, reveals forms of violence that are situated upon the socioeconomic status of the perpetrator and, thus, power relationships generated from it regardless of gender. More specifically, Foucault argues that power relationships in which the individual turns into a submissive subject are generated by "immediate everyday life that categorizes the individual" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781), which upon acceptance of this imposed identity becomes subjugated to a "law of truth" (Foucault, 1982, p. 781) that defines it. Nevertheless, the author does not imply that power is externally imposed on a pathetic subject but rather recognises that power relationships are produced and reproduced through various institutions and social practices in a dynamic and dialectic process.

I argue that Yearsley, who experienced financial and social oppression and marginalisation from her patron and prominent member of the Bluestockings society, the bourgeois lady Hannah More, is the ideal case to study the formation of power relationships beyond the male-female polarisation.

Researchers have studied Yarsley's and More's relationship and public dispute in- depth and highlighted them as an example of resistance against patriarchal cultural

hierarchies and oppression exercised upon a member of the lower social class within the context of patronage, which, although a popular practice for publishing until then, started being considered authoritative in the 18th century.

Yearsleys struggle to access print directly and her efforts to claim back from her patrons the absolute authorship of her writings, the promotion of her uncultivated poetic intelligence as opposite to the conformity to the models "preferred by the polite" (Felsenstein, 2002, p. 348) have been seen as emancipatory against the "masculine creative cycle" (Felsenstein, 2002, p. 347) despite a woman standing in the place of the representative of this perspective in Yearsley's case. To put it simply, Yearsley comprises a complex and interesting paradigm in investigating female oppression since her story can be examined through -at least- two prisms: the deconstruction perspective in the sense that her oppression was not sourced directly from a male figure and a power relations perspective that sees patriarchal conformity and oppression expressed through the socioeconomic and political status of an era-even if a woman expresses that.

Although the historically documented disagreement between the two women and poets has characterised their relationship and work over time, placing one against the other and classifying them in different social classes as if this were the only significant context in their collaboration finds opposing voices and opinions. Kahn, for example, considers that the focus on their conflict not only obscures their poetic work but also overlooks an important aspect of their collaboration: the fact that a female poet of the upper social class collaborated with a working-class poet in a work that contains conversations about "poetry, class conflict, subjectivity, audience -in fact many of the topics which a more oppositional view sees as posing insurmountable obstacles to just such conversations" (Kahn 1996,204)

5.3.1 Life and Work

A daughter of labourers, her mother was a milkwoman "that raised her daughter to follow in her footsteps" (Tompkins, 1969, p. 60). She married at 18 and became the mother of six within six years (Horwitz, 1997, p. 202). Ann Cromarty Yearsley learned writing from her brother, which was rather an accomplishment and "unusual for children of her class" (Ferguson, 1993, p. 14). The Bristol milkwoman, also known as Lactilla, a name she used for herself in some of her poems, remained literary active from 1785 until 1796. Yearsley was found destitute and was saved from starvation and death by a local gentleman named Vaughan when, after a brutal winter in 1783-84, she ended up in a barn together with her husband, five children and an elderly mother. In 1784, she was back in business selling milk door to door and collecting hogwash for her swine from the home kitchens where she sold

milk. This is how she came to the attention of Hannah More, a bourgeois lady, poet and respected member of the Bluestocking Society, a group of women in mid-18th-century England who hosted gatherings where they invited intellectuals and aristocrats with an interest in literature (Britannica et al.) and whose cook mentioned a milkwoman writing verse (Hald & Stead, 2020, p. 90). More is described as a cultivated, pious woman (Tompkins, 1969, p. 64) and an Evangelical philanthropist (Horwitz, 1997, p. 202). She was the one who introduced Yearsley's verse to Lady Elizabeth Montagu, an aristocratic lady and founding member of the Bluestocking Society. Together, they decided to initiate the patronage of this uneducated yet talented female poet, arranging her first publication through subscription. More, who visited Yearsley in her cottage, even offered her a small amount of money on behalf of Montagu and cared for an allowance for her during preparations for the publication (Tompkins, 1969, p.65).

Hannah More also hired a maid to help Yearsley with the children and feed her pigs, giving her the extra time needed to write her poetry (Kahn, 1996, p.204). Nevertheless, Landry points out that More considered Yearsley's leisure for writing "an infringement of middle-class privileges and lower-class duties." (Meyer, 2004, p.71), setting the tone for whatwas about to come next to their relationship.

The first collection of poems, Poems on Several Occasions, was published in 1785 and abounded with gratitude for the two patronages that made printing true, revealing Yearsley's humble character and gratefulness. Her gratitude towards More is expressed through the use of the name "Stella", a star, for her bourgeois female patron:

> Blest in dispensing! gentle Stella, hear,
> My only, short, but, pity-moving prayer,
> That thy great soul may spare the rustic Muse,
> Whom Science ever scorn'd, and errors till abuse. (Lines 21-24)

Nevertheless, this was about to change. On publication day, Yearsley received a deed of trust from her patronages, More and Montagu, requiring her signature, with which she and her husband should agree to renounce their claim on the profits from the book. All income produced was to be invested by More and Montague in any way they saw appropriate to the benefit of Yearsley and her children (Tompkins, 1969, p.70), the husband being carefully excluded fromfinancial benefits arising from the publication. This arrangement seems to have deeply insulted the proud milkwoman: "I felt as a mother deemed unworthy the tuition or care of her family" (Tompkins, 1969, p.70), she later wrote. Both Ann and her husband, John Yearsley, signed the document, fearing being seen as ungrateful towards the

patronages and the local society. However, this action soon led to a breach between the female poet and More. The allowance provided to Yearsley was so small that she and her family soon ended up having a small debt, and Ann asked her patronages to be admitted to the trustee as a joint member and together with her husband to be able to receive the interest of the investments decided by More and Montagu. In addition, the money should be divided into equal shares for Yearsley's children that they could claim once they turned 21.

Historical reports show how More -through discipline and tranquillity- steadily refused Yearsley's endeavours and remained in the trust to secure the money for the milkwoman's children (Tompkins, 1969, pp.74-75). Their relationship led to a rupture between them, with Yearlsey even implying fraud from her patronage and now former benefactor (Tompkins,1969, p.76) since from then on, she was determined to claim full authorship of her work and dismiss More's patronage, despite being seen by her contemporaries as ungrateful. The suspicion soon went even beyond money since Yearley had perceived as insulting and deliberately diminishing the fact that she was addressed by her patronage in her introduction to the first publication of poems as a poor milkwoman, probably in her effort to establish a female labouring poet culture similar to Duck's some years ago, though, towards his social mobility, she openly took a negative stance. Yearsley had already started to find More's corrections of her poems for the first publication too manipulating and intrusive to what could be called a savage genius (Goodridge and Keegan,2017 p.4) All these, along with the fact that as it has been historically recorded, More considered it essential for the milkwoman to stay put into her social stance rather than ascending socially like Duck, led to her story standing out as a feminist struggle against social and political oppression: 'I am utterly against taking her out of her Station. Stephen [Duck] was an excellent Bard as a Thrasher, but as the Court Poet and Rival of Pope,detestable"(Hall & Stead, 2020, p.90) writes More in a letter to Elizabeth Montagu. More responded angrily against her former benefactor in her poem "To Stella," written shortly after their dispute (Ferguson, 1993, p.17):

while borne on Principle she soars
Yea leaves the Stars behind! alas thy wing
has long been wearied! in the guideless Chace
Of a delusive Meteor, prim'd to cheat
Thy Soul, and lure her far from honest Candour

Nevertheless, Yearsley was clever enough to keep the poem unpublished and thus to avoid being further criticised as ungrateful, especially with More avoiding public and direct depreciation of her former protegee.

However, why would a bourgeoise lady try to benefit a poor, uneducated milkwoman poet in the first place and endure patiently all the public accusations against her? As Christmas notes in his work Lab'ring Muses: "polite patrons used their plebeian proteges to mirror their own superiority as they also projected a public image of benevolent philanthropy" (Christmas2001, p.28). Such tactics reinforced the image of the upper class as humanists, but at the sametime, it sustained a hierarchical power relationship between the beneficiary and the benefactor, who was expected to be grateful for all the benefits one as a free person would enjoy anyway. The bourgeois benevolence served as a means to preserve the strict class stratification of 18th-century society by keeping access to literature and arts restricted to the upper society- "no writing for the poor" according to More (Landry, 1990, p.123) and only allowing labourers to be instilled with as little knowledge and financial means necessary to keep on their literaryendeavours without being able to claim a place in the upper circles.

"Against her patron's wishes and protests, Yearsley demanded to be read on her own terms as a professional poet and one who disdained the pedantry of the reactionary elite. "More simply had nothing further to do with her", notice Hall & Stead (2020, p.91) for the Yearsley-More public dispute.

Some researchers disagreed with the image of Yearsley as a proto-feminist; they considered it to be constructed by those contemporary scholars involved in feminist literary studies, who sought to find in Yearlsey the female equivalent to Samuel Johnson's, the 18th-century poet who rejected Lord Chesterfield's patronage and became a symbol of the declaration of independence and self-worth. Additionally, researchers noted that Yearsley's actions are not consistent with her path after the dispute since she continued having patronage to her works from Frederick Augustus Hervey, Earl of Bristol and Bishop of Derry (Felsenstein, 2002, p.351) to the latter of whom was dedicated her abolitionist poem "On the Inhumanity of Slave Trade", which came out as a direct response to More's poem "Slavery" (Felsenstein, 2002, p. 367).

Yearsley's story of emancipation and patronage rejection should be seen within the broader historical framework of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution in 1789, which initiated an era of personal independence and abolishment of all restrictive institutions of thepast.

Within a less extended context, though, her story is the ideal example of how genderand class together add to women's marginalisation. Were she a male poet, her endeavours to achieve respectability through establishing a literary identity and climbing up the social

hierarchies would have been celebrated rather than stigmatised, as in Duck's case. On the contrary, Yearsley must stay put into her social class according to her patrons, who even consider her unable to handle her self-made money. Her story reveals how class is a political issue that intersects with gender and results in women's suppression within the societal context. Yearsley is aware of these restrictions placed upon her and seeks respectability on multiple levels: On a financial one, being respected means not only earning enough money but also having the freedom to make financial decisions independently and this, in turn, has as a prerequisite, ownership of full authority of one's work.

On her path to becoming respectable, Yearsley features multiple subjectivities. First, she is a destitute woman, then a milkwoman poet. She becomes the rescued and grateful protegee to become an assertive equal against More later. Yeasley fought with all power to earn autonomy and respectability, which is portrayed as an embodied vision for her in her literary work and the face of More. For Yearsley, More was not just a patron but a role model for being respectable. She struggled to adopt all the features of the bourgeois lady because this was the way to respectability. For More, the philanthropist, bourgeois lady, with her many acquaintances and significant financial surface, respectability was a quality she already possessed. However, her benevolent actions towards Yearsley can be understood as a subtle way of preserving this status. This reading reveals how power relations, social class control, and distinction were maintained through patronage. Yearsley herself seems to have internalised the values she fights against; not only does she seek respectability in resembling the bourgeoisie and class climbing, but she also goes back into finding another patron soon after the breach with More.

6. Conclusion

When I began researching these poets' lives and works, I was unsure about my findings. I was certain that I wanted to talk about these exemplary women who raised their voices boldly to discuss their struggles and make visible the discrimination women, especially labourers, underwent in a society that valued them so little. I wanted to highlight their passionate stance in life and their persistence in acquiring education in every way available amid long hours of hard work, poor life, and the disregard and restrictions of the upper classes. I was struck by their perseverance and courage to make it against all odds, especially in the case of Ann Yearsley, or the valour to speak

against matrimony as an exploitative institution in a time when marriage was already a solid social establishment inLeapor's case.

Despite all uncertainties, I aimed from the beginning to show how gender has never been the sole reason for women's discrimination, but multiple other factors, depending on the historical era and the socioeconomic and cultural context, intersect, marginalising them, therefore keeping the issue of women's oppression an always contemporary and never resolved one, since this ever-changing context reproduces new forms of subjugation.

During my study, the concept of respectability, as described by Skeggs, emerged as the missing link between women's oppression and intersectionality and cleared my perspective on the subject. Being respectable is associated with the why and how women are subjugated and is inextricably connected with class. Class is not merely an economic categorisation of individuals; it is also constructed by society and culture. This construction of class is central to forming one's identity and determines the place individuals occupy within society. Similarly, these women classified both for economic and socio-cultural reasons as lower class, pursued their respectability by negotiating their place in the social milieu of their era. To do so, they engaged in a dialectic relationship with the established system (bourgeoisie) that used these norms as a mechanism of social control and to preserve the social distinctions, aiming to ensure the bourgeois upper stance. As they challenged the views that saw them as individuals of lesser value due to their class and/or gender, they formed their personal subjectivities through this process. To put it simply, they were reproduced as subjects. Respectability appears to be not a linear path to achieving the societal stance one deserves. It is primarily a discourse with the mechanisms of one's subjugation, and as such, it presupposes the acceptance of their ontological existence and their a priori validity as qualities or features worth pursuing; hence, from the start, the individuals appear as lacking these qualities and accept this as a situation to overcome, which leads them to become subjects through this power relation produced.

The stories of these female poets made it possible to feature with more clarity the multiple oppressions experienced at the intersectionality of gender and class because of their strictly stratified society. In other words, because class has a common definition, we all connect with it nowadays.

However, the issue of women's multiple oppressions remains contemporary, although class, in this sense, no longer applies in modern societies. Women are still marginalised or stigmatised for a plethora of reasons, along with gender. I will briefly refer to some examples that keep the issue of intersectionality and respectability on the surface and, therefore, appropriate for further research:

Being a woman and being older means fewer opportunities in the work field despite the prior experience gained. This often connects to a woman's looks but does not apply to men. The image of wrinkled women's faces comes as a shock in social media, and numerous articles are written promoting a trend of "ageing with grace", which actually speaks for how women should undergo cosmetic improvement to achieve that, hence constructing a new respectability endeavour for them.

The societal expectations placed on women concerning motherhood and career success continue to create new forms of oppression and segregation. Women who choose to start a family early may be seen as being of lower educational or social status, while those who focus on their careers may be viewed as lacking fulfilment if they remain childless. These expectations are not placed on men and contribute to creating new classifications and respectability patterns for women, often benefiting certain economic systems. This highlights the need for further research into the multiple oppressions modern women face in relation to class and respectability.

Works Cited

Collier, Mary (1762). Poems, on several occasions. With some remarks on her life. https://archive.org/details/bim_eighteenth-century_poems-on-several-occasi_collier-mary_1762/page/n1/mode/2up
Accessed 03/24/2024

Duck, Stephen. (1736) "The THRESHER's LABOUR. To the Revd. Mr. STANLEY." Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive, 09 Jan 2024 (v1.10 (Winter 2023/24)). Web. 12 May 2024.
<https://www.eighteenthcenturypoetry.org/works/o4741-w0030.shtml>

Leapor, Mary (1751)Essay on Woman In: *Poems Upon Several* Occasion https://poeticalscavenger.sfsuenglishdh.net/poems/mary-leapor-an-essay-on-woman/
Accessed 29th April 2024***s***

Leapor, Mary. (1746) Man the Monarch
https://worldpoesy.com/man-the-monarch/ Accessed 29th April 2024

Pope,Alexander.(1735) Of the characters of women: an epistle to a lady.In the digital collection Eighteenth Century Collections Online. https://name.umdl.umich.edu/004809294.0001.000. University of Michigan Library Digital Collections. Accessed June 21, 2024.

Yearlsey, Ann (1785). To the same; On her accusing the Author of Flattery, and of Ascribing to the Creature that Praise which is due only to the Creator. In: Poems on Several Occasions. By Ann Yearsley, a milkwoman of Bristol [poems only]. The second edition. London: printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, pp. 71-73. xxxii

References

Batt, J. (2017) A Muse / To grace the page of weekly news: Mary Leapor and the periodical press.In: The Review of English Studies, New Series, Vol. 68, No. 283 pp.Oxford University Press https://www.jstor.org/stable/44506861
Accessed: 28-04-2024

Batt, J. (2005). From the Field to the Coffeehouse: Changing Representations of Stephen Duck. Criticism 47(4), 451–470. https://doi.org/10.1353/crt.2007.0005.

Black, Jeremy (2001) Eighteenth-century Britain, 1688-1783 Palgrave

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. (2023, Nov.30), "Bluestocking". Encyclopedia Britannica, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Bluestocking-British-literary-society.
Accessed 5/5/ 2024.

Burns, William E., (2010) A brief history of Great Britain. New York: Facts On File

Christmas, William J. (2001) "Introduction: An Eighteenth-Century Laboring-Class Tradition."The Eighteenth Century, vol..42, no.3, pp.187–94.JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/sta-ble/41467878. Accessed 27 Jan. 2024.

Christmas, William. (2001) *The Lab'Ring Muses: Work, Writing, and the Social Order in English Plebeian Poetry, 1730-1830*. University of Delaware Press.

Crenshaw, Kimberle. (1991) "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." Stanford Law Review, vol. 43, no. 6, pp. 1241–99. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039. Accessed 12 May 2024.

Davis, Kathy. (2008) "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 67–85. *APA PsycNet*, https://doi.org/10.1177/1464700108086364.

Doude, S.B. and Tapp, K.E. (2014). Radical Feminism. In The Encyclopedia of Theoretical Criminology,J.M.Miller(Ed.). https://doiorg.proxy.ub.umu.se/10.1002/9781118517390.wbetc090

Felsenstein, F. (2002). Ann Yearsley and the Politics of Patronage "The Thorp Arch Archive: Part I." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *21*(2), 347–392. https://doi.org/10.2307/4149238 Accessed 05/05/2024

Ferguson, M. (1985) *First Feminists: British Women Writers, 1578-1799*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press; Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press. *Internet Archive*, http://archive.org/details/firstfeminists0018th.

Ferguson, M. (1993). Introduction. *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, *12*(1), 13–29. https://doi.org/10.2307/463754 Accessed 05/05/2024

Ferguson, M. (1995) Eighteenth-century Women Poets : Nation, Class, and Gender SUNY Series In Feminist Criticism and Theory. StateUniversity of New York Press

Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. Critical Inquiry, 8(4), 777-795

Goodridge, J., & Keegan, B. (Eds.). (2017). A History of British Working-Class Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gopaldas, A. (2013). Intersectionality 101. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, *32*, 90–94. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43305317

Greene, R. (1993). 1Biography and Reputation. In R. Greene (Ed.), *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women's Poetry* (p. 0). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198119883.003.0001 accessed 28 Apr.2024.

Greene,R. & (2003)., Messenger,A. (Eds.), The Works of Mary Leapor. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. Retrieved 21 Jun. 2024, from https://www.oxfordscholarlyeditions.com/view/10.1093/actrade/9780198182924.book.1/actrade-9780198182924-book-1.

Hall, E., & Stead, H. (2020). A People's History of Classics: Class and Greco-Roman Antiquity in Britain and Ireland 1689 to 1939 (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315446608

Helma Lutz. (2015). Intersectionality as Method. *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, *2*(1–2), 39–44. https://doi.org/10.11116/jdivegendstud.2.1-2.0039 Accessed 27 Mar. 2024

Horwitz, Barbara J. (1997) British Women Writers, 1700-1850 – Hardcover.Scarecrow Press 1997

Kahn, M. (1996). Hannah More and Ann Yearsley: A Collaboration Across the Class Divide. Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 25, 203-223. https://doi.org/10.1353/sec.2010.0338.

Landry, Donna. (1990) The muses of resistance: labouring-class women's poetry in Britain, 1739-1796.Cambridge University Press https://archive.org/details/musesofresistanc0000land/page/12/mode/2up Accessed 27 Jan. 2024.

Markidou, Vassiliki. (2009). "And Let the Grove, If Not the Parlour, Stand": Home, Memory, and Gender in Mary Leapor's "Crumble-Hall". Home Cultures. 6. 163-178. https://doi.org/10.2752/175174209X416580

Meyer, Michael (2004) "MARY LEAPOR The Female Body and the Body of her Texts," 1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era: Vol. 10, Article 4, 63-78. Available at: https://repository.lsu.edu/sixteenfifty/vol10/iss1/4

Mohanty, Chandra Talpade. (1984) "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." Boundary 2, vol. 12/13, pp.333–58.JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/302821. Accessed 5 May 2024

Ramsbottom, J.D. (2002). Women and the Family. In A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain, H.T. Dickinson (Ed.)

Skeggs, Beverly (1997) Reprint edition 2002. Formations of Class and Gender. Becoming Respectable. Sage Publications. London

Skeggs, Beverly (2004) Class, Self, Culture. Routledge. London.

Tompkins, J. M. S (1969) The polite Marriage; also The Didactic Lyre, The Bristol Milkwoman, The Scotch Parents, Clio in Motley, and Mary Hays, philosophess: eighteenth-century essays. Freeport, N.Y., Books for Libraries Press https://archive.org/details/politemarriageal0000tomp/page/74/mode/2up Accessed 05/08/2024