

**NOTE: This is a pre-copyedited version of an article accepted for publication in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. For citation purposes, please consult the definitive publisher-authenticated version, which can be accessed through Project MUSE, through JSTOR (five years after publication), or through the paper journal. If you do not have access to these resources, please contact tswl@utulsa.edu. Copyright is held by the University of Tulsa, and all rights to reproduction are reserved.**

Visiting the Country House: Generic Innovation in Mary Leapor's "Crumble-Hall"

Sharon Young

University of Worcester

*ABSTRACT: Many studies of Mary Leapor's poetry focus on her gender and laboring-class origins to frame their analysis, and while this article does not seek to challenge these readings, it will contend that this emphasis on biographical contexts does not adequately account for Leapor as a poet. Instead, this article will argue for a closer examination of Leapor's engagement with genre to reveal her response to contexts beyond her immediate circumstances. To illustrate this, the article will reconsider "Crumble-Hall" (1751), one of Leapor's best known poems. The poem not only demonstrates Leapor's understanding of gender and class, but also two broader, hitherto largely ignored cultural contexts, which are revealed through Leapor's use of the country house genre: the fashion for collecting curios, art, and furniture and the related phenomena of tourism. "Crumble-Hall" is often regarded as a late and rather anomalous example of the country house poem; however, through this reading, it may be seen as belonging to a wider body of country house poetry, which extended into the mid-eighteenth century and increasingly included the house as an integral part of its discussion. Reading Leapor's poem with a focus on genre also expands our critical understanding of mid-eighteenth-century women's poetry and poetic practices more generally.*

I

Mary Leapor's country house poem "Crumble-Hall" (1751) offers an intriguing tour of a country estate.<sup>1</sup> As readers we accompany the poem's speaker around the house, experiencing its delights and treasures much as eighteenth-century tourists accompanied the housekeeper of grand estates to view new buildings, fashionable décor, and collections of curios acquired on travels in Europe and beyond.<sup>2</sup> Our tour guide though is Mira, not the housekeeper of Crumble

Hall, but a housemaid and Leapor's frequent poetic persona. Mira guides us expertly through the building, enthusiastically pointing out various architectural details and numerous objects that fill the house. The tour gradually reveals that Crumble Hall is not a conventional grand estate: its architecture is dated, its layout unfit for eighteenth-century living, its contents worn or unloved, and its servants unaccustomed to operating within conventional social boundaries. In keeping with this last quality, readers are given a glimpse of a below-stairs world rarely accorded to either the eighteenth-century tourist or the reader of a country house poem.

Given the differences from a usual tour or country house poem, it is unsurprising that critical discussion of "Crumble-Hall" generally focuses on Leapor's satirical appropriation of the country house genre. Donna Landry argues that it represents "a significant transformation of the genre," while Valerie Rumbold regards it as "an obviously unusual contribution to the tradition of the country house poem," which contains "a total refusal of the larger meanings customarily created in estate poems."<sup>3</sup> On a thematic level these observations are perhaps fair. Alastair Fowler suggests "estate poem" as a more precise term, since the genre is generally concerned with a poetic depiction not of the house itself—even less with its contents or servants—but of the wider estate or parkland, in service of praising the owners.<sup>4</sup> At its most basic level, the genre constructs and maintains an ideal community—what Hugh Jenkins describes as a "stable, hierarchical, and 'natural' commonwealth."<sup>5</sup> It presents the estate, its owning dynasty, its architecture, its designed landscape, and its offer of hospitality as models for the state at large. This ideal is centered on the country estate as the powerbase of the early modern world; such estates authorized social status, validated political authority, and provided economic power for the ruling elite. They were thus, as Kari Boyd McBride claims, sites of substantial cultural and financial investment (p. 3).

The model offered by the poems, however, is built on a myth. While this idyll is based on several binaries—as Jenkins notes: inside/outside, public/private, country/city, or ideal/real (p. 9)—in practice this structure is always in danger of collapsing into a far more complex series of iterations, as “Crumble-Hall” amply demonstrates.<sup>6</sup> As such, the country houses represented in this poetic mode are illusory, operating within a broader climate of cultural anxiety or conflict, which country house poetry strives to negotiate or elide. Jenkins describes the tensions inherent within the genre as “a series of complex of mediations” that include the anomalous and tenuous position of the poetic speaker (typically a guest rather than either insider or outsider) and a time frame modulating between past, present, and future (p. 12). As a result, this kind of poetry engages in a complex negotiation of harmony and anxiety, celebration and satire. This complexity is not always fully acknowledged by the critical responses to “Crumble-Hall,” which tend to reproduce or reverse the apparent oppositions of the genre. Rumbold’s claim, for example, that “Crumble-Hall” is a “refusal of the larger meanings” usually found in the form illustrates the tendency of the poem to reproduce a binaristic, even bifurcating, vision in its readers (p. 66).

Unsurprisingly for a genre concerned with stability and power, the country house poem presents an inherently hierarchical discussion along both gender and class lines (McBride, p. 4). In country house poems, women and those of the laboring classes typically are conspicuous by their absence or enjoy only marginal roles.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the models of social and political economy on display rely on the control—and thus silencing or obscuring of—the reproductive potential of women as well as the economic production of the estate’s laborers.<sup>8</sup> Instead, the fertile landscape in the country house poem conventionally gives spontaneously and generously as if in thanks or recognition of the virtue of the owning dynasty.

At first glance, fertility, order, and harmony are not easy to detect in Leapor's poem: the house is cluttered, chaotic, and dirty; the servants are garrulous and under no obvious control; and the grounds offer little in the way of produce. Perhaps more importantly, the poetic speaker is both a servant and a female. However, despite its unusual features, "Crumble-Hall" engages with many conventions of the country house poem. It is through its closeness to the traditional genre that the poem delivers its critique of the form and the ideology it buttresses. For example, as in a conventional country house poem, "Crumble-Hall" discusses at length the hospitality offered by the house—metaphorically but also physically. Hospitality is written into the actual edifice of the house, which displays

a gallant Show

Of mimic Pears and carv'd Pomgranates twine

With the plump Clusters of the spreading Vine. (p. 113)

This is a house where the "hospitable Door / Has fed the Stranger, and reliev'd the Poor" (p. 112). Although the agency of Crumble Hall's owners is downplayed and the past tense is clear, Leapor retains the conventional generic discussion of hospitality as an indicator of political legitimacy for estate owners and as evidence of the social bonds of earlier sociopolitical models (Jenkins, p. 148). Furthermore, while the servants are certainly presented as noisy, largely female, and unsupervised, they can be seen as variations on the "stable, hierarchical, and 'natural' commonwealth" (p. 12). At Crumble Hall this commonwealth comprises servants who replace the legitimate proprietors of the estate in their skill, sense of responsibility, and ownership. Thus Sophronia is the "sage" of the kitchen who presides over the food with "learned Knuckles," and it is "Grave *Colinettus*" who is "anxious for his new-mown Hay" rather than the estate's owners (p. 118). Crucially, though, "Crumble-Hall"'s formal and thematic complexities,

indicated by the presence of both expected generic tropes and significant deviations, are held together under the same poetic “roof,” just as the building in Leapor’s poem succeeds—almost—in containing conflicting and disparate objects, people, and spaces.

While the idea of space is important to the country house poem, with the text’s form defined by its attention to a particular topography and structure that gestures to the estate’s owners, the concern with place and the individual is balanced by something broader. Indeed, the significance of the genre in the eighteenth century more generally lies not only in its depiction of space and property, but also in the consideration of detail and specificity alongside wider sociopolitical discussion—to accommodate multiple perspectives, multiple ways of seeing. It is this multiplicity, or multivalency, inherent to the country house poem that I will argue is at the heart of “Crumble-Hall”; by paying attention to the ways in which Leapor utilizes this multivalency, I will offer a corrective to recent criticism that has focused on the dissonance between “Crumble-Hall” and the conventions of the country house poem. In what follows I will argue that Leapor’s poem is not so much a satiric undercutting of the country house genre, but a playful and inventive exploration of the possibilities—and limitations—of the form. As such I hope this discussion may illustrate a new direction in the study of laboring-class poets of the period, a direction that places attention to poetic form and genre at its center.

## *II*

Attention to form and genre is essential to reaching a more nuanced understanding of “Crumble-Hall.” The poem has attracted a considerable proportion of the recent critical interest in female or laboring-class poets of the eighteenth century.<sup>9</sup> As Susan Goulding points out, much of that criticism, however, is characterized by a persistent attention to Leapor’s biography, often

to the exclusion of other equally pertinent aspects of the poem (p. 69). She observes that Leapor “demonstrate[s] a paradox of women’s literary history in general: we probably would not know much if any of Leapor’s work were it not for the biographical apparatus, but that same apparatus has qualified attention to Leapor as a poet” (p. 71). As a result, the broader social and political implications of the country house genre are not recognized by many readings of “Crumble-Hall,” which locate the impetus for Leapor’s adaptations of the form in personal circumstances. These include Leapor’s dismissal from Edgcote House by the Chauncy family, the phenomenon of enclosure in her native Northamptonshire, and her more positive experience as a female servant for the Jennens family at Weston. Biographical information is pertinent, especially in a reading of “Crumble-Hall,” our understanding of which would be impoverished without the information about Leapor’s background and employment at the Weston and Edgcote estates. I would contend, however, that the critical consensus over the poem’s satirical or otherwise unconventional features is based more on biographical details than on close attention to the generic principles of the country house poem or their use in “Crumble-Hall.”

This critical reliance on biographical information risks leaving unchallenged the posthumous presentation of Leapor’s work as that of “a young unassisted genius” and daughter of a gardener.<sup>10</sup> The literary persona created by her patron, Bridget Freemantle, suggests a limited engagement with genre and form that, to some extent, has been accepted by recent critics at face value. Vassiliki Markidou, for example, starts her argument by emphasizing Leapor’s lowly station as well as her lack of education and employment.<sup>11</sup> Biographical detail, when weighed too heavily can obscure the extent to which Leapor may be engaging with broader issues and literary forms rather than her own personal circumstances. Bridget Keegan offers a rare corrective, when she observes that Leapor, like other “laboring-class poets[,] responded to

mainstream poetic conventions . . . . [She] worked within them but also transformed them.”<sup>12</sup>

Biographical contexts does not adequately account for Leapor as a poet, producing readings that are limited in coverage or take a polemical stance that cannot always be sustained by the very biography claimed as a starting point. Rumbold is at pains to make this very point, arguing that to read “Crumble-Hall” in this way might “import into a reading of ‘Crumble-Hall’ biographical and social factors which Leapor chooses to exclude from the text” (p. 63). Most notable in this regard is Landry’s reading in *The Muses of Resistance*, which foregrounds Leapor as a radical spokesperson for both her gender and her social class based on her supposed anger and frustration at her treatment as a maidservant at Edgcote House.<sup>13</sup> While we can be sure she left her employment at Edgcote House, we can only surmise how Leapor may have responded to this event. In the same way, we may accept Freemantle’s claim that she had only a limited number of books in her possession at her death, but this fact does not preclude her accessing books from the library at Weston or borrowing them from Freemantle.<sup>14</sup> Readings that underplay Leapor’s education certainly conform to contemporary constructions of her and fit neatly with radical political readings; however, they do little to explore the formal and generic scope of eighteenth-century women’s poetry or of “Crumble-Hall” as an example of a country house poem.

Such critical analyses of Leapor’s poetry illustrate a larger issue of the still-incomplete account of women’s literary history. The past quarter century has seen a substantial increase in the study of eighteenth-century women writers. Among other things, this work has revealed that, as Paula Backscheider and Catherine Ingrassia have claimed, women poets from this era “are deeply knowledgeable about genre conventions, and in order to express different experiences and responses from those men describe, they blend, mix, and juxtapose poetic kinds.”<sup>15</sup> Indeed, a survey of the generic decisions apparent in Leapor’s work indicates she was adept in the use and

adaptation of a wide range of genres and verse forms.<sup>16</sup> Yet this skill in using and adapting existing forms and genres is not necessarily linked to either gender or class, as Backscheider's and Ingrassia's claims suggest. Whether this poetic dexterity is used by female poets primarily to explore and express different experiences or whether the impetus to adapt genre is a specifically female practice is open to debate. As Rosalie Colie explains, the importance of genre lies in its complexity and fluidity, which allows the reader to glance the frame or scaffolding onto which the writer was attempting to fix her text or from which she was attempting to distance it.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, while markers of class or gender are important, an engagement with the ways in which writers like Leapor used literary convention may reveal a great deal about the broader political or satirical contexts in which these writers were interested.

By the time Leapor wrote "Crumble-Hall," the country house poem had been used to respond to a range of different events or contexts across more than a century. Some of these events were inflected by individual biographical details such as personal circumstance, gender, or location, yet many country house poems are pertinent to a much wider readership or cohort of writers.<sup>18</sup> Much of the critical commentary relating to the country house genre discusses the contexts and poetry of the seventeenth century when the genre emerged, despite the fact that the country estate remained, according to Elizabeth Veisz, "a potent symbol of class relations and domestic ideology in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British literature."<sup>19</sup> Although the basic impetus of the genre remained similar into the eighteenth century—reflecting the importance and responsibilities of landowners, the prescription of a stratified social order, and an anxiety about social and economic mobility—any reading must allow for generic innovation and change.<sup>20</sup> This allowance is especially important for a genre such as the country house poem, which has been so closely tied to specific yet various contexts.<sup>21</sup> For example, the anxious glance toward

the prodigy houses that are so visible in early examples, such as Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" (1616) or Thomas Carew's "To Saxham" (1640), modulated in the early eighteenth century into a celebration of the proper use of wealth to furnish estates with a socially and politically appropriate architectural and landscape design (Fowler, pp. 21-23).

Similarly, when by the mid-eighteenth century both the ideal and reality of feudal-style hospitality had disappeared, the fashion for collecting curios, art, and furniture and the related phenomena of tourism and consumerism revealed similar social anxieties about both social mobility and the extravagance of a propertied class (Fowler, p. 18). All of these cultural practices were, as Barbara Benedict, Richard Wilson, and Alan Mackley demonstrate, increasingly important cultural and economic trends from the beginning of the eighteenth century, reflecting socioeconomic shifts towards an urban or urban-orientated society often more able to afford and access consumer goods, works of art, and books.<sup>22</sup> These changes were accompanied by a developing taste for travel that made visiting country houses popular (Rumbold, p. 67). The shift in focus from hospitality to tourism was equally important for the owner, designer, tourist, and poet. These contexts of tourism and collecting point to why the depiction of the country house's interior spaces and contents—either consumer goods or collectables—became more prevalent, as evident in poems of the period including "Crumble-Hall." The emphasis on collecting is, however, also suggestive of a rhetorical aspect of the country house poem, which "collects" a variety of objects, spaces, and vistas within its composite picture.

### *III*

"Crumble-Hall" is a combination of adaptations of existing tropes, complications of traditional oppositions and hierarchies, and reworkings of earlier concerns to reflect new and

pertinent trends that concerned not only the owners but also the staff and visitors to country estates. In her adaptation Leapor negotiates several conventions of the genre that imply, but do not necessarily sustain, the sort of binary dynamic typically seen in country house poetry. Firstly, she positions Mira, her poetic speaker, inside the house rather than in the garden or parkland; however, this relocation does not necessarily mean that Leapor retains the opposition between house and garden that underpins the country house poem. Instead, the conventional social and generic boundaries between the disparate spaces of the estate are breached: the plough is seen in the house; hospitality is on display in the kitchen, not the dining room; and reading takes place in the servants' quarters, not the library. In addition, not only is Mira repositioned, but her role as speaker is subtly renegotiated in a further mediating gesture: instead of the speaker occupying the traditional position of guest, she is an employee.

The repositioning of the poetic speaker in turn dramatically alters the relationship of the speaker to the sources of anxiety identified by the poem. Where conventionally the boundary of both the estate and the genre are carefully policed to ensure perceived social threats are kept outside the bounds of the estate (and the poem), here Mira and the reader are directly confronted by various problems represented by the estate and its owners: landscape improvement, absent proprietors, and a misuse of wealth and position. By placing the poetic speaker inside the house, Leapor ensures that Mira is physically distanced from the wider estate and the local agricultural landscape, including its material practices. In this way Leapor creates a gulf between the house and its owners as well as the land and community beyond to which they have a responsibility. This distance is both physical and visual. The interior of the house is dark and labyrinthine:

Safely the Mice through yon dark Passage run,  
Where the dim Windows ne'er admit the Sun.

Along each Wall the Stranger blindly feels;

And (trembling) dreads a Spectre at his Heels. (p. 114)

From the “nether world” of the kitchen, Mira and her fellow servants can see nothing of the surrounding estate (p. 117). Neither, however, can the owners—either because of the dirt, their personal shortcomings, or their increasing detachment from the local community. Veisz explains:

Social alliances that had linked communities vertically, from lords to local tenant farmers, in relations of mutual obligation, gradually and unevenly gave way to greater geographical and social mobility and the rise of an aspiring middling rank that would in time come to see itself as a “class” linked horizontally to others of similar economic standing across geographic boundaries.<sup>23</sup>

This breaking of well-established ties to a particular community is evident in the poem: the owners are absent physically and emotionally from Crumble Hall. Only Mira and her readers, masquerading as tourists, are allowed a brief glimpse of the estate and surrounding landscape from the roof: “Here a gay Prospect meets the ravish’d Eye: / Meads, Fields, and Groves, in beauteous Order lie” (p. 117). Although fleeting, this privileged perspective is allowed on account of Mira’s role as guide or poetic speaker, not her status as servant. As Keegan argues, “the elevated view belongs to those with social and economic opportunities and the poets who wrote for them.”<sup>24</sup> We might also add to this list those who were educated enough to see the landscape in the correct way—in this case the discriminating reader and putative tourist. As a result, this view is not available physically or aesthetically to the house’s owners or its other servants.

The poem ends with a more direct engagement with the estate's landscape: the grove "Whose rev'rend Oaks have known a hundred Springs" is now threatened by agricultural changes and developments in landscape design (p. 121).<sup>25</sup> Leapor's use of the binary structure compares an ancient, well-managed agricultural and social system with the dirt and greed of the house, reversing the expectations of the genre where disorder is found outside the estate. The contrast or comparison, however, cannot be sustained. The translation of ideal and real onto nature and culture, past and present, which the earlier sections of the poem have introduced, collapses at this point. This is a threatened landscape with an uncertain future:

But hark! what Scream the wond'ring Ear invades!  
The Dryads howling for their threaten'd Shades:  
.....  
Whose rev'rend Oaks have known a hundred Springs;  
Shall these ignobly from their Roots be torn,  
And perish shameful, as the abject Thorn;  
While the slow Carr bears off their aged Limbs,  
To clear the Way for Slopes, and modern Whims. (p. 121)

Although Mira alone can visualize this scene "(Tho' not discover'd but with Poet's Eyes)," she too must rely on her imagination to realize it fully (p. 121). She is not present in the landscape, nor does she view it from the house. Mira must "let frolic Fancy rove" in order to see and hear this landscape (p. 120).

Leapor's reworking of the genre's inherent binaries is, then, more complex than a simple inversion of inside and outside, past and present. Mira also offers comment on the interior of the house, yet the opposition between inside and outside cannot be mapped onto the usual model of

ideal and real, past and present. Even in Crumble Hall's apparently negative moral economy, embodied by the awkward architecture, the dirt, and the disorder of the servants, there is still room for Leapor to present a sophisticated and, at times, ambiguous satire. Her ideal is not clearly articulated along spatial, historical, or sociopolitical lines, and the stable comparison traditionally offered by the genre is fragmented. Ultimately the only positive model depicted is located in a distant and now inconvenient past, in the alternative hospitality of the kitchen or well beyond the boundaries of Crumble Hall.

McBride claims that the emergence and longevity of country house discourse more widely can be accounted for by its ability to—or indeed its central function of—negotiating such conflicting positions (pp. 8-9). Indeed, the central country house motif of feudal hospitality is, by its very nature, simultaneously inclusive and exclusive, speaking to both a feudal past and a worrying social mobility of the present. In general terms, the country house poem treads a difficult path between wonder at the magnificence of the country house and scepticism at its usefulness and cost. Leapor's poem is similarly torn, but here the path negotiated integrates conflicting positions for which the diverse objects and interior spaces of the house not only reflect the shifting conceptions of the country house but also act as a metaphor for the way in which the country house poem holds together disparate or opposing ideas. Leapor may satirize but does not offer a fully articulated alternative. Instead, she suggests a more complex path between an idealized yet irrelevant past and a threatening future, or between the mismanagement of the estate by an absent gentry class and by an unwieldy but enterprising servant class. The ideal center of the poem, if it exists at all, is located in Mira herself—the only character with ownership of the spaces and vistas of Crumble Hall, which also suggests Leapor's ownership of the genre. The ambivalent status of the poetic speaker may hover between that of her fellow

servants and her employers, yet Mira identifies herself more with the aspiring and potentially discriminating visitor to whom she speaks directly. Although Leapor finds fault with many aspects of the house, its owners, and its inhabitants, the use of the country house poem holds together these often conflicting statements in a way that suggests the idea of the country house, if not this particular example, still holds something of value for Leapor, as it does for Mira and the unnamed visitor.

For Leapor, tourism and collecting not only replace and modify earlier themes such as hospitality but may also be considered as activities or discourses that operate, according to Benedict, as organizing frameworks to collate, arrange, and present disparate ideas or objects in a coherent manner.<sup>26</sup> In this way they operate much like the country house poem itself.

Ultimately, all these discourses provide a means for dealing with incongruent and conflicting elements. In Leapor's hands, the country house poem can be seen as an attempt to make sense of conflicting political positions and personal experiences rather than as a refusal of the genre.

While Rumbold argues that Crumble Hall cannot be seen "as an ordered whole . . . but as an assemblage of features which can be related, if at all, only at a local level" (p. 66), David Fairer sees the display of diverse objects and rooms differently: "Crumble-Hall" is "rambling, full of character, and crammed with odd details," where "there is no fixed angle of vision, but a series of glimpses, and the reader feels almost physically the variety of spaces that are drawn to our attention."<sup>27</sup> As Mira asks:

Would you go farther?—Stay a little then:

Back thro' the Passage—down the Steps again;

Thro' yon dark Room—Be careful how you tread

Up these steep Stairs—or you may break your Head. (p. 117)

This question is one of several digressions that break up the tour, just as the incoherent architectural design and the heavy punctuation in these passages emphasize these discontinuities.

It is a house full of objects, some new, some dirty and neglected, and some broken and discarded. It is a house “furnish’d amiably, and full” of unremarkable domestic objects: armchairs, china, and kitchen utensils (p. 117). It also houses:

Old Shoes, and Sheep-ticks bred in Stacks of Wool;

Grey *Dobbin’s* Gears, and Drenching-Horns enow;

Wheel-spokes—the Irons of a tatter’d Plough. (p 117).

As with the awkward layout of the house, seen by Markidou as symbolic of patriarchal oppression and a rejection of “the idealized view of the patriarchal country house constituting a model of order, serenity, and fulfilment,” the presence of so many objects is significant.<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Markidou, I would suggest that the digressive, cluttered trajectory described by Mira attempts to hold together, rather than reject, this dislocated literary and social economy. For Leapor’s speaker, there seems to be no alternative to using the collating framework of the genre to make sense of the different parts and thus hold together her observations.

Much has been made of “Crumble-Hall” as a critique of the Chauncy family, their planned improvements to Edgcote House and its parkland, and the gender and social relations represented by such estates. The poem also has been seen by many as a commentary on Leapor’s dismissal from Edgcote. However, an analysis of the poem as an engagement with the tropes and structures of the country house genre reveals a more complex picture. The poem seems to offer Leapor a useful framework for organizing her critique and articulating a particularly complex political position, which integrates disparate elements into a coherent whole. Leapor’s satire ultimately lies in the fact that these activities, like the design and management of the mid-century

country estate, are only tenable if accompanied by erudition. Crucially, however, Leapor includes all inhabitants in this requirement: servants and owners, reader and poet; only Mira is found sufficient.

The traditional country house poem presents an ideal while offering an implied comparison to a negative example elsewhere. In “Crumble-Hall,” Leapor provides us with the negative, if rather complex, model of a country estate, and it is perhaps the implied comparison allowed by the genre that the reader should consider most closely. This ideal may be located in the alternative economy of the servants’ hall or in an older form of landscape design. At the center of this ideal stands not the owner but Mira, as poet, as servant, and as sole proprietor of the prospect over house and garden.

#### *IV*

“Crumble-Hall” is often regarded as a late and atypical country house poem; however, as I have discussed, it may more accurately be seen as belonging to a much wider, yet largely critically unregarded, body of country house poetry of the mid-eighteenth century. This poetry increasingly includes the house as an integral part of its discussion. I also have argued that broader, often-ignored cultural contexts are revealed through Leapor’s specific use of the country house poem. These assertions suggest we may need not only to re-examine the relationship between “Crumble-Hall” and the country house poem but also to expand our understanding of the genre. My reading of “Crumble-Hall” indicates that we need to consider further the importance of generic contexts to the critical discussion of Mary Leapor’s poetry and to laboring-class poetry more generally. Although many studies focus on biographical contexts, I have suggested that this emphasis on personal detail does not adequately account for Leapor as a

poet; as Goulding suggests, “the hardships a working-class woman faced are present throughout Leapor’s poetry, but equally important is the final result” (p. 76). A critical study of Leapor’s engagement with genre and poetic form will, then, extend and complicate our understanding of her poetry and reveal her response to contexts beyond her immediate circumstances and milieu.

Furthermore, such readings may shed light on the critical understanding of mid-eighteenth-century poetry and poetic practices. For all of the important work done on the recuperation of marginalized writers and texts, there remain not only gaps in this scholarship but also persistent and, at times, distracting or limiting methodological frameworks. The resulting analyses do not necessarily reflect the full range of writers and texts or the variety of writing modes and generic contexts on display in women’s writing of the period, even when early “recovery” scholarship was replaced by a concern for feminist analyses and attention to other forms of identity. Attention to genre and form is, then, surely necessary and overdue.

SHARON YOUNG is currently completing a doctoral thesis on the country house in women’s poetry, 1650-1750, at the University of Worcester.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mary Leapor, “Crumble-Hall,” in *Poems upon Several Occasions*, vol. 2 (London: J. Roberts, 1751), 111-122, Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>2</sup> See Barbara Benedict, “The ‘Curious Attitude’ in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Observing and Owning,” *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 14, No. 3 (1990), 59-98; Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise: The Building of the English Country House* (London: Continuum, 2000), 47-

108; and Valerie Rumbold, "The Alienated Insider: Mary Leapor in 'Crumble Hall,'" *British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 19 (1996), 63-76.

<sup>3</sup> Donna Landry, *The Muses of Resistance: Laboring-Class Women's Poetry in Britain, 1739-1796* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 107; and Rumbold, "The Alienated Insider," 63, 66. Subsequent references to Rumbold will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>4</sup> Alastair Fowler, introduction to *The Country House Poem: A Cabinet of Seventeenth-Century Estate Poems and Related Items* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1994), 1-29.

Subsequent references will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Hugh Jenkins, *Feigned Commonwealths: The Country-House Poem and the Fashioning of the Ideal Community* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 12. The main studies on the country house genre include G. R. Hibbard, "The Country House Poem of the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 19, Nos. 1/2 (1956), 159-74; William A. McClung, *The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Kari Boyd McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England: A Cultural Study of Landscape and Legitimacy* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Heather Dubrow, "The Country House Poem: A Study in Generic Development," *Genre*, 12 (1979), 153-79; Fowler, "Country House Poems: The Politics of a Genre," *The Seventeenth Century*, 1 (1986), 1-14; and Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973). Subsequent references to Jenkins and McBride will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>6</sup> See Susan Gal, "A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13, No. 1 (2002), 77-79.

<sup>7</sup> See Jacqueline Pearson, “‘An Emblem of Themselves, in Plum or Pear’: Poetry, the Female Body and the Country House,” in *Write or Be Written: Early Modern Culture and Cultural Constraints*, ed. Barbara Smith and Ursula Appelt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), 87-104.

<sup>8</sup> See Williams, *The Country and the City*, 5-6.

<sup>9</sup> In addition to Landry’s *Muses of Resistance*, important studies of Leapor’s work include Richard Greene, *Mary Leapor: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Women’s Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993); Caryn Chaden, “Mentored from the Page: Mary Leapor’s Relationship with Alexander Pope,” in *Pope, Swift, and Women Writers*, ed. Donald C. Mell (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1996), 31-47; and Susan Goulding, “Reading ‘Mira’s Will’: The Death of Mary Leapor and the Life of the Persona,” *Modern Language Studies*, 32, No. 2 (2002), 69-89. For readings specifically of “Crumble-Hall,” see Landry, *Muses of Resistance*; Landry, “Mary Leapor Laughs at the Fathers: Reading ‘Crumble Hall,’” in *British Literature, 1640-1789: A Critical Reader*, ed. Robert Demaria, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 218-32; Landry, “The Labouring-Class Women Poets: ‘Hard Labour we most cheerfully pursue,’” in *Women and Poetry, 1660-1750*, ed. Sarah Prescott and David E. Shuttleton (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 223-43; Rumbold, “The Alienated Insider”; Rumbold, “Mary Leapor (1722-46): Menial Labour and Poetic Aspiration,” in *Women and Poetry, 1660-1750*, 88-94; Vassiliki Markidou, “‘And Let the Grove, If Not the Parlour Stand’: Home Memory and Gender in Mary Leapor’s ‘Crumble-Hall,’” *Home Cultures*, 6 (2009), 163-78; Jeannie Dalporto, “Landscape, Labor, and the Ideology of Improvement in Mary Leapor’s ‘Crumble-Hall,’” *The Eighteenth Century*, 42 (2001), 228-44; Elizabeth Veisz, “Writing the Eighteenth-Century Household: Leapor, Austen, and the Old Feudal Spirits,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 30 (2011), 71-91; David Fairer, “Mary Leapor, ‘Crumble-Hall,’” in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century*

*Poetry*, ed. Christine Gerrard (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 223-36. Subsequent references to Goulding will be cited parenthetically in the text.

<sup>10</sup> Bridget Freemantle, "To the Reader," in *Poems upon Several Occasions*, by Leapor, vol. 1 (London: J. Roberts, 1748), n. p.

<sup>11</sup> Markidou, "And Let the Grove, If Not the Parlour Stand," 164.

<sup>12</sup> Bridget Keegan, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition," in *A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Poetry*, 563.

<sup>13</sup> Landry, *The Muses of Resistance*, 78-119.

<sup>14</sup> See Greene, *Mary Leapor*, 158-78; and Landry, "The Labouring-Class Woman Poets," 236.

<sup>15</sup> Paula R. Backscheider and Catherine E. Ingrassia, "Poetry as Life Writing," introduction to *British Women Poets of the Long Eighteenth Century: An Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 296.

<sup>16</sup> See Rumbold, "Mary Leapor (1722-46)," 88; and Fairer, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall,'" 223.

<sup>17</sup> Rosalie Colie, "Genre-Systems and the Functions of Literature," in *Modern Genre Theory*, ed. David Duff (Harlow: Pearson, 2000), 152-63.

<sup>18</sup> Fowler's anthology of estate poems includes seventy-seven poems written over a century.

<sup>19</sup> Veisz, "Writing the Eighteenth-Century Household," 71.

<sup>20</sup> John Frow, *Genre: The New Critical Idiom* (London: Routledge, 2006), 1-5.

<sup>21</sup> The critical history of the genre has focused on the importance of sociohistorical contexts since Williams's *The Country and the City* in 1973. See also McClung, *The Country House in English Renaissance Poetry*, and McBride, *Country House Discourse in Early Modern England*. Earlier critical accounts were largely concerned with formal features, classical sources, and

biblical allusion and were ahistorical in focus. For earlier scholarship, see Hibbard, "The Country House Poem of the Seventeenth Century."

<sup>22</sup> Benedict, "The 'Curious Attitude' in Eighteenth-Century Britain," 59-78; Wilson and Mackley, *The Building of the English Country House*, 47-105.

<sup>23</sup> Veisz, "Writing the Eighteenth-Century Household," 72.

<sup>24</sup> Keegan, "Rural Poetry and the Self-Taught Tradition," 564.

<sup>25</sup> See Dalporto, "Landscape, Labor, and the Ideology of Improvement in Mary Leapor's 'Crumble-Hall,'" 229.

<sup>26</sup> Benedict, "The 'Curious Attitude' in Eighteenth-Century Britain," 65.

<sup>27</sup> Fairer, "Mary Leapor, 'Crumble-Hall,'" 225.

<sup>28</sup> Markidou, "And Let the Grove, If Not the Parlour Stand," 169.