

# The portrayal of rural life in 18th century poetry

[Experience](#), [Meaning of Life](#)



Summary: The presentation of rural life in eighteenth century poetry, including the meaning of pastoral poetry and the poetic conventions of anti-pastoral poetry. Plus, an analysis of "The Thresher's Labour" by Stephen Duck. exploring the presentation of rural life in eighteenth century poetry, by studying the poetic conventions of anti-pastoral poetry and more particularly by analysing 'The Thresher's labour' by Stephen Duck. Discuss the portrayal of rural life in one or more of the passages. In this essay I will be exploring the presentation of rural life in eighteenth century poetry, by studying the poetic conventions of anti-pastoral poetry and more particularly by analysing 'The Thresher's labour' by Stephen Duck. I will approach the issue by first of all addressing the meaning of pastoral poetry, and more specifically what pastoral poetry meant to eighteenth century poets, before looking at the meaning of anti-pastoral as opposed to pastoral. I will then perform a close reading of Duck's 'The Thresher's Labour' as a challenge to the traditional pastoral form. The traditional subject of pastoral poetry was that of life in the country, particularly that of shepherds. Terry Gifford states that: to refer to pastoral up to about 1610 was to refer to poems.... in which supposed shepherds spoke to each other, usually in pentameter The Thresher's Labour (1730) and The Woman's Labour (1739) form such a self-evidently interesting and accessible pair of poems for comparative study that in recent years they have become a familiar double-act in eighteenth-century studies, both as a topic in undergraduate courses and as an element in the scholarly recovery of a self-taught, laboring-class tradition in eighteenth-century poetry. Stephen Duck's poem had often been touched on by literary historians as an eighteenth-century curiosity, as had his rags-to-riches

though ultimately tragic life story, which was the subject of a respectable academic biography ( Davis 1926 ). Mary Collier's poem, reprinted in the 1760s and the 1820s, was again rediscovered in the wake of 1960s feminism. The two poems were yoked together in two editions in the 1980s (Ferguson 1985; Thompson and Sugden 1989: the latter is quoted in the present essay), and they have been discussed in comparative terms ever since. There are good reasons for this. The debate on women's work in which the two poets engage, Duck's seeming desire literally to silence women workers and Collier's resistance to this, and the documentary accounts of laboring lives that both poems offer, are invaluable to anyone interested in the period. At the same time, although there had been earlier laboring-class verses, these two poems seem to signal the arrival of a recognizable