

The Voices of the Dependent Poet: the case of Mary Barber

CHRISTOPHER FANNING

ABSTRACT This article addresses the difficulties of poetic voice entailed in a “minor” poet’s volume of poetry published by subscription in the early-Georgian period by examining Mary Barber’s *Poems on Several Occasions* (1735). The necessarily deferential mode of a volume published by subscription affects the presentation of the poet’s authority and identity. Mary Barber uses this deferential mode to construct a female poetic identity through indirection: the use of other voices, including “ghost writing” for others, the creation of satiric personae, quotation and the inclusion of others’ writing in her volume. These techniques are problematic, for while they allow expression, they also undermine poetic authority. This is discussed in analyses of the prefatory matter as well as the poems in this volume.

In 1735, Mary Barber, the wife of a Dublin woollen-draper, published *Poems on Several Occasions*, with a list of over nine hundred subscribers, including some of the most prestigious names of the day: Jonathan Swift, John Arbuthnot, John Gay, Alexander Pope, Sir Robert Walpole and many nobles.[1] Despite the prestige of its subscription list, this volume has received little critical attention since its first appearance. Part of this disregard derives specifically from the high profile of her patron, Jonathan Swift. More generally contributing to critical disregard, however, are the difficulties of poetic voice entailed in a “minor” poet’s volume of poetry published by subscription in the early-Georgian period.

Publication by subscription was a growing phenomenon in the eighteenth century, a time before the power of the market-place had completely displaced the traditional system of patronage: it has been described as “a half-way house between dependence on a single patron to underwrite a book and reliance upon sales”.[2] This was also a period when poets of non-traditional backgrounds (primarily women and those of lower-class status) were beginning to print volumes of poetry in increasingly significant numbers. The well-documented rise of the untutored poet, or “natural genius”, at this time offered a new, non-threatening medium for self-aggrandisement to patrons who wished to hear

their own praises from tractable dependents.[3] By the mid-eighteenth century, the patrons of such poets were not the noble or royal figures of what may have been an idealised past, but instead, middle-class organisers of subscription campaigns for charitable causes. Both Betty Rizzo and Roger Lonsdale suggest that such patronage and subscription tended (or intended) to reward humble, deferential poets so that “they were effectually muzzled, incapable of developing their own voices”.[4]

What I wish to address here is how the necessarily deferential mode of a volume published by subscription affects the presentation of the poet’s authority and identity. Mary Barber offers a particularly female perspective on the position of the subscription poet as she examines relations between women and men which are parallel to those of poet and patrons.[5] Barber uses the deferential mode of the subscription volume to construct a female poetic identity through indirection: the use of other voices by “ghost writing” for others, the creation of satiric personae, quotation, and the inclusion of others’ writing in her volume. The necessary paradox of this indirect technique is that the identity thus created requires a degree of self-effacement which obscures authority.

In many ways, it is this double-edged claim to authority by means of deference which has led to the obscurity of Barber’s reputation today. This is evident in her appearance in twentieth-century scholarship as a footnote to the life and works of Jonathan Swift, her strongest and most famous advocate.[6] Swift was extremely active in promoting Barber, launching a vigorous letter campaign for subscriptions to her volume and dubbing her “the best poetess of both kingdoms”.[7] As a member of Swift’s Dublin circle of female acquaintance in the 1720s and 1730s (which also included Laetitia Pilkington, Mary Davys, and Constantia Grierson), Barber entered into a poet–patron relationship with Swift. According to Laetitia Pilkington, Swift’s circle functioned as a collective unit for editing and revising each other’s works: “dull as [Barber’s poems] were, they certainly would have been much worse, but that Doctor *Delany* frequently held what he called a *Senatus Consultum*, to correct these undigested Materials”.[8] As a frequent a member of this *senatus*, Swift has come to obscure the other writers involved. Statements such as that in his dedicatory letter to Barber’s volume only increase the shadow he casts: “she [Barber] hath one Qualification, that I wish all good Poets possess’d a Share of, I mean, that she is ready to take Advice, and submit to have her Verses corrected, by those who are generally allow’d to be the best Judges”.[9] Such comments have given licence to later scholars in detecting Swift’s hand whenever Barber’s volume shows signs of quality.[10]

It is my purpose here to examine the aspect of Barber’s *Poems on Several Occasions* that lends itself to such interpretations and to suggest the possibility of an alternate reading. What I wish to explore here is the variety of voices adopted in this volume and their relationships to the notion of authority. Barber’s use of distinctly different voices creates an initial awareness of the

author's voice behind the speaker's. In addition, within this double-voiced form, ranging from straightforward statements written for her son to satiric impersonations of adults or social types, another level of voice occurs in the form of *quotation* – often of Barber herself – deeply embedding her authorial voice. Barber's inclusion of others' work in her volume, a customary feature of all subscription volumes, marks another variety of indirection. She openly and proudly acknowledges works by other hands, for each new voice marks an attempt to validate her own authority. Yet, inevitably, the different voices also compromise that attempt.

One voice Barber frequently adopts is that of her son Constantine, or Con. Although Margaret Doody suggests that this gives Barber access to the male world and a male voice, the "greater theatre of action" which Doody claims is made available by this technique (p. 73) is only that of the schoolboy – apologising for homework not done, avoiding the rod, expressing gratitude for a play-day, or discomfort in new clothes. This is a compromised voice, one that allows an author to make commentary but equally allows for the misreading of the kind Mary Barber has suffered at the hands of those who see mainly Swift's shadow. The ambiguity in question here is that of the language of authority. Barber is aware that it is not her place to assume authority. In the absence of societal sanction, to speak directly in her own voice would be an act of pride, a self-authorisation. Instead, she displaces this self-authorised voice onto another speaker, masking or questioning the source of the utterance.[11] By creating poetic personae or writing for other speakers, Mary Barber creates a division between "actor" (or speaker) and "author" to obscure the question of agency. Ultimately, the "authority" of this approach depends on the value attached to indirection as a technique of writing. It is possible that the ostentation with which Barber makes the masking gesture marks a claim to authority in itself.

First, we may examine the customary prefatory material of the subscription volume, for the structure of Barber's volume as a whole is a study in indirection. Before arriving at her poems, we first encounter a letter from Swift to the Earl of Orrery, Barber's own dedication to Orrery, her preface to the reader, fourteen double-column quarto pages of subscribers [12] and a poem by Constantia Grierson. Swift's letter to Orrery, in addition to praising Barber's "Wit and good Sense, as well as ... her Humility, her Gratitude, and many other Virtues" (p. 40), is noteworthy in its masking of Barber's voice. Not only does he write on her behalf, but he also takes on her voice, using free indirect discourse to paraphrase a letter from Barber to Swift, asking Swift's advice about dedicating her volume to Orrery. This is a technique of indirection: origins are obscured and Barber's agency in initiating the letter to Orrery is made distant. After this paraphrase, Swift moves on to "guess the Topicks she intends to insist on" (p. 39) in her own dedication to Orrery, anticipating and speaking for Barber the generic flattery of a dedication.[13]

Barber's own dedication couches itself within Swift's anticipations, denying her ability to add to his comments, likening herself to "an ordinary Painter ... attempt[ing] to fill up a Sketch of RAPHAEL" (p. 41). Of course, she moves on to do just that, consistently employing the device of occupatio, drawing attention to – by conspicuously passing over – Orrery's qualities. For example, picking up on the attention Swift has drawn to the generic nature of a dedication, she scorns empty praise: "The Expatiating upon the Patron's Modesty, generally makes another pompous Paragraph in Writings of this kind", but nevertheless continues, "In this, I must own, no Dedicator ever had a more ample Field; as all who know your Lordship, will agree; but 'tis so beaten a Path, that I shall only say, (what I have often thought) that Modesty is to your other Excellencies, what *Butler* says Light is to the Moon ..." (p. 42), and so on.

In keeping with her technique of indirection, Barber's letter to Orrery justifies further praise for his previous generosity by means of quotation from one of Orrery's own letters (p. 44). Similarly, Barber's request for Orrery's continued patronage is justified by means of quotation from one of Swift's poems (p. 43). This is an intertextual world of little breadth: references must do double duty – one must quote Orrery to Orrery or cite the work of his personal acquaintance who is also a public figure of authority. Within such a circumscribed field, Mary Barber's attempts to create a universe in which her authority is valid must necessarily draw attention to themselves.

Barber's preface to the reader offers another variety of indirection. The lengthy first sentence opens with the customary apology for her gender [14], "I am sensible that a Woman steps out of her Province whenever she presumes to write for the Press", and moves toward a defence of her audacity by claiming a domestic purpose: "chiefly to form the Minds of my Children". Yet, on the way to this humble statement of purpose (and still within the opening sentence) is couched a claim to novelty: "my Verses were written with a very different View from any of those which other Attempters in Poetry have proposed to themselves" (p. 45). While claiming unremarkability, Barber manages to slip in a claim to pursue things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme. Such a claim can be made because it is buried in an apology: if necessary, recourse to syntax will show the claim to be subordinate to the question of gender at the beginning of the sentence.

Mary Barber buries most of her claims to merit beneath any number of similar indirections. As the preface continues, she tells of the beginning of her public poetic career, her poem, "The Widow Gordon's Petition: To the Rt Hon. the Lady Carteret". As a piece "ghost-written" for an impoverished officer's widow, this petition is in itself at one remove from the author. However, as we learn from the story about this poem, further embedding occurs, for it was "sent inclosed to Mr. Tickell, in a Letter without a Name" (p. 46). Here, still embedded in the prefatory material to Barber's volume, is an image of her embedding technique at the social level (Barber in Gordon's voice,

anonymously delivered to Tickell, forwarded to Carteret). Thus, it is not surprising that the preface does not attribute the success of this petition to its author, but rather to the goodness of its recipient, Lady Carteret. This goodness even extends to the Lady's endeavour "to find out the Author" (p. 46), making Mary Barber appear almost wholly passive in her authorship of this poem, her public debut. The story of her debut is emblematic of Barber's approach to poetry. Bernard Tucker notes (p. 13) that a full third of her poems are, as her title suggests, "on several occasions", including reactions to reading other texts, domestic events in her children's lives, social events, the arrivals and departures of persons of varying degrees of importance, and so on. Such "occasionality" is hardly unique to Mary Barber: the *Eighteenth-Century Short Title Catalogue* lists some fifty-two different volumes titled *Poems on Several Occasions* by both men and women published between 1725 (the date of Barber's first poem, the petition) and her death in 1755.[15] We should merely note that for the volume under consideration here, such excuses for composition offer a further mask to the self-effacing poet.

Turning from the three introductions in prose, we encounter yet another layer in verse, and in another voice. Constantia Grierson's "To Mrs. MARY BARBER, under the Name of SAPPHIRA: Occasion'd by the Encouragement She met with in *England*, To publish her Poems by Subscription" emphasises some of the embedding themes we have already encountered in the prefatory material.[16] It is interesting to note that Grierson's poem states more directly Barber's claim to novelty, and accords it praise worthy of Milton: "FAR different Themes We in thy Verses view; / Themes, in themselves, alike sublime, and new".[17] The strength with which this claim is made seems to have made Barber uncomfortable, and we should note that she has already anticipated it in her preface, excusing Grierson's poem as "Proof that Women may have so much Virtue, as, instead of depreciating, to endeavor to raise the Character of each other" (p. 50). This attempt to draw attention away from her poetic claim toward the more socially acceptable question of female behaviour is typical of Barber. Nevertheless, it is also typical that she does print Grierson's poem. The manifest tension between self-effacement and self-proclamation here is also attributed to Barber herself by Swift as he writes in apology to Pope: "Mrs Barber acted weakly in desiring you to correct her Verses. ... I do believe there was a great Combat between her modesty and her Ambition".[18]

This combat is marked by the ambiguity of the authoritative claims made throughout Barber's volume. For example, Grierson's poem continues to represent Barber as a (domestic) visionary – "A Theme, alas! forgot by Bards too long; / And, but for Thee, almost unknown to Song" (p. xlvi) – but even here Barber's proclaiming role is a rather muted one. Even as it is stated, there is already, in the treatment of the "theme" as forgotten and unknown, a recognition of the effects of embedding as Grierson links it to the question of silence (lack of representation). And ultimately, it is Barber's "silent Virtues", like

the “humility” Swift ascribed to her, which are praised in Grierson’s poem (p. xlvii). She is described as “conceal’d” (Grierson invokes a contrast of Ireland and England here), and, as with her dealings with Lady Carteret on behalf of the Widow Gordon, Grierson’s praise is for Barber’s English subscribers rather than for the poet herself: “THESE works, which Modesty conceal’d in Night, / Your Candor, gen’rous BRITONS, brings to Light” (p. xlvii).[19]

With this pattern of indirection firmly established in the prefatory material, it is no surprise to glance at the titles of Barber’s poems and see her frequent use of poetic masks.[20] Many (some fifteen) were “Written for my son” to deliver upon various occasions. These poems often distance authorial responsibility by what amounts to self-quotation, the simple placement of Mary Barber’s words into a reporter’s mouth. These poems begin in the child’s voice, but quickly turn to direct quotation: “my Mother says ...” In some cases, the child’s voice offers a respectful preface to words delivered by his mother, as in “Written for my Son in his Sickness, to one of his School-Fellows”: “Says my Mamma, who loves to make / Reflections, for her Children’s Sake” (lines 7-8). This reinforces what Doody has identified as one of Barber’s foundations, her “maternal authority” (p. 73).

More frequently, however, the child establishes a satiric setting for his mother’s words, creating a compromising portrait of Mary Barber. In these cases, there is a lively sense of irony, as Barber displays an ultimately self-deprecating anti-poetic stance. This often occurs in the poems written for Con to deliver at school, such as “An Apology written for my Son to his Master, who had commanded him to write Verses on the Death of the Late Lord—”:

I beg your Scholar you’ll excuse,
Who dares no more debase the Muse.
My Mother says, if e’er she hears
I write again on worthless Peers,
Whether they’re living Lords, or dead,
She’ll box the Muse from out my Head.
Sir, let me have no more, she cry’d,
Of Panegyricks, ill apply’d ... (1-8)

The child’s perspective offers an extremely limited basis for the legitimation of “maternal authority”. The perspective is compromised by both the naivety of childhood admiration and the acknowledged coercion (ear-boxing), thus limiting the author to her maternal domestic setting. Another such poem, “A Letter for my Son to one of His Schoolfellows, Son to Henry Rose, Esq”, places Mary Barber not only in her maternal role, but identifies her social and economic status as well [21]:

Dear Rose, as I lately was writing some Verse,
Which I next Day intended in School to rehearse;
My Mother came in, and I thought she’d run wild:
“This Mr. *Macmullen* has ruin’d my child:

"He uses me ill, and the World shall know it;
 "I sent you to *Latin*, he makes you a Poet:
 "A fine Way of training a Shopkeeper's Son! ..." (1-7)

Such portraits of the poet as mother, all disclaiming the role of "poetess", depend upon their introduction by children for their effectiveness. There is an overlay of mimicry in the words attributed to Mary Barber. The perspective of these poems successfully shows us that she has no delusions of poetic grandeur. Yet, at the same time, because the speakers of these poems have motives of their own (what child does not parody his parents?), the disclaimers are not absolute.

Other of the poems written for Con follow a different pattern. In one of Barber's most reprinted poems, "Written for My Son, and Spoken by him at his first putting on Breeches", Constantine speaks of the arbitrary tyranny of Custom over Reason with regard to clothing which is uncomfortable and non-functional: "What is it our Mammams bewitches, / To plague us little Boys with Breeches?" (1-2). Unlike the poems we have discussed thus far, here the child does not directly quote his mother. Thus, there is no prefatory material, no overlay of mimicry (or respect) to question (or reinforce) Barber's authority. Instead, we proceed by means of a mouthpiece, reading a full displacement of Mary Barber's voice. Her own words are not even quoted here. Furthermore, the chosen speaker is in what seems a position radically opposite to Barber's: the son accuses the mother, not the wife the husband, or womankind mankind (although this is what is going on here). This displaced opposition is further displaced by an *emblematic* confrontation: "To Tyrant *Custom* we must yield, / Whilst vanquish'd *Reason* flies the Field" (3-4). It is important to note that the gender of Reason is never specified with a pronoun whereas Custom is revealed to be specifically male at the end of the poem (50, 55).

This confrontation introduces the poem's political and military imagery, which provides the framework for a critique of the restrictions men impose upon women in the indirect terms of a clothing metaphor. The child complains in the language of an anti-blazon, enumerating body parts cut off by restrictive clothing under the auspices of clothes-makers or other authority figures. The first verse paragraph moves chiastically from legs which "suffer by Ligation, / To keep the Blood from Circulation" (5-6) to two separate mentions of feet (7, 10) and back to legs (18), tightening the sense of restriction with a verbal knot. The second verse paragraph enumerates fists and closely bound wrists (19, 20) (extremities corresponding to the feet and legs of the first paragraph) before moving to the torso, bound "so tight we cannot eat" (22), until finally, "The Hat-band helps to cramp our Brains" (24).

While this progression from the extremities to the body and brain occurs, there is also a progression in the tyrants who restrict the body. In the first paragraph, the shoemaker (8) gives way to the surgeon (16). In the second, the mother (20) is superseded by "the Grand Turk" himself (26). Although Doody (p. 74) and Tucker (p. 16) see this poem as a unique satire against adult *male*

clothing, and some of the articles (such as hatbands or cravats) are specifically male, the complaints are equally applicable to female concerns: the gout mentioned as the result of constricting shoes afflicted Mary Barber herself; tightness preventing eating certainly suggests the tightly-laced female corset and stomacher. And furthermore, although hatbands are a piece of masculine apparel, metaphorically speaking, one of the loudest complaints of the female poets of the day is the deprivation of education: men “cramp our brains” (24).

The third and fourth paragraphs argue by analogy, moving through the difference between creatures and humans in terms of their clothing. By pointing out that animals are clothed by nature, “For Use, for Ornament and Ease” (42), Barber (or Con) draws attention to the external nature of human dress. Without the guidance of reason, clothing becomes an external means of control – man is “more plagu’d than other Creatures” (30) – rather than a reasoned self-protection. The final lines make it clear that more than clothing is involved here. Breeches become a “Livery” (50), blatantly signifying servitude. Custom:

Delights to make us act like Fools.
O’er human Race the Tyrant reigns,
And binds them in eternal Chains:
We yield to *his* despotic Sway,
The only Monarch All obey. (52-56, emphasis added)

The absolute tyranny toward which this poem moves is unquestionably masculine. The subject of the tyranny is of unstated gender with apparent female affinities.

Finally, it is certain that the form of the poem – its argumentative mode, the standard analogical reasoning in the comparison with nature, the political jab at English imperialism in the reference to our wiser Irish ancestors’ brogues (15) [22] – is above a child. The poem exceeds the limitations of the mouthpiece which allows the poem to be voiced, thus necessarily drawing attention to the female poet’s disguised authority.

The combination of the borrowed voice and the clothing metaphor is a potent one for Barber. Outward appearances are important, often enabling, but also potentially dangerous and crippling. Such a case is taken up in “To Mrs. Frances-Arabella Kelly”, where Barber interestingly begins in her own voice and shifts to that of her addressee. This poem uses many of the techniques found in “Written for My Son ... at his first putting on Breeches”, taking as its starting point the act of dressing: “Today, as at my Glass I stood, / To set my Head-cloaths and my Hood; / I saw my grizzled Locks with Dread” (1-3). What follows is a rapid summary of the duplicitous tyranny of appearances, which offers women power over men, yet only by submitting to ideological definitions of attractiveness. Barber then proceeds to adopt another’s voice to explore the alternate possibilities for this double feature of social mores. As seen in “Written for My Son ... at his first putting on Breeches”, a mouthpiece is a technique which allows the indirect approach, distancing the author from what may be a

forbidden topic. In "To Mrs. Kelly", Mrs Kelly herself speaks, revealing her complete acceptance of, and therefore submission to, the masculine expectations:

These Beldams, who were born before me,
Are griev'd to see the Men adore me:
Their snaky Locks freeze up the Blood;
My Tresses fire the purple Flood. (29-32)

These words express the double edge of the tyranny of appearances, but – since it is in quotation – ironically Mrs Kelly believes she controls by (unwittingly) being controlled. Her final lines resound with the greatest irony, since they conclude with a word most common to the earnest protests of the women poets: "Heav'n gave me Charms, and destin'd me / For universal Tyranny" (37-38). Her statement is true, but not in the way she intends it to be true. The would-be tyrant is subject to the tyranny of appearances.

This portrait of Mrs Kelly's delusions of power returns us to the humble voice of the poet with which this poem began, for here the double edge has a positive sense in the poet's awareness of the duplicity of appearances. Certainly, a woman is affected by masculine expectations of appearance, which are mimicked here: "*Rot that old Witch – she'll never die*" (14). However, this is set in the context of Barber's inspection of her "grizzled Locks", which leads to an identification with and vindication of the Gorgon: "*Medusa's Hair was only gray*" (6). The figure of the Gorgon is a powerful conceit. It describes the tyranny of (patriarchal) social expectation that casts out the ugly. Yet, it also creates a powerful female figure whose appearance tyrannises those who look upon her, reclaiming power by means of her outcast status. This is akin to the process we have examined in Barber's poetry which embraces outcast status through the displaced voice in order to appropriate authority by the indirection of quotation.

The end result of Barber's use of quotation in "To Mrs. Kelly" – its rhetorical effect – is, in fact, most direct.[23] Unlike "Written for My Son ... at his first putting on Breeches", in which another's voice is adopted as a covert mouthpiece, in "To Mrs. Kelly", the other's voice is adopted for a direct ironical purpose, set up by the context. This is similar to the approach of the final poem in the volume, "To a Lady who commanded me to send her an Account in Verse, how I succeeded in my *Subscription*", which offers satirical portraits of the kinds of people who declined to subscribe to Barber's volume. This poem closes the frame opened by Constantia Grierson's laudatory "To Mrs. MARY BARBER, under the Name of SAPPHIRA: Occasion'd by the Encouragement She met with in *England*, To publish her Poems by Subscription" by returning to this theme. Grierson's indirect praise of Barber by means of flattering her subscribers here becomes Barber's indirect self-defence by means of the self-justifications of the non-subscribers. While these clearly serve an ironic purpose within the poem, we should also note that Barber is simultaneously anticipating the objections most readers might raise to her book. For example, Barber's

characters, most of them women, voice the customary reservations about female authorship: "Verses are only writ by Men; / I know a Woman cannot write" (34-35). As a common generalisation, this was to be expected. The more specific charge of dullness (such as that by Laetitia Pilkington) is also anticipated in this poem. It is interesting to note that one record of readers' criticism from 1735 falls very much within the terms established by Barber's satire. Just as Barber's Belinda complains:

Call it not *Poetry* ...
No – Call it *Rhyming*, if you please:
Her Numbers might adorn a Ring,
Or serve along the Streets to sing ... (77-80)

So Anne Donnellan, one of Swift's correspondents, reports from London that "there are, indeed, a few severe critics (who think that judgment is only shewn in finding faults) that say they are not poetic".[24] Similarly, Barber's Sylvia anticipates Donnellan's report that "a few fine ladies, who are not commended in them ... complain they are dull" [25] in her complaint that:

She never ask'd me to subscribe,
Nor ever wrote a Line on me,
I was no Theme for Poetry!
She rightly judg'd; I have no Taste –
For Women's Poetry, at least. (26-30)

Borrowing the critics' voices in a sense silences them and allows Barber's own voice to be heard, as if she has scripted their reactions.

This, after all, is the function of Barber's double-voiced technique. The attention which such poems draw to themselves necessarily draws attention to their author, making a claim for her authority. One interesting feature in Barber's volume which explicitly addresses this function is a thematically unified grouping of poems, including some by other hands, which appear together in dialogue, expressly pointing out her use of mouthpieces, in this case that of her son. These poems respond to one of Barber's Constantine poems in kind, creating personae who confront Con with his mother's authorship of the verses he recites. Responding to Barber's "Letter for my Son to one of His Schoolfellows, Son to Henry Rose, Esq", one Reverend Dr T– (a genuinely "other" voice) writes, "To Mr Rose; sent in the Name of the Honourable Mr Barry, one of his Schoolfellows". This poem tells Rose that Constantine's "Tricks are too well known; / They are his Mother's Verses, not his own" (7-8). Constantine himself is warned not to be "presumptuous" in attempting his mother's "sacred Fire" (9, 12). Of course, the poem in Barry's name appears as indirect *praise* for Barber, *but* it is couched in the admonitory exposure of Con's duplicity.[26] Indeed, indirect praise for Barber's verse certainly exposes Con in Constantia Grierson's poem included in this cluster (although not explicitly part of the dialogue), on Constantine's "speaking *Latin* in School to less Advantage

than *English*: Written as from a Schoolfellow": "The Muse, thy Mother only speaks in thee. / We knew long since, your Verse, so much admir'd, / By her superior Genius was inspired".[27] Despite this praise of Barber, at the same time that Con is discovered (to the benefit of his mother), there is another exposure implicit here, for Con has used his mother's faulty Latin, revealing the limits of her abilities.[28] Barber's claim to authority gains support by her inclusion of others' poems here, but, again, at a cost.

In the poem, "The Conclusion of a Letter to the Rev. Mr C–", the issue of the mouthpiece is more complex. The scenario is as follows: Barber is interrupted in writing her letter when Con returns from school and suggests she write the letter in verse. In the course of her reply to Con, explaining that Mr C– disapproves of female poets, she mockingly imagines Mr C–'s reaction to her letter. All of this, we must note, is reported in the letter to Mr C– itself. These layers of quotation allow Barber her most direct consideration of the confrontation between men and women. Deep within the two layers of quotation, the male opinion is given. The use of quotation allows Barber to satirise male excess. For example, she mimics Mr C–:

If ever I marry, I'll chuse me a Spouse,
That shall *serve* and *obey*, as she's bound by her Vows;
That shall, when I'm dressing, attend like a Valet;
Then go to the Kitchen, and study my Palate.
She has Wisdom enough, that keeps out of the Dirt,
And can make a good *Pudding*, and cut out a *Shirt*.
What Good's in a Dame that will pore on a Book?
No! – Give me the Wife that shall save me a Cook. (27-34)

This technique allows a statement of the female poet's authority additional to that implied in the satiric voice. For while the man is ridiculed for his opinion, her learning is still on display through her imitation of his citation of authorities: St Patrick, Plato and Thomas More.

But what is more interesting than the implicit double quotation marks around the male opinion is the presence of the single quotation marks around the female, that is, Barber's own opinion. The poem begins with a strong sense of male disapproval of female writing:

... I make it a Rule
To leave off all Writing, when *Con.* comes from School.
He dislikes what I've written, and says, I had better
To send what he calls a *poetical* Letter. (1-3)

This moves into the awareness of the recipient, Mr C–'s, stronger opinion which we have just examined. Therefore, it is no wonder that Barber's most earnest and straightforward discussion of male–female relations is distanced through quotation. Barber's advice to her son is common good sense. However, it is rhetorically constructed against the male opinion just given; that is, it is

highly aware of quotation. Indeed, it is so self-conscious that it must put itself in quotation marks: she *reports* what she says to her son. (Here we should note the difference from the poems written for her children: in the present case Mary Barber speaks in *her own* voice, yet still she must quote herself.) For example, she advises Con:

And shun, above all Things, a *housewifely Shrew*,
That would fly to your Study, with Fire in her Looks,
And ask what you got by your poring on Books;
Think Dressing of Dinner the Height of all Science,
And to Peace, and good Humour bid open defiance. (40-44)

This is advice which would stand on its own. However, as it is presented, it recalls, and even depends upon, the terms of the male opinion we quoted earlier (27-34).

Ironically, this most clear statement of practical feminism is brought about by the most indirect means: quotation in reference to another quotation within quotation. This can be read as either subversive or self-conscious. This female poet is either taking over the male mode of expression by cunning or nervously hedging her bets with quotation (a form of subordination to the main level of discourse). A revealing comparison is Swift's advice about marriage in the conclusion to "Strephon and Chloe":

On sense and wit your passion found,
By decency cemented round;
Let prudence with good nature strive,
To keep esteem and love alive.
Then come old age whene'er it will,
Your friendship shall continue still:
And thus a mutual gentle fire,
Shall never but with life expire.[29]

The sentiments expressed here are of a kind with Barber's reported advice to her son:

Let your Person be neat, unaffectedly clean,
Tho' alone with your Wife the whole Day you remain.
Choose Books, for her Study, to fashion her Mind,
To emulate those who excell'd of her Kind.
Be Religion the principal Care of your Life,
As you hope to be blest in your Children and Wife:
So you, in your Marriage, shall gain its true End;
And find, in your Wife, a *Companion* and *Friend*. (69-76)

What is absent from Swift's poem is self-quotation. Although Swift is a notorious creator of personae (some of whom critique Swift himself) and parodic thief of others' voices, his voices speak directly from a sense of their own authority (whether justified or not). The speaker of "Strephon and Chloe"

does not have to quote himself to make his opinions known. Barber is the author of her poem in a more problematic way. Being a woman, she has no authority behind her authorship, and so she must invent it by means of indirection – the displacement of her own voice.

It is the double nature of this technique which seems to have kept Mary Barber in Swift's shadow. There are, of course, other biographical factors at work in producing Barber's current lack of reputation. We have seen, albeit briefly, her sensitivity to questions of "race" (there is a noticeable Irish consciousness in the volume) and class (she labels herself a "citizen", the keeper of a woollen-drapery's shop) as well as gender. And Barber's self-effacing presence in *Poems on Several Occasions* corresponds with the way in which she deals with such questions at the social level. Nevertheless, from a twentieth-century perspective, the strongest factor at work in her biography has been Jonathan Swift. An Irish wife of a "citizen", troubled with the gout, seeking to support four children, and perhaps a husband, she involved herself, with the aid of a renowned male poet, in a subscription scheme that thrust her into circles very different from those she knew, as she took letters of introduction to London and Bath to meet the elite of society and literature. This social alienation is accompanied by a more radical self-alienation, for, as the bearer of letters of introduction, she comes not as herself, but as a representative of another, Jonathan Swift, who speaks for her.

We have seen this displacement of her own voice throughout her poems. It can also be seen in certain events of her life, such as the case of the letter to Queen Caroline in praise of Mary Barber, bearing the forged signature of Jonathan Swift.[30] This act of forgery is what Hobbes would term "feigned" authority.[31] In this case, the "actor" (Barber) is in fact the "author" of her actions and therefore should suffer the consequences. Although Swift concluded she was innocent of this ineffectual scheme, it is somehow appropriate that it should have concerned Barber, whose best technique is to borrow others' voices. Interestingly, we can see a reversal of this situation in the case of Barber's arrest in Swift's stead for carrying his "libellous" poems into England. Here Mary Barber is acting with Swift's authorisation (i.e. carrying his words), yet the "actor" suffers what is due to the "author". Again, when Barber, in financial need, requests and is granted permission to print Swift's *Polite Conversation*, we see another such transfer of authority. In these cases [32], as in many of her poems, Barber is author of her actions by indirection. She is the passive agent of another, yet that other acts on her behalf. Given her situation, this is the most viable option. Yet, it comes at a cost. By choosing to speak from a position of obscurity, Barber allows history to leave her in the shadows. It is worth noting, however, that, by this choice, she has taken enough authority to create poems which manage to address important questions under adverse circumstances.

Christopher Fanning, Department of English, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario K7L 3N6, Canada (cjf1@qsilver.queensu.ca).

Notes

- [1] The volume is actually dated 1734. Newly researched corrections to Barber's biography (c. 1685-1755) and publication history have been established by A.C. Elias Jr in "Editing Minor Writers: The Case of Laetitia Pilkington and Mary Barber" (*1650-1850: Ideas, Aesthetics, and Inquiries in the Early Modern Era*, vol. 3, ed. Kevin L. Cope [New York: AMS, 1997], pp. 129-147).
- [2] W.A. Speck, "Politicians, Peers, and Publication by Subscription 1700-1750", in *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England*, ed. Isabel Rivers (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1982), pp. 47-48. In "Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage" (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 7 [1974]), Paul J. Korshin classifies subscription as a growing "new variety of literary patronage", replacing "the generous individual patronage of the Renaissance" (p. 463). He notes, somewhat contradictorily, that "authors were often obliged to wealthy benefactors for soliciting subscriptions for them", yet "the sense of obligation which pervades and often exacerbates the traditional patron-client relationship is usually diminished or wholly absent in the author-subscriber relationship" (p. 464). Part of the democratising spirit in Korshin's statements seems to derive from a focus on "ambitious" works by male authors, especially Johnson's *Dictionary* and *Shakespeare*. See also Dustin Griffin's study: *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
- [3] See Betty Rizzo, "The Patron as Poet Maker: The Politics of Benefaction", *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 20 (1990), pp. 241-266.
- [4] Rizzo, p. 242. Lonsdale notes the charitable motive of subscriptions for the "deserving" wife or mother and her family" (*Eighteenth-Century Women Poets*, ed. Roger Lonsdale [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990], p. xxvi). Speck, Korshin and Griffin do not address subscription as a vehicle of charity. Also, we should note with Rizzo that not all patrons were middle class: Stephen Duck famously rose to become Queen Caroline's protégé.
- [5] Some of the critical neglect of Barber may be explained by recent approaches to eighteenth-century women's writing that have concentrated on the forging of a professional identity for women writers, investigating the female writer's placement of herself in the literary market-place. Although she does address similar issues, especially the problems of authority and identity, an "amateur" writer such as Mary Barber, who did not write in popular genres such as fiction or drama, and who published only one major volume for the purpose of collecting subscriptions, does not fit easily into the market-place paradigm. Recent examples of the "market-place" approach are Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), and Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen: Women Writers in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1992), both of

which focus on fiction. Turner classifies Barber as a “professional” writer, mainly due to the broad definition of “professionals” as “those who received payment for their work” (p. 60). Turner elsewhere acknowledges that subscription often, and especially in Barber’s case, depended upon a patron (see pp. 61, 106, 110).

- [6] Until recently, apart from brief mentions in Swift biographies, the only critical attention she had received was with regard to the attribution of “Apollo’s Edict”, which appears as both Swift’s and Barber’s. See the notes to “Apollo’s Edict” in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 1, pp. 355-356, and *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems*, ed. Pat Rogers (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 710, which, to a greater and lesser degree, respectively, give credit to Swift for this poem. See Oliver W. Ferguson, “The Authorship of ‘Apollo’s Edict’”, *PMLA* 70 (1955), pp. 433-440, for a defence of Barber’s authorship. The few recent substantial critical mentions of Barber, notably in Margaret Doody’s essay, “Swift Among the Women” (*Yearbook of English Studies*, 18 [1988], pp. 68-92) and Bernard Tucker’s edition of *The Poetry of Mary Barber (?1690-1757)* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), do little to dispel Swift’s shade. Another recent treatment is Margaret J.M. Ezell, *Writing Women’s Literary History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 112-115, which deals briefly with the changing (and shrinking) representation of Barber’s poems in succeeding editions of *Poems by Eminent Ladies* (1755-1780).
- [7] Jonathan Swift, *Correspondence*, ed. Harold Williams, 5 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963-65), 4, p. 186.
- [8] *Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington*, ed. A.C. Elias, Jr (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997), p. 283. See this edition’s notes on Barber, pp. 391-393 and 672-674.
- [9] *The Poetry of Mary Barber (?1690-1757)*, ed. Bernard Tucker (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), p. 40. All quotations are from this edition, unless otherwise noted; cited in text by page for prose and line for verse. Barber in her own preface profusely acknowledges “the Goodness of some Men of Genius, who with great Condescension undertook to correct what I had written” (p. 48).
- [10] The present study is intended as an interpretive account of how one particular subscription volume draws attention to problems of voice. I am not attempting to distinguish the editorial hands at work before the volume’s appearance. This field of study has been broached by A.C. Elias’s “Editing Minor Writers”, which suggests that the *senatus consultum* made Barber’s poetic voice more conventional and genteel in preparing her collected edition – often in her absence (p. 135). Elias elaborates on this issue in “*Senatus Consultum*: Revising Verse in Swift’s Dublin Circle, 1729-1735”, in *Papers from the Third Munster Symposium on Jonathan Swift*, ed. Hermann J. Real & Helgard Stover-Leidig (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1998), pp. 249-267.
- [11] Hobbes’s analysis “Of Persons, Authors, and things Personated” in *Leviathan* (ch. 16) offers terms useful to an understanding of Mary Barber’s technique. For Hobbes, authority is the “Right of doing any Action” (or speaking any words). The author (one who owns this right) may delegate his authority to an actor,

who acts in the name of the author. It is the author, not the actor, who is bound by such authorised acts. *Leviathan*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), p. 218.

- [12] Mary Barber, *Poems on Several Occasions* (London: 1734), pp. xxxi-xliv. Tucker prints an abridged list.
- [13] Griffin briefly considers this letter in terms of Swift's attitudes toward patronage (p. 103).
- [14] See Rebecca Gould Gibson, "'My Want of Skill': Apologias of British Women Poets, 1660-1800", in *Eighteenth-Century Women and the Arts*, ed. Frederick M. Keener & Susan E. Lorsch (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988), pp. 79-86.
- [15] Of the fifty-two *Poems on Several Occasions*, some fifteen are titles for collections by dead authors ranging from Milton to Thomson. Of the remaining thirty-seven living authors, sixteen include a list of subscribers.
- [16] Although Barber's volume was planned as early as 1730, in the following two paragraphs I do not mean to suggest that Grierson, who died in 1732, reacts specifically to the prefatory material in Barber's 1735 volume (indeed, Swift's letter is dated 20 August 1733). I do mean to suggest that the common elements found in Grierson's poem are pervasive characteristics of Mary Barber, and perhaps female poets of this period in general.
- [17] Grierson in Barber, *Poems on Several Occasions* (1734), p. xlv.
- [18] *Correspondence*, 3, p. 457.
- [19] This concern with subscribers will return at the very end of Barber's volume, in her own satiric account of "gen'rous Britons". Such self-consciousness about the subscription process is not uncommon in subscription volumes.
- [20] As I have noted, such extensive prefatory material is customary in subscription volumes. In Barber's volume, the self-effacement of such embedding material is pointed by the continued use of this technique in her poems. See Tucker's introduction to *The Poetry of Mary Barber*, pp. 18-22, for some general comments on Barber's use of different voices.
- [21] The single poem written in her daughter's voice, "A Letter written for my Daughter, to a Lady who had presented her with a Cap", contains an interesting ironic portrait of the mother from a female perspective, and is also expressly concerned with class-consciousness.
- [22] See Doody, p. 74.
- [23] It is interesting to note that "To Mrs. Kelly" is immediately followed by "The RECANTATION: To the same Lady", which, while ostensibly apologising, restates the criticism of the preceding poem.
- [24] Swift, *Correspondence*, 4, p. 333.
- [25] *Ibid.* Donnellan was herself praised in Barber's volume and appears in the subscription list.
- [26] Barber's response to this poem, "Written for my Son, to Mr Barry; occasion'd by the foregoing Verses", not only draws attention to the use of the mask (indirectly: by accepting the fiction of Barry's authorship), but also indirectly

addresses the compromise made to Barber's authorship by accepting Dr T-'s indirect praise:

For you, tho' nobly born, descend
To injure, yet appear a Friend;
And seem to make my Praise your Aim,
With more Success to wound my Fame. (9-12)

[27] *Poems on Several Occasions*, 1734, p. 87.

[28] Grierson was known as a classicist.

[29] Jonathan Swift, "Strephon and Chloe", in *Jonathan Swift: The Complete Poems*, ed. Pat Rogers, lines 307-314.

[30] Swift, *Correspondence*, 5, pp. 259-260.

[31] Hobbes, p. 219.

[32] For accounts of these three incidents, see Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift: The Man, His Works, and the Age: Dean Swift*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), pp. 702-703 (letters), 777 (arrest), 836 (*Polite Conversation*), and Tucker's introduction.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Maria Edgeworth

To coincide with the forthcoming publication of Pickering & Chatto's annotated critical edition of Maria Edgeworth, *Women's Writing* invites revisionary essays exploring Edgeworth's contribution to women's writing from a varied of perspectives. The special issue of the journal will be guest edited by Mitzi Myers, one of the projects co-editors (with Marilyn Butler & Bill McCormack).

Please submit abstracts, inquiries, and essays to Mitzi Myers at the address below. Completed papers should follow the journal's normal house style.

Please write to
Mitzi Myers
2206 Bedford Drive
FULLERTON
CA 92831-1504
USA

Telephone: +(1) 714 993 4472