

Constantine Barber

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Constantine Barber, son of poetess Mary Barber (1685–1755), is mainly now known as a physician. Born around 1712–1714 and raised in Dublin, Ireland, Barber attended Trinity College and received his Doctor of Medicine (MD) at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands. He was President of the Royal College of Physicians in Dublin from 1754 until his death in 1783. Although he was successful academically, Barber did not have much influence in the literary world. His mother was a known poetess due to patronage from Jonathan Swift, and all of Constantine’s known works were published in Mary Barber’s¹³⁸ *Poems on Several Occasions* (1734).

Constantine’s poem “To Mrs. Barber, New-Year’s Day, 1733” is an ode to his mother comprised of heroic couplets in iambic pentameter. During the early eighteenth century, the calendar system was gradually switching from the Julian to the Gregorian. Although the Gregorian calendar starts on January first, New Year’s Day was still celebrated on the vernal equinox, so Constantine drafted this poem sometime in March. When he wrote it, Mary Barber was travelling between Dublin and England with the support of Jonathan Swift to raise subscriptions for her work, and Constantine was still attending Trinity College in Dublin. Mary Barber was around forty-eight years old, and Constantine around twenty.

Further Reading

- Lavie, Chantel M. “The Boy in the Text: Mary Barber, Her Son, and Children’s Poetry in *Poems on Several Occasions*,” *ABO: Interactive Journal for Women in the Arts, 1640-1830*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2021, pp. 1-24.
- Poole, Robert. ““Give Us Our Eleven Days!”: Calendar Reform in Eighteenth-Century England.” *Past & Present*, no. 149, 1995, pp. 95–139.

¹³⁸ See elsewhere in this anthology for work by Mary Barber

To Mrs. Barber. New-Year's-Day, 1733¹³⁹

SEE, the bright Sun renews his annual Course,¹⁴⁰
 Each Beam re-tinges, and revives its Force,
 By Years uninjur'd;¹⁴¹ so may'st¹⁴² thou remain,
 Not Time from thee, but thou from Time may'st gain:
 O might the Fates thy vital Thread prolong, 5
 And make thy Life immortal, as thy Song!

Less Lustre¹⁴³ waits the God,¹⁴⁴ when he refines
 The rip'ning Metal¹⁴⁵ in *Peruvian* Mines;
 Brightens the Crystal with transparent Day,
 Or points the Di'mond¹⁴⁶ with its sparkling Ray; 10
 Than when, delighted, he thy Soul inspires,
 Informs thy Judgment, and thy Fancy fires;
 Assists thee striking out some bold Design,
 And breathes immortal Honours on each Line:
 In common as *His* Rays on all descend, 15
 So *You* the Great delight, the Poor befriend:
 As Heat productive *His* bright Beams bestow,
 So, warm with Life, *your* pow'rful Numbers¹⁴⁷ flow:
 As He from Clouds bursts forth divinely bright,
 So Envy sets *You* in a fairer Light: 20

¹³⁹ Barber, Mary. *Poems on Several Occasions*. C. Rivington, at the Bible and Crown in St. Paul's Church-Yard, 1734, pp. 254–255; *Eighteenth-Century Poetry Archive*.

¹⁴⁰ *The bright Sun renews his annual Course*: this is a reference to lines 7 and 8 of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*: General Prologue.

¹⁴¹ *Uninjur'd*: uninjured, meaning she has not visibly aged.

¹⁴² *May'st*: mayest, i.e. may you.

¹⁴³ *Lustre*: "The quality or condition of shining by reflected light; sheen, refulgence; gloss" (*OED*).

¹⁴⁴ *God*: refers to Apollo who is known as the God of the Sun and Poetry.

¹⁴⁵ *Rip'ning metal*: the ripening metal is silver.

¹⁴⁶ *Di'mond*: diamond.

¹⁴⁷ *Numbers*: "metrical periods or feet; lines, verses" (*OED*).

Yet, tho' thus far Similitude we see,
One Thing disturbs the wond'rous¹⁴⁸ Harmony;
With *faded Light* the Winter Sun appears,
Whilst You shine *brighter* in Decline of Years.



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¹⁴⁸ *Wond'rous*: marvelous.