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Swift: Peculiar Supporter of Female Writers

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **Introduction: Swift: Peculiar Supporter of Female Writers**

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) is not traditionally known for valuing the company of women. While contemporary critics tend to be more forgiving and defer to the prevailing values of the eighteenth century, they generally do not dwell on the positive influence that Swift had on female writers of his day. This thesis will work towards remedying that omission by analyzing the writing of three prominent female contemporaries of Swift: Delariviere Manley, Mary Barber and Laetitia Pilkington. While varying in writing ability, each of the three women in this thesis had a personal relationship with Swift, was invited to join his “inner circle” for a time and received his advice on a variety of issues. Despite substantial analysis to the contrary, this thesis will emphasize the positive impact that Swift had on women writers of his day.

While surely influenced by the mores of his time that relegated female writing to the “lower rungs” of literature, Swift nevertheless sought women out, reviewed their work and offered his suggestions and insights; indeed, he “provided a constant model and stimulus for women writers who...found themselves [like Swift]...in a position of subjugation and supposed docility when they would rather speak out and vex the world a little as well as divert it” (Doody, “Swift” 92). Ever the keen social observer, Swift often expressed his doubts about the capabilities of the female mind through the veil of satire or by employing alternate literary voices. However, the Dean’s ridicule does not mean that he was merely an insensitive misogynist. Despite the opinion of some critics, Swift was concerned with the development of the female mind, and dedicated much of his life

to nurturing it; he further explains that while he “ever hated all Nations, Professions, and Communities; [he did profess] love towards Individuals...” (Swift, Writings 634). Thus, while certain aspects of human behavior troubled him deeply, he was nevertheless able and willing to support and befriend individual acquaintances (particularly females), lending them both personal and literary advice.

Therefore, rather than bow to the prevailing societal pressures that kept women writers at arm’s length, Swift welcomed female companionship, and helped them to become effective literary voices. The template that he advocated, however, was from the “male” perspective, as he encouraged his female protégées to emulate “traditional” masculine behaviors in both their personal and literary endeavors (Barnett 161). Furthermore, Elias notes that Swift believed “women have just as much intellectual force and character as men and are just as capable, without special help, of shaking off their mind-forged manacles themselves” (“Introduction” 2: 417). While one can understand why feminists have traditionally taken issue with the Dean, it is clear that he believed women were capable of bettering themselves, particularly if they resisted society’s pressure to be more concerned with their outward appearance than the development of their mind. One must also note that both Manley and Pilkington fell victim to the mistreatment and abandonment of men, but nevertheless were able to channel their vengeance into creating significant works that addressed this abuse. Thus, while each of these writers certainly would have succeeded without his assistance, this thesis will offer evidence to support the notion that Swift’s support helped them thrive in a male-dominated profession.

Therefore, this thesis focuses on three prominent female writers who benefited

from the Dean's friendship and advice: Delariviere Manley (best known for her influential New Atalantis), Mary Barber (focusing primarily on her Poems on Several Occasions), and Laetitia Pilkington (notably through her groundbreaking The Memoirs of Laetitia Pilkington). While each writer wrote in a distinctive manner and possessed different public personas, Manley was perhaps the most talented of the three; in fact, many critics regard her as Swift's peer rather than simply a follower. Indeed, they were both concerned with many of the same issues, including dissatisfaction with those in power, a desire to satirically comment on the issues of the day and general disdain for the deficiencies of mankind.

In contrast, while perhaps not as confident of her ability to succeed as a published female writer, Barber frequently employed the voices of others, including her son, Constantine. However, rather than attempt to challenge the prevailing norms that discouraged women from publishing, she chose to focus on subject areas that would cause less controversy, such as domestic issues. She also occasionally wrote for others who were less skilled at crafting persuasive written arguments.

Finally, although not generally regarded as talented or as versatile as Manley or as thoughtful as Barber, Pilkington achieved her success by writing about the personal behaviors of public figures, particularly those of her mentor, Dean Swift. Critics believe that she was able to shed light on the "real" man hidden behind the public facade, while also providing details about her own life and that of numerous public figures. Unlike many contemporaries (including Swift) who occasionally used pseudonyms to facilitate their ability to speak freely, Pilkington's most popular works were based on actual encounters; she had little use for fictional characters and situations that merely hinted at

the actions and motivations of others. While Swift would certainly not have approved of her tendency to reveal personal details of his life - her Memoirs were published shortly after his death - she documented his behavior with friends and acquaintances with a degree of candor that was a significant departure for its time (particularly from a female perspective) and helped pave the way for the notorious tabloids that continue to be prevalent to the present day. Thus, this thesis will conclude with a focus on Pilkington and the lasting impact that she has had on the legacy of Swift, as evidenced primarily through her three-volume Memoirs.

A primary influence for this thesis is the seminal work of Margaret Anne Doody. Her scholarship sheds light on Swift's positive influence on his female companions, as evidenced in numerous essays, including her essential "Swift among the Women" (1998). In this work, Doody offers evidence to support the Dean's concern for his female followers); indeed, Swift's followers were inspired by his "energy, pungency and pointedness" (often in the form of teasing and ridicule), behavior that was intended to produce literature that shared his concern for social issues and personal behaviors (Doody, "Swift" 79). This analysis will support her work and clarify the vital role that Swift played in the development of eighteenth century female writers.

### **Delariviere Manley (1663 or c. 1670 – 1724)**

Delariviere Manley - Köster suggests that her first name most likely in homage to Lady Delariviere Morgan (v) - is perhaps most outwardly similar to her mentor; both are skeptical of the underlying motivations of others and use satire to lash out at those who they believe abuse the public trust. Their similarities made it difficult for critics to distinguish between Manley's work and her mentor, particularly when they jointly authored the Tory pamphlet The Examiner; she eventually succeeded him as principal writer (Rabb, "Manl(e)y," 126). In fact, preliminary computer studies indicate that Manley has some "quantitative resemblance" to the Dean (Köster xxii). Much like Swift, she also writes in a variety of literary modes (pamphlets, articles, novels, etc.), and at times includes situations of inappropriate male and female behavior.

Manley was the third child of career military officer Sir Roger Manley; her mother died when she was quite young. She was exposed to writing from an early age, as her father wrote several articles concerning warfare. After her mother's death, the three sisters and one brother were raised by governesses. Her brother followed his father's footsteps by pursuing a naval career, while the girls became romantically involved with men from the service. Indeed, her sister Mary Elizabeth eventually married a captain, while Manley was involved with Ensign James Carlisle, who was also active as an actor, playwright and author.

Both Manley and Pilkington (as detailed later in this thesis) were subject to the manipulation of men. Upon the death of her father after the revolution, Manley and her

sister Cornelia were left to the “care” of her father’s nephew, John Manley. Although her father had treated him like a son, John “married” Delariviere under false pretenses, got her pregnant and forced her to live in a state of depressed seclusion in London for several years; he eventually left her to rejoin his legal wife in hopes of a promising business opportunity. Forced to fend for herself, Manley took several short-term opportunities, including serving as an aide to the aging Duchess of Cleveland. Upon her dismissal, she published several works, including Letters, The Lost Lover and The Royal Mischief. Köster notes that after achieving modest success, she became the mistress of lawyer John Tilly, deputy warden of Fleet Prison, who, much like John Manley before him, ultimately left her to marry a rich widow (viii). Similar to Swift, her writing at times included a variety of controversial subjects such as adultery and sexual activity.

Based in part on her troublesome experiences, her writing style therefore developed into a unique blend of “amorous satirical fiction and politics” (Anderson 272). Her literary achievements include several plays, as well as her career highlight, the New Atlantis (1709-14), a “society” work infused with political commentary that was controversial, successful, and read by many important published writers, including Pope and Swift. Her journalistic achievements included The Female Tatler (1709) where she used the pseudonym of Mrs. Crackenthope to express herself more freely. Despite this attempt at anonymity, however, she and her publisher were jailed in 1709 when they refused to confirm that she was the author of these controversial articles. Other important published works include The Adventures of Rivella (1714), Lucius (1717) and The Power of Love (1720). She is generally considered to be the author of the anti-Whig satire/romance The Secret History of Queen Zarah (1705), a fictionalized autobiography

based on Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough that she compares to a “Romantick Tale of a Tub” (Novels 127). Despite the fact that she was widely read, she occasionally annoyed the likes of Swift, Pope and Fielding by including some controversial content (Köster v).

Manley uses a number of pseudonyms to help her circumvent the restrictions that society imposed on female writers. She and Swift were concerned with exposing the improper behaviors of others in a remarkably direct manner for the time. Her most popular novel was Atalantis, which she claimed was a translation of a much earlier work. This important work comments on British society in a manner somewhat analogous to Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels (also published anonymously); here, she offers a somewhat rambling narrative that comments on inappropriate behaviors and political corruption, along with a healthy portion of moralizing along the way. “Innocence is banish’d by the first dawn of early Knowledge; Sensual Corruptions and hasty Enjoyments affright me from their Habitation...Human Nature is universally corrupted, those that fight against them, are as wicked as themselves...” (Atalantis 3,15). Since she claimed that Atalantis was merely a translation of an earlier work, Manley felt comfortable offering frank observations. For example, while referring to the motivations of the goddess Astrea, Manley observes that “[h]er Design was rather for Rome, or the Metropolis of France or Great Britain, Places renown’d in the Court of Jupiter, for Hypocrisy, Politicks, Politeness and Vanity” (Novels 273).

Years later, Swift also expressed his disdain for the appalling behaviors of those in power, as suggested by this description of Laputa in Gulliver’s Travels. “I was surprized to find Corruption grown so high and so quick in the Empire...which made me less wonder at many parallel Cases in other Countries, where Vices of all Kinds have

reigned so much longer” (Writings 172). Note the similarity of directness and word choice in the two authors; both writers were intent on expressing their concerns in plain, unadorned language to emphasize their mutual disdain for careless insincerity. This shared contempt of impropriety subsequently formed a bond between the two writers, and helped ensure a long relationship based on mutual respect and concern with similar issues.

Manley and Swift are also quite troubled by the unwarranted importance that society places upon external beauty. Rather than a harmless diversion, they see the pursuit of superficial beauty as detrimental and ultimately dangerous. For instance, Manley goes so far to admit that “[t]he love of Beauty, is the loss of Reason. Neither is it to be suppress'd by Wisdom, because it is not to be comprehended with Reason” (Atalantis 60). Swift goes even further, offering a satirical description that accentuates the imperfections of the female body that are hidden from the casual observer. Writing here as Gulliver, he notes that two giant “Maids of Honor” in Brobdingnag “would often ...lay me at full length in their Bosoms; wherewith I was much disgusted; because...a very offensive Smell came from their Skins... with a Mole here and there as broad as a Trencher...” (Writings 95). Thus, rather than allowing oneself to become entranced by the physical beauty of women, both writers remind their readers that a woman’s true “beauty” is based on character and intelligence, rather than merely a pleasing appearance.

To further reinforce the danger that undue attention to superficial appearance can promote, Manley expresses her concern for society’s inability to distinguish between artifice and genuine values.

Did Mankind confine themselves only to what was necessary,

reasonable, or proper, there would indeed be no occasion for most part of the great expence they are at...every Country is sufficient to it self, for sustaining Life with Temperance, tho' not with Luxury (Atalantis 89).

She also directs her comments to women whose self-esteem depends upon the admiration of others. "I pitied [Rivella's] Conduct, which I saw must infallibly center in her Ruin: There was no Language approached her Ear but Flattery and Persuasion to Delight and Love... [she was] delighted with every Fop, who flatter'd her Vanity" (Rivella 43-4). It is also interesting to note that this misguided behavior was precisely what troubled Swift, as he believed that women were capable of thoughtful discussion (as demonstrated by their admirable literary efforts) and should not be restrained by the stifling expectations of a male-dominated society.

Manley is also not afraid to write with a degree of detail that may have occasionally made the Dean blush. Personally against the inappropriate public display of lust, she here offers a revealing look at a troubled female protagonist with an aggressiveness traditionally associated with men. "[S]he threw her self down upon a Bed, with only one thin Petticoat and a loose Nightgown, the Bosom of her Gown and Shift open... (Atalantis 71). In this manner, Manley subtly directs her concern at both sexes, and exposes the danger associated with such lewd behavior. Fabricant notes that this passage also reinforces the similar methods that both writers employed as "recorders of intimate scenes others might well think obscene" (157). Despite the consequences, both writers felt compelled to follow their conscience and (through the use of satire) expressed themselves in ways that were not always accepted by "polite" society.

Unlike Swift, however, she is less skillful at weaving “morals” throughout her writing, and often bluntly (or perhaps satirically?) reinforces her points to ensure that her reader has understood them. “Your Story has two Morals, one you have your self remark'd, the other is, ‘That no Woman ought to introduce another to the Man by whom she is belov'd...’” (Atalantis 83). In contrast, Swift generally avoided unadorned moralizing; by stating her morals so plainly, Manley at times interrupts the flow of her writing.

Nevertheless, both writers feel comfortable employing satire, particularly when it is directed at politicians and misguided leadership. Indeed, both occasionally felt the consequences of such written attacks during the reign of Queen Anne; while writing for The Examiner, they often targeted specific individuals and their misuse of power. Manley alternately uses romance to advance her political attacks; indeed, she was imprisoned not because of her lewd observations in Atalantis and elsewhere, but rather due to her success in criticizing the Whig ministry (Rabb, “Manl(e)y” 127). Thus, while critics have focused on her more provocative romances, her significant political satire is extensive and certainly worthy of further scholarship.

Much like Swift and several of his other female acquaintances, Manley maintained a close personal and professional relationship with the Dean. Indeed, although generally viewed as an “attack,” Fabricant suggests that Swift composed “Corinna” as a commentary on Manley, employing his characteristic teasing and satirical tone (156-157). With Cupid as his narrator, one can see the playful admiration that he had for his partner and friend.

‘This little maid

Of love shall always speak and write:  
And I pronounce," the Satyr said,  
The world shall feel her scratch and bite  
...Her common-place book all gallant is,  
Of Scandal now a cornucopia,  
She pours it out in Atalantis,  
Or Memoirs of the new Utopia (Swift, Poetical 205-6).

Thus, similar to her mentor, Manley skillfully blended fiction and social commentary to express her concerns for a world that she believed was embracing values and behaviors that were ultimately harmful both to the individual and the advancement of society in general. Her ability to use a variety of literary modes emphasizes her considerable talents, and her literary output is impressive by any standards. As Swift observes, "Manley's narratives are built precisely upon this principle: episodic 'small circumstances' [that] accumulate into greater matters" (Rabb, "Manl(e)y," 135).

### **Mary Barber (1685–1755)**

Unlike the versatile Manley, Mary Barber is not generally regarded as the most talented member of Swift's female writing circle. She is certainly, however, one of the most apologetic, and often feels the need to publish anonymously, or mask her gender by employing voices of both sexes (Fanning 81). While she and Swift have a similar writing style and outlook on human behavior, this chapter presents evidence to fortify her reputation as an insightful social critic in her own right.

While little was known of her parents, it is apparent that Barber came from a modest background. The wife of a woolen-draper Rupert and mother of nine children, with only four surviving childhood, she lived in Dublin from 1705 until 1724, and claimed that her primary motivation for writing was not financial, but rather a way of furthering the education of her children.

A Mother, who vast pleasure finds  
In modeling her Childrens Minds...  
Mingles in ev'ry Play, to find  
What Byass nature gave the Mind;  
Resolving thence to take her Aim,  
To guide them to the Realms of Fame;  
And wisely make those Realms their Way... (Barber 7).

Her focus on family was appropriate for the time, and helped justify her literary ambition, particularly since her primary motivation was to supplement her children's

learning. When she subsequently decided to publish her writing, she was nevertheless aware of the overwhelming resistance to female writers. Indeed, in the preface to her successful Poems on Several Occasions (1734), she echoes society's opinion that a "woman steps out of her Province whenever she presumes to write for the press" (xvii), since to speak in her own voice would be "an act of pride, a self-authorisation" (Fanning 83). Due to these significant societal pressures, she often hides her true identity by writing for others and employing a variety of satiric personas.

The Dean also shared an interest with domestic issues, as he occasionally chooses everyday concerns as subjects of his works. For instance, "A Description of the Morning," focuses on the hasty efforts of a woman to tidy up a room.

Now hardly here and there an Hackney-Coach  
Appearing, show'd the ruddy Morns Approach.  
Now Betty from her Masters Bed had flown,  
And softly stole to discompose her own  
The Slipshod Prentice from his Masters Door  
Had par'd the Dirt, and sprinkled round the Floor.  
Now Moll had whirl'd her Mop with dext'rous Airs,  
Prepar'd to Scrub the Entry and the Stairs (Swift Writings 518).

While both writers employ a similar rhyming scheme (aa bb), Swift's vocabulary is a bit more sophisticated and varied ("decompose," "Slipshod," etc.). Barber leans towards more common expressions ("pleasure," "modelling," etc.). Each of Swift's lines are also more detailed and sophisticated, while Barber's focus is on brief, straightforward observations. However, unlike Swift whose subject matter was far more diverse, her

primary focus on a mother's concern for her child's development appropriately lends itself to more commonplace observations and terminology.

However, unlike her mentor, Barber felt a pressing need to hide from the public; this is clearly evident in Swift's preface to Poems that was originally a letter he had written to the Earl of Orrery to solicit support for Mrs. Barber. While praising her talents, Swift paraphrases a letter that Barber had earlier written to him, speculating upon which "Topicks she intends to insist on; [the Earl's] Learning, your Genius, your Affability..." Some critics believe that this shifting back and forth between these two writers acts to blur the line between the two, reinforcing their close literary relationship (Barber v; Fanning 83).

From the very beginning of her published writing career, Barber felt the need to mask her identity; indeed, she wrote her first published poem, "The Widow Gordon's Petition: To the Rt. Hon. the Lady Carteret," for the impoverished widow of a fallen officer. By speaking with the voice of a woman of a higher social standing, Barber's ability to present an emotional plea here is more effective than it would have been had she chose to write under her own name.

Weary'd with long attendance on the court,  
You, Madam, are the wretch's last resort,  
Eternal King! If here in vain I cry,  
Where shall the fatherless and Widow fly?  
How blessed are they, who sleep among the Dead,  
Nor hear their Childrens piercing Cries for Bread! (Barber 2)

While this urgent plead would certainly hold much less resonance had it come from a

novice female writer, Barber's use of Lady Carteret's voice is surely more effective at drawing the attention and respect of more established writers, including Swift.

Barber also frequently writes from the perspective of her son, Constantine ("Con"). On the surface, she appears to be concerned with relating typical schoolboy complaints such as homework, uncomfortable clothes, etc. In one of her most popular poems, "Written for My Son, and Spoken by him at his first putting on Breeches," she uses Con's voice to complain about the agony of wearing uncomfortable school clothes. Writing in a self-depreciating manner, Barber is able to comment on the control that men had over the type of clothing that should be worn in public, regardless of considerable discomfort. In the guise of her schoolboy son complaining about tight pants, Barber draws attention to clothing designed more for appearance sake than for the wearer; these clothes "suffer[ed] by Ligation, / To keep the Blood from Circulation" (Barber 13), working her way to the head that is equally constricted by the "Hat-band [that] helps to cramp our Brains" (14; Fanning 87).

In this amusing manner, Barber subtly comments on the absurdity of a male-dominated society that calls for conformity in the dress of both sexes, even when it neglects the "discomfort and unhealthiness of their own wear" (Doody, "Love" 496). Ridiculing society's preference for appearance (as opposed to comfort and practicality) was a topic that she could discuss without censure by comically employing her son's voice. While the motif of satirizing women's clothing had been utilized many times before, "[o]ne can see how Barber's witty contempt for authority and custom, for public English authority and custom, would appeal to Swift" (Doody, "Swift" 74-5).

This focus on absurd clothing practices recalls Gulliver's observations during his

voyage to Lilliput. “We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the Heir to the Crown, to have some Tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his Heels higher than the other; which gives him a Hobble in his Gait” (Swift, Writings 30). While both writers were concerned with artifice, Swift goes a bit further when he returns to addressing domestic issues to ridicule the transient nature of women’s cosmetic “beauty,” as observed in “The Progress of Beauty”.

Three Colours, Black, and Red, and White,  
So gracefull in their proper Place,  
Remove them to a diff’rent Light  
They form a frightfull hideous Face...  
So Celia went entire to Bed,  
All her Complexions safe and sound,  
But when she rose, the Black and Red  
Though still in Sight, had chang’d their Ground (Swift, Writings 523).

Thus, both Barber and Swift recognized the illusory nature of appearance, deriding its fleeting and often absurd nature. This skeptical view of artifice becomes all the more compelling, given the need for both writers to hide themselves on occasion to more plainly comment on the deficiencies of others. While questioning the wearing of clothing, both authors are able to subtly suggest that decisions are not always made for the benefit of the public, but rather for appearance or politically-motivated concerns.

Furthermore, her frequent willingness to portray herself as a “comic and sometimes awkward figure” was a technique she shared, and perhaps learned, from Swift himself (Doody, “Swift” 74). The Dean was certainly comfortable with looking closer to

home for subjects to ridicule; in A Tale of a Tub, his mockery is clearly directed inward.

I have one concluding Favour, to request of my Reader; that he will not expect to be equally diverted and informed by every Line, or every Page of this Discourse; but give some Allowance to the Author's Spleen, and short Fits or Intervals of Dullness... (Swift, Writings 370-1).

However, the careful reader must question how a writer who emphasizes modesty can nevertheless become quite assertive (and at times nearly aggressive) while advancing her writing career. For instance, critics believe that Barber forged Swift's signature to a letter of solicitation sent to Queen Caroline. Perhaps the Dean was also pleased with the assertiveness that Barber employed while promoting herself, a traditional masculine quality that did not rely on the comeliness of the female to promote her agenda.

Another instance of her assertive behavior occurred during a visit to England to raise subscriptions for her writing, where her actions evidently irritated Pope by requesting that he correct some of her verses. Acting as mediator, Swift was able to convince Pope that Barber was torn between her wish to achieve literary acclaim and appropriate personal behavior. Indeed, Swift was unwavering in his support throughout Barber's career. For example, his letter campaign to solicit subscriptions helped her gain over nine hundred subscribers for Poems (1736), including Pope, Gay and other prominent literary and political figures of her time (Fanning 81). Furthermore, Poems was one of the first collections of poetry written by a woman for subscription, surpassing in its tally of subscribers those for George Faulkner's complete editions of both Pope (1736) and Swift (1735) (Budd 206).

Barber was also an ardent supporter of her mentor as well; at one point, she,

Matthew Pilkington and others were arrested in England for possessing manuscript copies of “Epistle to a Lady” and “On Poetry: A Rapsody”, two of Swift's political poems that attacked the Walpole administration (Mayhew 159). Since her writing style was at times similar to Swift, Apollo’s Edict was at one point thought to be hers (due to its inclusion in Poems on Several Occasions); others believe that it may have been written by Swift, or that Barber gave it to the Dean for revision. Indeed, this poem “has long been cited as a typical example of Swift’s attitude towards poetic cant and outworn cliché,” an attitude supported by none other than the god Apollo himself (Ferguson 433, 440). Despite the lack of confirmation regarding its true authorship (Swift, Barber, a communal effort, etc.), there is clearly a distinct shift in word choice and tone, as it strays far from Barber’s customary domestic focus.

Irene’s now our royal care:

We lately fix’d our Vice-roy there.

How near was she to be undone,

Till pious Love inspir’d her Son! (Barber 107)

In any event, her fortuitous decision to generally avoid the “pretentious” pentameter and employ Swift’s “quick colloquial rhymed tetrameter” (Doody, “Swift” 75) helped make her writings more appealing to the reading public. It also is apparent that the Dean’s emotional and financial support throughout her brief career helped her to achieve her own literary success.

She unfortunately suffered from gout for much of her life, an ailment that prevented her from reaching her full literary potential. As a result, her creative output tapered off considerably after 1734. However, to help her through this financially

troubling time, Swift again provided his support by offering her the English rights to his Complete Collection of Genteel and Ingenious Conversation (1738). His respect for her literary talents was made clear in 1744, when (in reference to her prominent inclusion in Poems by Eminent Ladies) he pronounced her the best poet of both kingdoms. She eventually succumbed to her illness and died in 1755, while husband Rupert outlived her by another twenty-two years.

### **Laetitia Pilkington (1706-1750)**

In contrast to the frequent use of assorted literary personas by Barber, Manley and Swift himself, Laetitia Pilkington ensured her success by emphasizing her femininity, her relationship with the Dean and her ability to comment on the behavior of public figures that distressed her in some way. Rather than hide behind alternate personas and situations, Pilkington succeeded by writing about everyday life, employing an approach similar to today's popular tabloids and magazines that succeed due to the misfortunes of public figures. Her readiness to reveal minute details of personal behavior sparked the interest of a reading public, perhaps looking for a diversion from more serious literature. However, it was her relationship with Swift that helped attract attention to her work, as she was one of the few individuals who possessed first-hand knowledge of his private life, and was willing to share her observations with a curious public.

In a new biography just published (2008), Norma Clarke reinforces the general consensus of literary critics that no credible resources on Pilkington exist beyond her own Memoirs (Hill, par. 6). Despite a lack of corroborating evidence, however, it is clear that her interest in writing began at an early age. "From my earliest Infancy, I had a strong Disposition to Letters; but my Eyes being weak, after the Small-pox, I was not permitted to look at a Book; my Mother regarding more the Beauty of my Face, then the Improvement of my Mind" (Pilkington 1: 13). Unfortunately influenced by prevailing public opinion, her mother believed that women should be more concerned

with their appearances than the development of their mind, an issue (as noted above) that deeply troubled Swift. Fortunately, her father was more supportive in this area and encouraged his daughter's interest in reading and literature.

As an adult, Pilkington was eager to meet the Dean; however, she was forced to be patient and wait for the proper moment. Dr. Patrick Delany, a close friend of Swift, had earlier introduced the Dean to her husband, Matthew Pilkington, an ambitious clergyman with literary aspirations. It was Laetitia, however, who urged her husband to obtain an introduction to Swift. So eager was Pilkington to meet the Dean that she even composed a few birthday verses for him in 1729. Once finally meeting Swift, he put her through a variety of uncomfortable tests that forced her to "earn" his favor; at one point, he accused her of possessing a "woman's double nature, of hiding her slovenly nature behind a façade of propriety" (Thompson 85). Nevertheless, she endured his unusual manner of tutoring (usually a combination of abrasive correction followed by praise) and emerged from his shadow as a popular writer in her own right. Despite substantial odds, her notable wit and determination, along with her popular anecdotes about the Dean, helped her to succeed in a male-dominated profession and secured her a place in literary history.

Pilkington was born in or near Dublin from a respected family; her father was a physician and obstetrician who later became president of Ireland's College of Physicians, while her mother was the niece of Sir John Meade. In 1725, she met and married Matthew, an ambitious priest of the Church of England; shortly after their meeting, Swift secured Matthew the position of chaplain to the Lord Mayor of London (1732-1733). It was this action, however, that ultimately planted the seed of his wife's literary career.

When visiting London, she discovered that her husband had become intimately involved with a Drury Lane Theatre actress. Perhaps motivated by a sense of guilt or to divert attention away from his own indiscretions, Matthew introduced her to James Worsdale, an artist and womanizer who later purchased poetry written by Pilkington and sold it as his own, thus initiating her published literary career (although her true identity was initially concealed). Unfortunately, Matthew would later use her relationship with Worsdale as justification for divorcing her, despite the fact that his own personal behavior was clearly inappropriate.

Nevertheless, it was not until she met the wealthy and elderly poet laureate Colley Cibber that she decided to write under her own name and support herself financially. Cibber, who had much success with his autobiographical Apology for the Life of Colley Cibber, Comedian, enthusiastically encouraged her to follow his example of using actual people and situations as the basis of her work. “Zounds! Write it out, just as you relate it, and, I’ll engage it will sell” (Pilkington 1: 160). Elias notes that she ultimately decided to incorporate her own personal and professional difficulties as the framework for her successful multi-volume Memoirs, with the first two editions appearing shortly after the Dean’s death in 1745 (“Introduction” 1: xvi-xvii).

Thus, the primary inspiration for her published writing was not simply the result of a fertile imagination; indeed, her most successful work (the Memoirs) was prompted by her determination to recover financially from what her husband and others regarded as “inappropriate behavior” for a married woman, despite the fact that Matthew himself was inappropriately involved with other women during their marriage. The couple eventually separated in 1736; once Matthew went public with his wife’s “inappropriate” behavior

(without admitting guilt on his part), he filed for divorce, forcing Laetitia to earn a living by utilizing her literary skills of observation, memory and wit. Her subject matter, however, differed greatly from her female contemporaries, as it focused on vindicating the personal wrongs that she had endured by fearlessly attacking others whose behavior was equally inappropriate, or in some cases (particularly that of her husband) surpassed her own (Thompson 90).

It was the time that Pilkington spent with Swift, however, that initially attracted the interest of the reading public. Indeed, prior to the public scandal initiated by Mr. Pilkington, Swift had earlier shifted his allegiance from Matthew to Laetitia, as he recognized that she possessed a literary talent and wit far superior to that of her husband. While Swift's support lasted only until her husband went public with his accusations, he initially chose to support her over her more "socially acceptable" spouse. Swift's expectations, however, became rather extreme at times; indeed, many believe that her relationship with Swift may have contributed to the deterioration of their marriage. At one point, the Dean even forbade her to confide in her husband if she wished to remain the favorite of his inner circle. "[S]hake off the leavings of your sex. If you cannot keep a secret and take a chiding, you will quickly be out of my sphere..." (Thompson 88).

Pilkington's probing wit, however, was uncharacteristic of female writers at that time; while she greatly admired the Dean's abilities, believing his "true genuine Wit could fear no Rival" (Pilkington 1: 23), her published use of wit was viewed by some as problematic. Indeed, bluestocking leader Elizabeth Montagu believed that "Wit is dangerous in itself and especially so in women. It makes them incautious and, even worse, it attracts men... [providing them with] too much sex appeal in men's eyes"

(Elias, "Introduction" 1:LII-III). Thus, while Swift was certainly known for a skillful and biting wit, Pilkington's candid writing appeared to support the general perception that she was an unprincipled woman who deserved her notoriety as a divorced woman. Thus, her writing skills, while essential in that they allowed her to survive financially, also reinforced the judgmental perception that society held for outspoken women.

Swift had been quite comfortable playing the role of "paternalistic teacher" to the younger woman he often regarded as simply a "little girl." Hill notes that Swift enjoyed teasing Laetitia by "squashing her down with one hand until he could claim she measured only 3 ft. 2 ins. tall" (par. 3). Despite this patronizing behavior, however, she recognized that his wearisome guidance would later help her develop a unique voice. "[I]f I have any Merit, as a Writer, I must gratefully acknowledge it due to the Pains [Swift] took to teach me to think and speak with Propriety..." (Pilkington 1: 45). Nevertheless, the source of her popularity was due to the subject matter - notably Swift and other public figures - and not on her ability to write in a style that was widely embraced by her peers and audience. Indeed, she was quick to admit that much of her readership was eager to learn more about her mentor. "I hope my Readers will indulge me in the frequent Mention I shall make of Doctor Swift; for tho' his works are universally known...few Persons now living, have had so many Opportunities of seeing him in private Life..." (Pilkington 1: 24).

Thus, despite the inclusion of other prominent public figures, it was her willingness to write at length about her mentor throughout the three volumes of her Memoirs that kept her in the public eye. In contrast to other biographers who wrote from a respectful distance, Pilkington had been an intimate acquaintance of Swift and realized the power that resulted from revealing personal details about his interactions with others.

Furthermore, Elias emphasizes Pilkington's belief that "domestic details often allow more insight into a great man's character than his official acts" (1:xix).

Yet as I have frequently observed in Life, that where great Talents are bestowed, there the strongest Passions are likewise given...During Meal-times he was evermore in a Storm; the Meat was always too much or too little done, or the Servants had offended in some Point, imperceptible to the rest of the Company... (Pilkington 1:23).

It was this insight that set her apart from other biographers who did not have direct access to the Dean on a regular basis and were forced to rely on second-hand information. Rather than rely on his writings and characters, her ability to comment on a variety of domestic occurrences brought the Dean to life and enabled her to further her literary career and support herself, despite her status as a "fallen woman."

In addition to her frequent anecdotes about the Dean, she shared Swift's concern with unfortunate elements of human nature, including the rampant lies of politicians and other public figures. "Lying is an Occupation / Us'd by all who mean to rise; / Politicians owe their Station / But to well concerted Lies" (Pilkington 1:107). This deep concern with corrupt politicians and the actions of misguided leaders was a theme that the Dean returned to time and again during his illustrious career, as illustrated here in The

Examiner:

[A]lthough the Devil be the Father of Lyes, he seems...to have lost much of his Reputation, by the continual Improvements that have been made upon him. Who first reduced Lying into an Art, and adapted it to

Politicks, is not so clear from History; although I have made some diligent Enquiries... (Swift, Writings 452).

Pilkington's frustration and desire for vindication (becoming more pronounced with each successive volume of her Memoirs) was directed at her husband and eventually the Dean himself. An example of Swift's ridicule of the female mind is found in this excerpt from "The Furniture of a Women's Mind."

A Set of Phrases learn't by Rote

A Passion for a Scarlet-Coat;

When at a Play to laugh or cry,

Yet cannot tell the Reason why;

Never to hold her Tongue a Minute;

When all she prates has nothing in it... (Swift, Writings 529)

Thus, after enduring many years of disrespect by the men in her life, she "had a very great Inclination to be even with [Swift and husband Matthew], and expose the Inconstancy of Men..." (Pilkington 1:39). Indeed, prior to the Dean's death, she had composed The Statues (1739) as a response to the inability of men to treat women appropriately. In this pointed and satirical work, she highlights man's inability to remain faithful.

The Race of Mortals are by Nature frail,

And strong Temptations with the Best prevail...

How false is Man! Nor recollects his Vows;

With wild Inconstancy for all he burns,

And ev'ry Nymph subdues his Heart by turns (Pilkington 1:43).

Elias notes that Pilkington may have been influenced by Swift's insistence that his female followers modify their behaviors and take on more male characteristics, encouraging her to feel that she deserved the "same privileges as a man" (Pilkington 1: LII), and found it upsetting and unfair that male "Seducers [such as husband Matthew] should be our Accusers" (Pilkington 1: 67).

Much like the Dean, she often writes about controversial subjects (such as the infidelity and irrational behavior of public figures); however, the focus on her own sexual missteps was quickly redirected for the purpose of revenge and indignation, and was not used to simply attract readers seeking lurid details. While she wrote plainly about the indiscretions of others (including married men who had propositioned her while still married, and her husband's involvement with other women during their marriage), she is much less candid about her own failings. Indeed, Elias notes that when the narrative turned to herself, she quickly shifted the storyline elsewhere ("Introduction" 1: LI), perhaps assuming that her private life had already been sufficiently exposed.

Pilkington made no apologies for her rambling, autobiographical style; she admitted that she wrote hurriedly, preferring spontaneity rather than a measured writing style; the result was a narrative rich with realistic dialogue and minute details. Elias

believes that this inclination, however, “moved [her] even farther away from serious literary norms. She was sailing into relatively uncharted popular waters” (“Introduction” 1: xxiv-v). More than her peers, Pilkington’s experiences and adventures mirrored those of contemporary women. Curiously absent from the ranks of other eighteenth century female writers until recently, she experienced a life full of experiences and roles, “as daughter, wife, mother, and single woman.” However, Elias notes that she indeed remained herself, an “individual to the end” (“Introduction” 1:liv).

## **Conclusion**

This thesis has presented a close look at three female writers from the eighteenth century who, despite considerable societal odds, achieved a measure of success due to the guidance and support of Dean Jonathan Swift. While other prominent male writers of the day believed that women were incapable of producing serious literature, Swift's interest in the company of women both as acquaintances and students of writing helped many of his female followers to succeed by means of what was then considered a "man's profession".

While his methods of tutoring were indeed unusual (particularly those that the Dean employed when dealing with Pilkington), those who were willing to endure his peculiar guidance improved their writing ability. His assistance, however, would be much less successful in today's world, where his methods would surely be branded as condescending and inappropriate. However, the support that he offered women during the eighteenth century was unique, since most successful male writers viewed women as incapable of serious thought and insight. Whether he was truly aware of the repercussions of his support, he nevertheless helped them develop the confidence and literary skills that they needed to succeed in the male publishing world.

Indeed, Swift returned time and again in his attempt to nudge the female members of circle toward what he (and many contemporaries) considered was a more "masculine" way of thinking and writing. Indeed, perhaps one of the greatest benefits of their time with Swift was developing the confidence to seek out their own particular voice and

becoming comfortable with their independence; as noted earlier in this thesis, both Pilkington and Manley produced their best work without the support of a husband. Once their self confidence had strengthened, they were able to step outside the confining boundaries placed around “appropriate” female behavior, and produce works that were both popular and insightful. While Manley and Barber occasionally used alternative guises to make their writing more acceptable to the public, Pilkington took no such precautions; she published what she wished - often to publicly reprimand the inappropriate behaviors of others - and nevertheless succeeded in creating a significant demand for her memoirs.

Also notable is the subject matter that his followers utilized; rather than focus on light romance and domestic issues, all of the writers featured in this thesis tackled serious issues intended to chastise inappropriate behaviors and corrupt leadership, and presented controversial elements (such as Manley’s intimate details) that were controversial even for established male writers. It is to Swift’s credit that he was able to effectively support these efforts, and not take the conventional route by steering them toward more socially acceptable issues. Indeed, as Doody notes,

When women writers of his era think of dealing with their domestic world in its hard detail, and often with some ill humour as well as enjoyment, they tend to look at Swift as one of their models... When they want to assert satiric energies against a world that seems inclined to drain them through the operation of politeness and duty, they turn to Swift again (“Swift” 89).

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