A rare and beautiful binding on a copy of the 1805 edition of Mary Tighe's Psyche prompted its owner, and the author, to explore how this book came to acquire such an exceptional cover.

In October 1793 twenty-year old Mary Blachford of Gardiners Row, Dublin married Henry Tighe of Rossana, Co. Wicklow.¹ They were first cousins, Mary’s mother, Theodosia, was the only daughter of William Tighe, of Rossana, whilst Henry was the son of one of her three brothers, William junior, who had married Sarah Fownes, heiress to the Woodstock estate at Inistioge. It has been suggested that the marriage of Mary and Henry was one of convenience, but this does not seem to have been the case. Whilst the union served to avoid dilution of the family’s wealth, she appears to have been overcome by the attentions of Henry. From what is presently known of the married life of the young couple, it does not appear to have been the entirely unhappy marriage which has been so often depicted; his mother-in-law regretted his lack of religion and

¹ Star 14 October 1793.

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that he drew Mary into frivolous society, but noted that his tenderness never failed.

Mary Tighe, who had been educated by her mother, wrote poetry before and after her marriage and is remembered for her epic piece, Psyche; or, The Legend of Love, which was largely completed by 1803. Although she had no intention of publishing the poem it became known to other poets and writers and was greatly admired. When she was eventually persuaded to put it in print she commissioned an edition of 50 copies, not for sale, but for distribution to relatives, friends, admirers and individuals whom, or whose work, she admired. The first eight years of her married life were spent largely in London, and it was a London publisher and bookbinder, James Carpenter of Old Bond Street, whom she selected to produce the work: he placed the printing with C Whittingham of Union Buildings, Leather Lane. It is assumed that the binding would have been done by Carpenter. However, knowledge of various surviving copies shows such a variety of bindings that it is unclear whether there existed a basic format, or whether binding instructions were given on an individual basis.

The author of this article, the honorary librarian of Kilkenny Archaeological Society, had listed on the Society’s web site notes of copies of *Psyche* which were being offered for sale in 2002. Knowing of this interest Jim Corley contacted him offering to bring into the library his copy of the first (1805) edition of *Psyche*. This article sprang from the viewing of the book which soon followed. It contains a presentation inscription penned by Mary Tighe: on the title page she has written in a minute hand ‘To James Barry Esq., from M Tighe’. There is nothing unusual in this, the large majority of the two dozen copies now known contain similar inscriptions. What is out of the ordinary is the quality of the binding; it is an opulent and handsome production. When it last

![FIG 2: Binding of Jim Corley’s copy of the (1805) edition of Psyche.](image-url)
passed through the salesroom it was described as

Contemporary, green, straight-grained morocco. Covers ruled and paneled in gilt with floral corner pieces and Wedgewood-style cameo and nymph onlays, spine in compartments, tooled and lettered in gilt, gold clasp with two stones, gilt turn-ins, yellow watered silk endpapers, all edges gilt.

The covers measure 13 x 10 cm, with the short title, PSYCHE, and LOND 1805, appearing on the spine in gilt. The small volume has been kept in a contemporary box which has served to preserve its fresh appearance over the course of two centuries.

Whilst the binding is unsigned, research by Phillipa Marks of the British Library, London, has identified it as being from the workshop of Rodwell, Golden Square, London. The British Library’s copy of *Los histori de los dos enamorados* carries identical floral corner pieces on a binding signed by Rodwell.

Internally the contents are no different from other known copies; 214 pages of text and an 8 page preface, the final page of the latter initialled by Mary, as is the case with most copies.

The question of the multiplicity of bindings is an unresolved one. Were the copies distributed to the recipients by Mary, in a standard binding and subsequently rebound? Or did Mary commission particular bindings related to the individual to whom the copy was to be presented? There appear to be three possibilities for the commissioning of the special binding of Barry’s copy of the work, all of which might have been undertaken within a couple of years of publication, and be quite comfortably classed as contemporary. Those possibilities, which will be discussed, were:

- By Mary Tighe between its publication in July 1805 and presentation to Barry in August 1805;
- By James Barry in the period August 1805 to his death in February 1806;
- By a subsequent owner following Barry’s death in February 1806.

**Binding commissioned by Mary Tighe**

It has already been remarked that surviving copies of the first edition are found in a variety of bindings. However, there is no discernable pattern; copies for immediate family were not uniformly of a better quality, nor were those presented by her to individuals she particularly admired.

No special relationship is known between Mary and James Barry which could account for the particular mark of favour that the presentation of this exceptional copy would suggest. Nor is a particular closeness indicated by the rather prosaic presentation

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2 Bloomsbury Auctions, New York, 1 January 1970, lot 516.
3 British Library G10203
inscription ‘To James Barry Esq., from M Tighe’. However, this is not to say there was not a special or close relationship. Cork born James Barry was almost the national artist of Ireland as Thomas Moore was often considered the national poet. Although Barry’s superb series of six paintings which adorned the Great Room of the Royal Society of Arts were executed by 1783 they were still admired in the early 1800s. They probably received further publicity when A poetical epistle to James Barry Esq. which was suggested by the series of pictures, appeared in February 1805, only months before *Psyche*, and from the same publisher, James Carpenter.
Acknowledgements
The content of this paper was finished and submitted a couple of weeks prior to Edward Law’s sudden death in August. Edward described the paper as being complete ‘apart from abstract and acknowledgement’. We have thus added a brief abstract at the head of the paper and would like, on Edward’s behalf, to thank Mr Jim Corley who, by sharing his remarkable book, provided the initial stimulus for the article. Their ensuing correspondence undoubtedly contributed to the options discussed in the paper. (Eds.)