THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA OF JOHN GAY

by

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: The following study will examine the eighteenth century play, The Beggar's Opera by John Gay, and will reveal the many influences and traditions which contributed to its creation, and finally the causes for the amazing success of this new invention, ballad opera.

PREFACE

It is an undisputed fact that The Beggar's Opera represents Gay's greatest literary achievement. In the succeeding pages, an attempt will be made to examine this work with the view to understanding both its composition and the causes for its astonishing and unprecedented success. The remarkable impact which it made on audiences, beginning with its very first performance in 1728, has continued up to modern times, and a study of the sources of this great impact and appeal will without doubt prove to be of interest.

In order to understand and appreciate this accomplishment of Gay's, it will be necessary first to look at the materials available to him, and then try to establish the reasons why, and the ways in which they appealed to him at the time. Finally, an examination will be made of the manner in which Gay employed and shaped these materials to create a work of art, which, in expressing his particular gifts, personality, and beliefs, was a unique creation. This drama, it will be seen, synthesizes realism, fancy, romanticism, and sentimentalism, to form one of the most enduring and entertaining dramas of all time.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T S

INTRODUCTION

WHAT WAS GAY'S INTENTION

No study of The Beggar's Opera would be complete without mention of the fact that in 1716, Swift wrote a letter to Pope in which he suggested that Gay write a pastoral dealing with low-life characters -- a footman, a porter, or chairman -- or better yet, one set in Newgate.[1] In 1714 Gay had published the successful, and it might be noted, realistic pastoral, The Shepherd's Week, so that writing a pastoral would have been for him not a difficult task. However, he had early exhibited an interest in the theatre. First there was The Mohocks, published in 1712 but never produced. Then in 1713, The Wife of Bath was produced, but was, unhappily, a miserable failure. There followed The What D'Ye Call It in 1715, an unusual hodge-podge of tragedy, comedy, pastoral and farce. This was quite a success, but Three Hours after Marriage which appeared in the following year was only partially successful. In this year of 1716 however, Gay published a very successful poem, Trivia, or the Art of Walking the Streets of London. From

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[1]Jonathan Swift, The Correspondence, ed. Harold Williams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), II, 215.

these, his most significant works to date, it begins to emerge that not only was Gay at his best in realistic depictions, but that he felt deeply about, and knew extremely well, the streets of London.

Swift's proposal concerning Newgate therefore struck a responsive chord in Gay. Perhaps the suggestion was quite unnecessary to one of Gay's inclinations. Be that as it may, after mulling over the idea for some time, Gay decided in favor of comedy rather than pastoral. He probably felt that the subject was eminently dramatic, and that drama would afford him scope for much variety in the presentation of a work which would deal with quite explosive ideas. The variety of entertainments that could be incorporated into a drama would ensure that audiences would find some enjoyable elements in the presentation. Besides, there was precedent for the treating of low-life characters in drama. Although the pastoral form could be treated realistically, as he had so successfully proved, the essence of Newgate which he intended to reveal demanded the dramatic form.

It seems likely that it was Gay's intention to create something that would be an aesthetic experience, an objet d'art, something that would be peculiarly his, and that would at the same time gently jolt the passive and selfish members of society into an awareness of the realities of their society. By the time that he began to write his play, Gay

had become increasingly aware of the evils existing in the social system, and had arrived at a state of disillusionment and disenchantment with society, in particular its upper levels. However, his view of the social scene was humorous and understanding, despite his unhappy financial position which seemed to persist over the years. Accordingly, Gay was concerned to write a piece that would take, while allowing him to voice his observations and opinions on society. He sincerely wanted to produce a comedy with which every part of the audience could become involved, identify, and above all, enjoy. So he decided that while he would base his work on the satirisation of social groups and professions, he would so combine this and other elements, that the result would be a delightful and entertaining piece of theatre. The combination must however end up as an aesthetic entity, a polished and cleverly made artifact that could not fail to be admired. Foremost in his mind then seems to have been audience response.

With these ideas in mind Gay began to write, and as Dr. Johnson observes, invented a new dramatic species, ballad opera.[2] He had already, in The What D'Ye Call It, revealed his inventiveness. This time, his creation was

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[2]Samuel Johnson, Lives of the English Poets (London: Dent, 1961), II, 41.

such that he himself was unable to duplicate it, as note the comparative failure of the sequel, Polly, written in 1728, immediately after his great triumph. To those who are not too familiar with the eighteenth century, it would seem that The Beggar's Opera was a freak and inimitable. But while its success was never recaptured, many writers did attempt to copy Gay's formula and so capitalize on his success. Most however met with markedly less applause, as is attested to by the host of unexciting and unimaginative ballad operas which was unleashed upon the public during the fifty years following Gay's opera. There was a quality present in The Beggar's Opera which eluded all those who followed Gay faithfully in form, situation, and even in phraseology.

When the conditions obtaining in eighteenth century London are borne in mind -- the moral laxity, poverty, crime, injustice, and corruption -- it seems highly probable that Gay's major intent was the revelation of the ills of society, but in such a manner as to make the chief perpetuators of these evils laugh at themselves. The play had therefore to be entertaining, and even fanciful, and so Gay took as his starting point, a very ironical conclusion at which he had arrived, namely, the similitude existing between high life and low. To communicate this thesis, he makes use of satire and fanciful and absurd elements, all of which aid in exposing his sympathy and, affection for, as well as his

understanding of the less privileged members of society. As he exposes the pretensions, absurdities, and foibles of the privileged classes, the satire extends to the opera, professions, and social groups. But while he gleefully indulges in satire, he is also concerned, and deeply so, with popular appeal and originality, and so interspersed with his action a great number of popular street ballad tunes. His final attempt to prove his thesis, and at the same time keep his audiences captive, took the form of the topical and popular stories of Jonathan Wild and Jack Sheppard, the most famous criminals of the day. The dangerous world of criminals then held a powerful fascination for eighteenth century London. But what was especially significant was the fact that particularly after their executions, these people became heroes to the members of the lower classes, while to the affluent and self-indulgent, the Jonathan Wilds of the world were exotic and exciting, if frightening, characters. It seems then that Gay, keeping in mind his intention of revealing the sameness of mankind while keeping his audiences amused, decided that his play must be so constructed that if any one element failed, for example, the political satire, then there would be another to hold the interest. This seems to be one of the reasons for his inclusion of his numerous songs with their power of evoking pleasure, surprise, and often parody, when juxtaposed in the minds of the listeners

with the originals. Gay felt that here was a certain avenue to some success as the English ballads were familiar and dear to the English people. The whole purpose then of the play is the stating of Gay's thesis in such a manner that audiences would be led to accept and realize its truth, as well as laughing with the dramatist at man's pretensions.

Obviously then, Gay's Newgate idea would not and could not conform to regular dramatic forms. How could he achieve a unified whole out of such a variety of elements -- music, satire, spectacle, burlesque, farce, romance? One of the things at which he planned to poke fun was the Italian opera, a medium which incorporated astonishing variety, and which had become increasingly ridiculous to the majority of the public. It might then have occurred to Gay to compose his work in the form of an opera. How could it fail to amuse if he rigorously adhered to its absurdities? Moreover, to demonstrate his thesis fully, he would have music that appealed to, and belong to, all the people -- and such were the old ballads. In some such manner, it seems, was born the first ballad opera.

At this point, it might be well to examine more fully the nature of the ballad opera form as created by Gay, and as it was imitated during the ensuring years.

Although Allan Ramsay's The Gentle Shepherd, 1725, has sometimes been cited as the first ballad opera, this claim is quite inaccurate as Ramsay's poem contained only

four songs in the original version, and later, after the success of Gay's play, was rewritten by Ramsay himself to accord with that work, and thus apparently for theatrical performance. The Beggar's Opera was considered by the eighteenth century as the first ballad opera, and all those which followed in the wake of Gay's triumph, adhered to his formula to a greater or lesser degree.

As inaugurated by Gay, the ballad opera consisted of a play in three acts, in prose, generously interwoven with a variety of songs, most of which were familiar to the audience. The action was firmly grounded in realism, and leaned heavily on satire. There were however, threads of sentimentality and unreality winding through this starkly realistic world, as well as scenes of spectacle and some dances. The operas which were written after Gay's kept quite strictly to this formula with but few innovations. Sometimes there were fewer than three acts, and prose was sometimes bypassed. However, dances and spectacle were seldom omitted, and the treatment, as in Gay, was invariably humorous, while the content was realistic and satirical, with sometimes the introduction of pastoral, sentimental, and romantic elements.

As has been pointed out, Gay brought the form to such perfection in The Beggar's Opera that, despite the success of such a notable author as Fielding, the form steadily

degenerated after Gay's first effort. The earliest rivals, mostly Grub Streeters, slavishly copied Gay, even to the use of an introduction before an overture. The criminal milieu seems to have been especially attractive to these followers of Gay, and so we find that many old plays which dealt with low-life were revived and cast in ballad opera form. The Quaker's Opera which was presented towards the end of 1728, was a re-working of The Prison-Breaker, 1725, while Love and Revenge, or the Vintner Outwitted, 1729, was the ballad opera version of A Woman's Revenge, 1715. Later on these playwrights sought new realistic material, and began to follow the trend being pursued by artists like Hogarth who were turning to actual characters and scenes of London low-life for their subjects. Such characters as the infamous Kate Hackabout who terrorised even her fellow prostitutes, and the old rake of the town, Colonel Charteris, who both appeared in Hogarth's The Harlot's Progress, keep reappearing under their own and slightly altered names in many dramas at this time, for example, Theophilus Cibber's The Harlot's Progress, 1732.

In his excellent study of the ballad opera, Professor Gagey points out that while the songs may have been the main attraction for contemporary audiences, for the playwrights they were not the "prime concern", and could have been

omitted without detriment to the plays.[3] The songs of Gay's imitators were, as a rule, uninspired, mere decorations thrown in for good measure, whereas Gay's were an integral part of his play.

To these first audiences, the milieu was perhaps almost as appealing as were the songs of The Beggar's Opera. Gay's inventiveness resulted in the creation, in Macheath, of a fascinating character who was both the conventional sentimental hero, and the new type of anti-hero, a most attractive and even likeable man. As for the rest of his characters, Gay contrives to envelop these very pathetic and unromantic prostitutes and thieves in a web of sentimentalism and fancy. Newgate was undoubtedly a horrible place at that time, but Gay ignores this aspect of it almost completely, and with fanciful touches, makes it into an almost romantic setting. To many, the piece acquired additional excitement from its cast of characters who seemed quite novel on stage. They were not, of course, as such people had appeared in Elizabethan and Restoration dramas. What made Gay's play seem so different to his contemporaries is that, by treating his characters satirically, he imparts to

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[3]Edmond M. Gagey, Ballad Opera (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 7.

them a "semi-heroic glamor and a life of their own".[4] Macheath is at once the philosophical stoic and epicurean, the man of reason, cheerfully resigned to the risks of his profession and the brevity of life as well as a romantic and sentimental character. Polly is both the tender, sentimental, virtuous, and moral heroine, and the the daughter of a notorious receiver of stolen goods and thief-taker, to whom her father's way of life is not abhorrent. It is the satirical intent of the play, which operates through the characterization as well as the frequently heightened dialogue, which makes this play the first true ballad opera.

Mention has already been made of the presence of romantic and sentimental elements in The Beggar's Opera. It must be remarked however, that these aspects were of necessity modified because of the mock-heroic tone and humorous nature of the work as a whole. Yet these aspects are quite significant, and we find later ballad opera creators, for example Fielding in his ballad farces, stressing these elements.

Despite the popularity of The Beggar's Opera the operas which came after, were, as has been noted, almost all relative failures. One reason for this lack of success

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[4]Gagey, Ballad Opera, p. 42.

is the fact that the ballad opera form attracted almost no writer of the first rank, Fielding, who at this time had not yet found his real talent, attempted this form, but concentrated on farcical and burlesque elements. But the chief reason for the failure of Gay's imitators lay in the inimitable quality of Gay's piece. This quality is nowhere more manifest than in the elegance of several passages. Such a one is Lucy's at the beginning of scene eight of the third Act: "Dear madam, your servant. I hope you will pardon my passion when I was so happy to see you last. I was so overrun with the spleen that I was perfectly out of myself". Audiences too must have been struck by the occasional "grande dame" lines of Mrs. Peachum, or the noble sounding words of the gang members as they constantly harped on the subject of honor. Such speeches exhibit remarkable polish and sophistication on the part of the characters, and thus elevates the play to the level of absurdity while modifying the crudities. In this way is imparted the "charm" and grace for which the play became notable, and which its imitators lacked. Many of the songs too are filled with lyrical sentiment, which makes them, in Gay's words from his Introduction, "charmingly pathetic". These elements of elegance and sophistication impart a romantic quality to the play, and in discussing this aspect of the work, Professor Gagey remarks as follows:

> In occasional scenes appears an ironical topsy-turvydom -- as in the famous one between Polly and her parents where the heroine is roundly berated for her marriage to Macheath -- so that we find at times an air of unreality not in accordance with a literal depiction of the Jonathan Wilds of real life, a device illustrative, of course, of Gay's thesis of a similitude of manners in high life and low. The Beggar's Opera thus shows a happy combination of realism and fancy, of fact and imagination, done with the same delicate artifice as in Trivia or the Pastorals and enlivened by a superb power of irony and satire.5

From what has been said in the above pages, it is I hope apparent, that this first ballad opera was no accident, but a deliberate and carefully planned and executed artifact. Gay effected a mixture of traditional songs, sensational facts of eighteenth century London's criminal world which was fascinating to every strata of contemporary society, the romantic and sentimental elements dear to the theatre going public, and political and social allusions. All these elements gayly veiled his cynicism and harsh criticism of the status quo.

Having now determined the form and nature of Gay's creation, it would be appropriate at this point, to consider the facts and traditions available to him, and of which he made use.

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[5]Gagey, Ballad Opera, p. 47.

CHAPTER I

THE CRIMINAL BACKGROUND

In the history of the theatre, the year 1728 stands out as the year of that unprecedented success, The Beggar's Opera. For sixty-two nights during the first season, this play kept audiences enthralled, and continued in its very frequent performances after that, to exert its peculiar hold. A compound of social and political satire, as well as satire of current dramatic forms, and the current rage, Italian opera, is blended into a story and songs based upon facts and traditions familiar to the public of the day. The story revolves around London low-life and the prison milieu, and the facts from which it is built were the recent events of the London scene, in particular the careers of Jonathan Wild and Jack Sheppard. As for the lyrics, they are for the most part written in the style of, and set to the tunes of, the traditional street ballads and folk songs that were known to all England. The literary tradition to which the play belongs was no less familiar. It is the genre of what is called rogue literature, which in England, went back at least as far as Chaucer. An examination of this genre, in the ensuing pages will reveal that The Beggar's Opera, while inaugurating a new dramatic form, ballad opera, belongs to an existing literary tradition, the literature of roguery.

Rogue literature manifests itself in most of the basic genres -- poetry, prose, and drama. Therefore, this type of literature is determined and recognised solely by its subject matter, "and depending upon observed actuality rather than ideals, it presents low life in lieu of heroic, and manners rather than conscience and emotion".[1] From a study of its history, it becomes clear that the genre favors prose and descriptive narrative as opposed to poetry and drama, and so is primarily associated with the novel. However, it includes works as various as Jonsonian comedies, the Newgate Calendar, the English Rogue, as well as novels such as Moll Flanders and Jonathan Wild. Although containing such a variety of types, it will be seen that it is in the picaresque novel that this type of literature first exhibited itself and found its most popular and definite form.

Historically, this literature arose in Spain during the middle of the sixteenth century, with the publication in 1554 of the picaresque novel, La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes. In this as in succeeding picaresque novels, the picaro who is a rogue of humble birth, swaggeringly recounts his life of roguery. It is an adventurous life, spent in the employ of a series of masters whom the hero cheats and tricks.

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[1] F. W. Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1907), I, 1.

These first picaresque tales spring from a moral stance on the part of the authors, and so are to a great degree vehicles of social satire. Most of the masters who are tricked and cheated deserve the treatment accorded them, for the deeds in which the rogue delights differ from the actions of the masters only in being smaller in scope. They are in fact, "the petty and disreputable counterpart of the glorious deeds of his betters".[2] The masters are in fact rogues by choice, in being exploiters of their servants, who are most often represented as being rogues through necessity. These masters were the traditonal heroes of the popular heroic romances of the day. Now in rogue literature which tries to oust this class, the rogue is seen as a new type of hero, the anti-hero. "The kinship between the hero and the anti-hero is real, whereas the disparity between their position and fortunes is accidental."[3] This irony is at the heart of every satirical picaresque tale.

In all levels of society then cheating exists. It is all a matter of degree. The irony of course lies in the fact that the small thieves are brought to justice by the big rich thieves, the men in authority. As far as the picaro

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[2]W. R. Irwin, The Making of Jonathan Wild (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941), p. 88.

[3]Ibid.

is concerned, stealing is really his greatest crime. He delights in his trickeries, enjoying the discomfiture of others, and often steals in order to survive in society. He is a complete rogue, but not a villain, a distinction which is stressed by Professor Chandler in his exhaustive and informative study of rogue literature.[4] The villain goes beyond tricks and jests to such heinous crimes as murder, while the rogue often tricks for trickery's sake, with the delight of an artist. He is despicable yet attractive, and looks at life humorously, and it seems, from the point of view of a socialist. The goods of society belong to all men and are there for the taking by those who dare. The rogue is in fact good-natured at heart, and often ends up a reformed and respectable member of society, often settling down with a wife as does Lazarillo.

La Vida de Lazarillo de Tormes seems to have been the result of two forces. One was the rising antipathy to the chivalric romances then prevalent, and the social order they represented. This first rogue novel therefore reflected a literary recoil, in which the hero gives way to the anti-hero. The second force was the existing social conditions. The Spanish decadence was beginning. "Reality everywhere

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[4] Chandler, The Literature of Roguery, I, 1-3.

discredited the ideals of chivalry. The disdain for patient labor made room for easy cheating, and the lack of bread more and more enforced it."[5] Idealism in literature was giving way to realism.

Perhaps the most famous Spanish author to enter this field was Cervantes, first with his satirisation of idealism and chivalry in Don Quixote, and then with his Novelas Exemplares, 1613. The story of Rinconete and Cortadillo reveals Cervantes as a master of the rogue genre. He follows his model Lazarillo de Tormes by making his two anti-heroes lads of humble origin who early learn to make their way in the world through the use of their wits. The records of their criminal activities are deftly interwoven with seemingly inconsistent acts of piety, and with routine conformity to the precepts of religion. As a result, there is an aura of mock respectability surrounding these two rogues. As somewhat similar attitudes are adopted by Gay in his opera, Professor Irving's remark in his very comprehensive biography of Gay seems significant. He points out that during the summers of 1718 and 1719 Gay was reading quite a number of the works of Cervantes.[6]

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[5]Chandler, The Literature of Roguery, I, 7.

[6]William Henry Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1940), p. 175.

In England, some of the Canterbury Tales, for example, The Miller's Tale and The Reeve's Tale, can be seen as the real beginning of the rogue genre. Legendary heroes such as Robin Hood and Robin Goodfellow also contributed to this growing field of literature through plays and ballads. Then there were the Jest books, such as the Cobbler of Canterbury, which were collections of tales describing the tricks of occasional criminals.

On the continent, Satires and books of Characters contributed to rogue literature, while in England, satire was, until the eighteenth century, largely forgotten. On the other hand, we find that in England, the professional characters, such as appeared in Overbury's collections, found their way into picaresque tales which were then almost synonymous with rogue literature. Sir Thomas Overbury's "A Meere Scholer", and "A Tinker", for example, repeatedly appear in such collections as The Tinker of Turvey, 1630. This emphasis on professional characters was a quite natural development, as the romance of roguery in Spain had emerged from satire upon professions and estates.

Apart from the tales already mentioned, rogue literature also took the form of Anatomies of Roguery. These described the manners of professional criminals, and includes the Cony-catching pamphlets of Greene and Dekker, Canting lexicons, and Scoundrel verse. Robert Greene, who until two

years before his death was famous as a writer of romantic fiction in the style of Lyly, began to write his Cony-catching pamphlets in 1590, the year in which he began to reform his wild manner of living. These picaresque writings displayed such a remarkable knowledge of low-life that they were a constant source for pamphleteers, dramatists, and storytellers, for a long time after. Thomas Dekker the dramatist deserves attention as being the first writer of note after Greene to unify in fiction separate accounts of rogues, as in his Belman of London, 1608. He unblushingly borrows from Greene.

Another type of writing which belongs to this literature is that dealing with prisons, and issued in the form of tracts and repentances of criminals. The first of this kind seems to have been The Blacke Dogge of Newgate, published in 1600, and written by a Luke Hutton who was of good family, educated at Cambridge, and executed for robbery. Hutton's account falls into the category of what were termed "repentances".

In the field of poetry, the rogue was also celebrated. Normally in this Scoundrel verse, the free life of rogues and vagabonds is eulogized. The songs which appeared in plays such as Richard Brome's popular comedy, A Jovial Crew, or the Merry Beggars, and the pantomine Harlequin Sheppard, songs which quickly caught the ear of the London public, may be

classed as Scoundrel verse. Burns' Jolly Beggars, 1785, marks the high point of this type of verse in the eighteenth century.

Immediately after the death of criminals, it was the lucrative practice to issue biographies. These criminal biographies form another segment of rogue literature. The literary value of these biographies was almost non-existent, and they were almost always supplemented and heightened by the imagination of the writer, as well as by anecdotes from jest books. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, the pamphlets setting forth the life of a single criminal gave place to compilations, an example of which is the famous Newgate Calendar. Plays and ballads were also, as we shall see, vehicles at this time for describing the lives and exploits of recently executed criminals.

Beggars, whores, and thieves had early found a place in English drama with Fletcher, Shakespeare, and Jonson. There had been rogues like Falstaff, tavern scenes and jail scenes, and the whole world of Jonsonian comedy with its tricksters and cheats. This rogue element was present in drama until the closing of the theatres, but when they reopened in 1660, we find that the character of the drama had changed. It was no longer theatre for the people, but theatre for a select court audience. Only a few plays like Cowley's Cutter of Coleman Street, 1661, continued the

Jonsonian tradition of dealing with humors and rascals. It was Thomas Shadwell, particularly in The Squire of Alsatia, 1688, who brought back to the theatre the tradition of roguery. As early as 1671, in The Humorists, he had revealed his relationship to Jonson. Thus low-life characters began to return to the drama at this time, a fact of which John Gay could not be unaware. Of course it was in 1641 that there had first appeared A Jovial Crew, or the Merry Beggars, which was acted again in 1724, and in 1715, A Woman's Revenge, two important examples of the new interest in rogue drama.

During the early decades of the eighteenth century, society was in a very chaotic state, and criminals were becoming more daring and bold than ever in their attacks on society. As W. H. Irving points out in his biography, the year 1724 "saw sensational developments in the city's attempt to deal with crime, a subject which by this time was beginning to fascinate Gay".[7] Joseph Blake, John Sheppard, and Jonathan Wild now held the public attention with their criminal activities, trials, and executions. But of these famous three, it was Jonathan Wild who was the chief offender and terror of the city, as well as being the most fascinating to the public.

From what has been said of the conditions that gave rise in sixteenth century Spain to the literature of roguery,

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[7]William Henry Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1940), p. 203.

it will be apparent that similar conditions obtained in eighteenth century London. Exploitation, love of pleasure, and scorn for labor, were accompanied by poverty, social misrule, and of course crime. Out of such a climate sprang such men as Jonathan Wild. "Jonathan Wild shaped the age, and the age shaped him. For while Augustan suavity distinguished the manners and letters of the favored few, vice was rampant and justice asleep or groping among the indigent many. Hangings at Tyburn proved for the victims gala days of applauded heroism, and for pickpockets who plied in the throng occasions of golden harvest."[8] Newspapers advertised lost articles which would be returned to their owners at a price, and no questions asked. Highwaymen terrorised travellers on the roads leading into London. Corruption in high places was rife. Writers like Defoe and Bernard de Mandeville examined the state of affairs and made recommendations in pamphlets for bettering conditions, and for example, preventing street robberies. Wild was so famous, and so intrigued the public, that he was constantly being visited in prison by high and low alike. Defoe was one of his most famous visitors, and subsequently wrote his "true" life of Wild. It is not surprising then that at this period, the literature of roguery, gaining new impetus, began to flourish.

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[8]Chandler, The Literature of Roguery, I, 155-156.

Like the rest of the public, the writers were led to examine these gangsters, and Gay for one, saw that they were the counterparts of the men who, on the higher social level, were regarded as heroes. There was something pathetic, comic, and ironic in this situation where just a twist of fate would be sufficient to elevate these anti-heroes into heroes. Jonathan Wild, born in a different social class, would most likely have been a Walpole. Chance, opportunity, and environment, determined who would be the prime minister and who the criminal. Doubtlessly most authors were impelled by opportunism to offer a steady flow of anti-heroical satire in novels, drama, and other criminal chronicles. "The favorite device consisted in representing the departed as a hero, and in bestowing ironic praises on his valor, wisdom, and magnanimity, and on the glory of his exploits."[9] This was indeed a recoil from idealism. With Gay there was more -- an ironic awareness of the similitudes existing between the classes.

Such were some of the facts and traditions available to Gay when he came to write The Beggar's Opera. The animal-like world in which men fought for survival by living desperately, a world in which only the fittest and the cleverest survived, had very early caught hold of Gay's imagination and gentle nature, and he began to describe this

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[9]Irwin, The Making of Jonathan Wild, p. 83.

world as early as 1716 in the poem Trivia.

As he regarded London, Gay saw that honesty, hard work, and practicality were virtues that were missing. He had advocated these in The Shepherd's Week, and saw them as necessary also for the town. His attitude to a society that was lazy, and to those members of it who were rich and useless, was one of scorn. This trait of laziness we know bothered him not only in others but equally in himself. The pursuit of idleness tended not only to corrupt the idler, but created the opportunities for theives to practice their craft, both on the streets and in the homes. These idle rich who spent their time promenading the streets, deserved to be robbed. At the same time, the young rogues who emulated their peers and roamed the streets, are encourgaged to pick even more pockets. So we find that in Book III of Trivia (ll. 51-76), Gay's attitude to the young thief is ambiguous. There is the strong implication that the victims deserve to be cheated because their sense of values are all wrong. They put too much emphasis on such material things as snuff boxes. As for the thief, whom he calls an artist, Gay displays towards him an attitude of admiration and sympathy as well as disapproval. At once we are reminded of sixteenth century Spain, but even more of The Beggar's Opera. Gay's attitude towards Macheath is identical to that displayed in Trivia. Patricia Meyer Spacks in her perceptive biography of Gay remarks that the word "artist" as applied

to the young thief, albeit ironically, "reminds us that language and attitude can dignify thieves as easily as wigs".[10] His hand is "to rapine bred", and he employs "practis'd sleight" in cheating. Again we are reminded of The Beggar's Opera in which the language of highwaymen and whores is so dignified, they are almost undistinguishable from the aristocracy. The young thief in Trivia is clearly seen as a victim of society. He steals because he was brought up to steal. So Gay observes that the young fellow's hand was "to rapine bred". Trivia reveals keen observation, and first hand knowledge of the London streets. It also expresses Gay's beliefs at this time that the causes of social disorder were idleness, laziness, and scorn of hard work.

Even earlier, in the farce The Mohocks, 1712, Gay had been concerned with social disorder as displayed in the behaviour of rakes. Of this play which was never acted, Professor Irving remarks:

> The one thing which gives this little play a certain right to live, at least on the printed page, is the multitude of topical allusions which show that its author was awake to the life of the streets, soon to become, if you like, the laureate of the disinherited. Here they are, the watch-men and the street-molls, the press gangs and Italian eunuchs, the mountebanks

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[10] Patricia M. Spacks, John Gay (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1965), p. 46.

> ready to draw a tooth with a touch, the chairmen and cinder-wenches. Gay loved the street corners, made ballads for the beggar girls to sing, dragged Swift about to share his plebeian pleasures . . .[11]

These early pieces give the impression of an author aware of the tradition of rogue literature and of the social conditions which gave it birth. We also feel that Gay genuinely loved, sympathised with, and knew the lower classes, and that rogue literature naturally attracted him. Therefore the topics he chose for these two early works were congenial to him, and allowed him to express his mockery of a society which created roguery. Trivia perhaps cannot be strictly classed as Scoundrel verse, but its realistic descriptions of street life and the various tricks employed in cheating belong to the literature of roguery.

Swift was one of the friends forever active in helping Gay to a better financial position. We find the former, as late as 1723, making suggestions to Gay in a letter on the course to adopt in order to gain a good position,[12] and as early as 1716, in the letter already mentioned, suggesting literary topics which were likely to be popular and thus lucrative. Gay however, involved as he was in this London underworld which Swift had suggested in 1716 that he make use of, and aware as he must have been of

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[11]Irving, John Gay Favorite of the Wits, p. 67.

[12]Swift, The Correspondence, II, 443.

the success of the several forms of rogue literature at that time, felt that he had not yet hit upon the form suitable to his peculiar powers. And so he waited.

In the meantime, Jack Sheppard and Jonathan Wild had captured the public interest and imagination, and Gay was still being denied any real advancement at court. It was very easy for him to capitalize on the public interest in these two criminals, even though he had not found the proper medium for expressing his thoughts on them and their society. Accordingly, he quickly dashed off in 1725, shortly after the executions of Joseph Blake and Jonathan Wild, the delightful ballad, Newgate's Garland: Being a New Ballad. Shewing how Mr. Jonathan Wild's Throat was Cut from Ear to Ear with a Penknife, by Mr. Blake, Alias Blueskin, the Bold Highwayman, as he stood his Tryal in the Old-Bailey. This ballad was so well known that it was soon included in the Pantomine, Harlequin Sheppard, 1724. Besides being an example of Scoundrel verse, this ballad is interesting because in it are to be found the ideas which Gay was later to develop in The Beggar's Opera, that human nature is essentially the same in all levels of society. Here is the fourth stanza:

> Knaves of old, to hide guilt by their cunning
> inventions,
> Call'd briberies grants, and plain robberies
> pensions;
> Physicians and lawyers (who take their degrees

To be learned rogues) call'd their pilfering fees;
Since this happy day,
Now ev'ry man may
Rob (as safe as in office) upon the highway.
For Blueskin's sharp penknife hath set you at ease,
And every man round me may rob if he please.13

It was in 1723 that the Countess of Suffolk wrote to Gay suggesting that he write a satire to be revenged on those in high places who had been using him ill. She writes: "I am resolved you shall open a new scene of behaviour next winter, and begin to pay in coin your debts of fair promises. I have some thoughts of giving you a few loose hints for a satire; and if you manage it right, and not indulge that foolish good-nature of yours, I do not question but I shall see you in good employment before Christmas".[14] The Countess, Mrs. Howard, was sure that those satirised would try to bribe Gay by finding him a position. Part of Gay's reply to her is as follows: "I know that, if one would be agreeable to men of dignity, one must study to imitate them; and I know which way they get money and places. I cannot indeed wonder that

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[13]John Gay, Poems, ed. John Underhill (London: Routledge, 1893), I, 272-273.

[14]Henrietta, Countess of Suffolk, Letters to and from Henrietta Countess of Suffolk and her Second Husband, the Hon. George Berkeley; from 1712 to 1767 (London: Murray, 1824), I, 111.

the talents requisite for a great statesman are so scarce in the world, since so many of those who possess them are every month cut off in the prime of their age at the Old Bailey".[15] These thoughts seem to come straight out of The Beggar's Opera. Here then are two ideas, one from Swift in 1716, and one from Mrs. Howeard in 1723, which seem to have become allied in Gay's mind -- ideas of the Newgate milieu and social satire of the ruling class. In his reply to Mrs. Howard, there is much irony and bitterness as he reflects on statesmen and their injustice, and on the ways of achieving court preferment. The small thieves who are daily executed seem to Gay to possess the same skills as the statemen who flourish. They are all thieves. Mankind is really the same in all levels and walks of life. As Gay played around with these thoughts, at the same time keeping his prospective work in mind, he must have thought of the numerous ways in which such anti-heroes as Jonathan Wild were celebrated.

Apart from having such ideas in mind, Gay was constantly being kept aware of the rogue genre through the various entertainments being offered on the stages of the theatres of London. Shortly after Jack Sheppard's death in 1724, John Thurmond published and staged a pantomine called

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[15]Lewis Melville, Life and Letters of John Gay (1685-1732), (London: Daniel O'Connor, 1921), p. 61.

Harlequin Sheppard, which depicted one of Sheppard's famous escapes from Newgate, and the equally famous assault of Blueskin upon Jonathan Wild. Professor Irving notes that Gay participated in a Christmas pantomine performed at Drury Lane, entitled Harlequin Jack Sheppard; or the Blossom of Tyburntree.[16]

In 1725 there appeared an anonymous play, The Prison-Breaker, or the Adventures of John Sheppard, written for presentation at the threatre royal in Lincoln's Inn Fields. This farce was not presented until 1728 when it was rearranged by the actor Walker, under the title of The Quaker's Opera. It seems likely that Gay read this work, although W. E. Schultz in his excellent and comprehensive study of The Beggar's Opera suggests that the two authors might only have used the same source, the contemporary scene. Yet he finds the parallels of content, situation, wording, and characterization significant enough to support the belief that Gay might have derived some suggestions from the older work.[17] Gay's play is, however, superior in treatment, style, and characterization, and his thesis is different. The difference between the two plays is also accentuated by the lack of musical treatment in The Prison-Breaker.

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[16] Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, p. 206.

[17] W. E. Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), pp. 169-170.

A Woman's Revenge, or a Match in Newgate by Christopher Bullock, appeared in 1715, and was presented quite frequently after that, notably in 1724, one week after the folding of Gay's The Captives. As in the case of The Prison-Breaker, this play too was made into a ballad opera, Love and Revenge, or the Vintner Outwitted, 1729. W. H. Irving believes, as did some of Gay's contemporaries, that Gay was influenced by this play, as at the time of its appearance he was then mulling over his Newgate idea.[18] There are numerous resemblances between the two works, such as the cynical thrusts at society and the professions. In Bullock's play, the cheat Vizard constantly reiterates the idea that all men are rogues, irrespective of social class, and that all are moved solely by self-interest. Punishment is meted out according to position and not according to guilt. At one point he remarks thus: "That's owing to the Corruption of the Age. For as you seem to intimate, few Men, indeed, suffer for Dishonesty, but for Poverty many: The greatest part of Mankind being Rogues within, or without the Law, so that little Thieves are hang'd for the Security of great ones. Take my Word, Sir, there are greater Rogues ride in their own

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[18] E. M. Gagey in his Ballad Opera, p. 14 refers to this contemporary view and cites one accusation of stealing made against Gay. See also Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, p. 203.

Coaches, than any that walk on Foot."[19] This is without doubt the general vein of The Beggar's Opera, but here the similarity ends. The charm, elegance, and music of Gay's play are also missing from the older work.

There is one more play to be considered, which it has been suggested did influence Gay. This is Richard Brome's A Jovial Crew, or the Merry Beggars, written and performed in 1641, which soon became a stock piece of the theatres. In tone and setting it anticipates Gay's opera, and there are even similarities in some of the speeches, for example, when one of the women, Rachael, exclaims, "Does he think us Whores too, because sometimes we talk as lightly as great Ladies?"[20] This recalls Polly's reply to her father in Act I, scene iii: "I know as well as any of the fine ladies how to make the most of myself and of my man too! A woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a court or at an assembly." There are a number of songs and dances, but the fact that in 1731 it too was made into a ballad opera, shows that Gay's opera was the model for ballad operas, rather than the other way around. Gay doubtlessly gathered ideas from these older works, but his play is

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[19]Christopher Bullock, A Woman's Revenge: or, a Match in Newgate (London: for E. Curll, 1715), Act I, scene i, p. 4.

[20]Richard Brome, A Jovial Crew, ed. Ann Haaker (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1968), Act II, scene i, p. 37.

is essentially unique and the product of his particular genius.

There were of course a great number of other low-life plays apart from the ones mentioned above, appearing on the Haymarket and London scene, and Gay could not help but be aware of their popularity. He must have witnessed or read at least the ones just mentioned. In no case, however, is there any evidence of any one of these having direct and particular influence on Gay. The material which comprised all these rogue dramas was at the disposal of everyone. All that one had to do was to read the daily papers, or the confessions of condemned criminals which appeared like clockwork. Evidence of the methods of thief-takers and receivers of stolen goods like Peachum, could be easily gleaned from a glance at the advertisements in the daily papers. Thus Gay had at hand, both in print and in contemporary life, all the material he needed for his Newgate work. It is necessary to cite but one example of the availability of material from such sources. The capture of Macheath the first time round is thus described in the stage directions: "They take him about the neck, and make signs to Peachum and constables who rush in upon him".[21] This description is factual. It was a common

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[21]John Gay, The Beggar's Opera, ed. Edgar V. Roberts (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, Regents Restoration Drama Series, 1969), Act II, scene v, p. 41.

practice to use women to capture criminals in this way. The capture of Edward Burnworth by Kate Leonard is a famous example of this custom, and Hogarth represented a similar scene in his Industry and Idleness.[22] All that remained for Gay to do was to find the appropriate form in which to portray these facts.

The low-life drama of which we have just taken note, and with which Gay seems to have been familiar, did not fully do justice to Gay's own point of view. To him the petty thieves and rogues of the streets were pitiful but clever men. In their pretensions to grandeur and honor, they were amusing, for then they seemed very like those they imitated, and all were products of an ailing social system. So Gay's attitude was different from that of other writers of low-life subjects. His attitude was one of compassion and amusement, and therefore he did not essay a flat portrayal of realities. What he aimed at and achieved, was a blend of the realism of the facts and traditions of rogue literature, and the facts of contemporary London, with his own private view of the false qualities that had emerged in society for example materialism and self interest. So he wrote an opera, and drew Macheath in the image of a rogue and picaro, and in

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[22] Ibid., p. 41n.

making Peachum a replica of Walpole, and endowing him with some of the qualities of a picaro, he softened even his villainy. Like a traditional rogue, Peachum is not malicious, and believes that his deeds are justified, because such is the way of the world. Like Lazarillo, Macheath too settles down in the end with one wife.

Gay's friends, apart from Pope, Swift, and Arbuthnot, were Pulteney, Bathurst, and Bolingbroke, men who were trying to bring about the downfall of Walpole. These men believed that, under the latter's rule, England was on the way to destruction, and that their party had the answers that could save the country. They all pretended a philosophical aloofness from a hollow world, but at the same time, they quietly schemed to get into power. Gay realized the shortcomings of these friends of his, as well as the corruptness of the Walpole administration which, in his view, was reducing men such as himself to beggary as it ignored their merits and oppressed them. But he saw that both parties were equally rapacious. His reaction to this state of affairs was cynicism which expressed itself in mocking laughter rather than disgust. "Mankind probably are but little odious vermin, but even so they are worth watching and worth laughing at, and the curious parallels in all the employments of life might make fascinating designs for drama."[23] Out of

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[23]Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, p. 235.

such thoughts and attitudes Gay could build a satire, using the anti-heroes of low-life to represent the scheming corrupt fighting world that he saw as the world of the court and government, a world that was very like the animal world he had portrayed in his Fables.

The matter then of Gay's work arose out of contemporary events which he molded in his unique manner to express his own state of mind, and the effect these events had on his life. As to the manner, it will now be apparent that it incorporates elements of established literary and artistic forms, even while inventing a new one, ballad opera. These established forms belong to the genre of rogue literature, and as will be seen in subsequent chapters, popular contemporary drama and opera. We have seen that during the eighteenth century there was a predilection on the part of writers to use the materials of low life artistically, not only because this level of life needed to be brought to the attention of the general public, but because there was an air of glamor and excitement by which it was surrounded. Thus this literature was eagerly pounced upon by the literate public. Defoe, one of the eminent practitioners in this genre, made his descriptions, especially of prison scenes, so harsh, that they were revolting. Gay's work on the other hand, while akin to Defoe's in presenting realities, emerges completely differently because Gay's view is highly

satirical. His roguish society is a picture of high society, and so his creation takes on a certain airiness and "charm", a result of his mocking and humorous way of looking at life.

CHAPTER II

THE MUSIC OF THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

There has never been any doubt about the fact that a significant element in the powerful appeal of The Beggar's Opera for its early audiences was its musical features, and this aspect of the work has continued to fascinate up to the present time. The result of this appeal has been that Gay's original music has, time and again been re-worked for modern theatregoers. During the present century, Benjamin Britten adapted and presented Gay's music, Darius Milhaud arranged it for his Opera des Gueux, and Bertolt Brecht, in his Threepenny Opera, an adaptation of The Beggar's Opera, used some of the original tunes. To the first audiences, the effect of Gay's music was novel and exciting. His liberal use of old, familiar native tunes which possessed a muscular quality, very different from the quite feminine imports of Italian opera then synonymous with music, created a feeling of patriotism. This feeling was harmful to the vogue of Italian opera. Unlike most operas, comic or serious, Gay's play is as alive and vivid when read as it is on the stage, whereas in the other operas, "their music supplies justification or compensation for the improbabilities of their plots, their eccentricities of language and meter".[1] With Gay, the

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[1]Spacks, John Gay, p. 158.

music is self-justified because of its beauty. But it does more than add "charm" to the play. It adds another dimension through which a new line of cross-commentary is set in motion by the relationship of Gay's lyrics to the original words of the airs chosen.

At this point one may be led to ask why Gay decided to introduce into his comedy such a wealth of songs, sixty-nine in all, and why he chose the tunes he did.

Since Elizabethan days, it had been customary to include some music in dramas. During Restoration times, this musical element encroached even further on both comedy and tragedy, so that there were very few plays acted which did not include songs and dances either in the texts or entr'actes. Dryden and Congreve, for example, were partial to songs in their plays. But the tunes were, as a rule, not traditional ones, and they were considerably fewer in number than in ballad operas. The profusion of songs introduced by Gay was unparalleled in dramatic history. During the Elizabethan period, there was an entertainment called the jig, which did employ popular ballad airs, and this has led to the suggestion that here we have the fore-runner of the ballad opera. Hwever the jig was no more than a brief dance in dramatic form, with singing, but rarely with spoken dialogue. Gay might have known of these jigs, but it is most unlikely that he had recourse to them before beginning work on his comedy.

The French comédie en vaudeville in its form bears a stronger resemblance to the ballad opera of Gay than does the jig. Like the latter, the French form made use of ballad airs and employed prose dialogue to join the songs. As in the case of the jig, there is no proof that Gay was influenced by this form. However, it should be noted that Gay made two trips to France with his aristocratic friends, the Pulteneys, in 1717 and again in 1719. During these visits he might have witnessed these comedies. Further, these plays were being performed in London and at Haymarket by groups of French players, and so Gay might have been acquainted with these dramas.

Allowing the possibility of Gay's knowledge of these forms, the question may still be asked if Gay chose the form he did because of the many precedents for including music in drama. We have already noted the existence of low-life drama such as A Jovial Crew, The Prison-Breaker, and A Woman's Revenge, and the evidence that Gay read or was aware of them. They too made use of a few songs. But for the extensive use of music of this type in The Beggar's Opera, Gay must have been impelled by something stronger than these literary antecedents.

In his life of Gay, W. H. Irving has pointed out that at the time of writing The Beggar's Opera, Gay had finally become aware of where his own peculiar powers lay

-- in realistic descriptions of low life, and in the creation of lyrics -- and decided to develop a form that would display these powers, "whether this form was conventional or not".[2] There was much evidence to support, in particular, his belief that he "could hit the taste of the town in ballads".[3] He had only to recall the national popularity of such songs as 'Twas when the Seas Were Roaring, which appeared in 1715, and Sweet William's Farewell to Black-eyed Susan, 1720. The latter was set to music by four different composers during that year. Around 1713, when Gay became secretary to the Scriblerus club, the members are reported to have spent much time walking the streets, and patronizing, with obvious enjoyment, the ballad singers. Pope was at this time interested enough in their art, to write an epitaph for one of these singers, and many of Swift's songs were first introduced to the world by his ballad singing acquaintances.[4] As for Gay, he was an accomplished flutist, and the only one in the Scriblerus group who could

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[2]Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, p. 237.

[3]Ibid., p. 237.

[4]Ibid., p. 93.

write singable songs. He was, it seems, loved by and popular with the singers, not only for himself, but for his songs. He in turn was genuinely fond of them, perhaps because of his unpretentious and gentle nature, his joy in living and high spirits at this time, and his interest in people from every walk of life. His account in the Introduction to the play of his relationship with the players, certainly strengthens this picture of Gay at this stage of his life. There was no doubt in his or his friends' minds that he possessed a lyrical gift.

Gay's interest in ballads and their singers was then early visible. In 1714, in "Saturday" of The Shepherd's Week, we find him treating one of these singers humorously, and listing the names of several ballads which he doubtlessly knew. The ballad singer was then a familiar figure of he the London streets. More often than not, these itinerant singers were professional beggars, or dressed as such, performing indoors as well as outdoors. Gay knew them well as the following lines from Trivia testify:

> Let not the ballad-singer's shrilling strain
> Amid the swarm thy list'ning ear detain:
> Guard well thy pocket; for these Sirens stand,
> To aid the labours of the diving hand;
> Confed'rate in the cheat, they draw the throng,
> And cambric handkerchiefs reward the song.
> But soon as coach or cart drives rattling on,
> The rabble part, in shoals they backward run.[5]
> (ll. 77-86)

[5] Gay, Poems, I, 152.

In his Introduction, Gay deliberately remarks through the Beggar, that the piece was originally written to celebrate the marriage of two ballad singers, James Chanter and Moll Lay, thus justifying his generous use of ballads. However, the Beggar, the mask behind which Gay here hides, also makes very clear his relationship with these beggar singers as he proudly states as follows: "I own myself of the company of beggars; and I make one at their weekly festivals at St. Giles's. I have a small yearly salary for my catches, and am welcome to a dinner there whenever I please, which is more than most poets can say".[6] The accusation is implicit here that poets, in the existing political climate, have been reduced to beggars. Thus Gay's title becomes significant.

On this subject of ballad singers and singing, Charles Pearce in his popular account of the history of The Beggar's Opera, recounts that in the New Monthly Magazine of 1836, it is pointed out by a contributor that from the time of the Restoration, the ballad singers became a sort of corporation. He continues thus:

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[5] Gay, Poems, I, 152.

[6] Gay, The Beggar's Opera, ed. E. V. Roberts, p. 5.

> Custom had established yearly festivals for them in the classic regions of St. Giles's, which were much frequented by some of the wits of the day -- Swift, Gay, Bolingbroke, Steele, etc. From these high followers of the Muses yearly contingents of ballads were expected. Swift contracted to furnish the humorous songs. Gay, who, as Goldsmith observed of him, had a happy strain of ballad thinking, was set down for the pathetic ones . . .Gay and Swift had naturally a relish for low society, and were hailed by the fraternity and sisterhood as the most precious sources of profit.7

Taking into consideration the facts noted by Charles Pearce, it would seem that Gay very naturally included ballads in his drama of Newgate. In his view, beggars, singing, and prisons, were inextricably bound together. The ballad singers' world was the world to which he belonged, the world which, as he clearly states, has been kind to him. Perhaps he even felt that these beggars were more deserving of his attention and respect than the courtiers whose favors he sought. No ballad singer of his acquaintance could be thought of as "a mere court friend, who professes everything and will do nothing".[8] Mention might here be made of a romantic story, originating with Horace Walpole, about Gay and a woman who appeared to be a mendicant, but who later turned out to be an Irish noblewoman.[9] Apart from its application to Gay's thesis concerning

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[7]Charles E. Pearce, "Polly Peachum", (London: Stanley Paul, n.d.), pp. 14-15.

[8]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene iv, p. 63.

[9]Gagey, Ballad Opera, p. 26.

the similitude between high and low life, this charming story, if true, further strengthens the evidence of Gay's partiality for the tribe of beggars and singers. The tremendous popularity of virtually all his ballads, must have greatly influenced his decision to make his story of Newgate into a musical, incorporating well-known and popular street ballads. In addition, Gay must have had in mind the uses to which ballads were put at that time. Street ballads were really a form of journalism, reporting the sensational news events of the day, and stating or implying comments on current issues, particularly the political ones. The political situation angered Gay, and what safer way to criticise this than through the medium of song. It is no wonder then, that Gay, the facile composer of lyrics that took, should choose to fill his most important work to date, the one in which he proves himself a true member of Scriblerus, with ballads to well-known tunes.

Most critics, beginning with Dr. Johnson, see The Beggar's Opera as a satire against the then popular Italian opera.[10] A few like Charles Pearce disagree. He believes that the play was intended to rival with its realism

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[10]Johnson, Lives, II, 39.

the fantastic qualities of Italian opera, not ridicule this amazing form.[11] It would seem, however, that Johnson's estimate is correct. The whole work is conceived as satire, beginning with its ironical thesis of the similitude of high and low life. In the opinion of the members of the Scriblerus club, unbridled self-interest which ruled society, was incompatible with either reason or morality. Society was stagnant, the poor becoming more wretched and desperate, and the rich more uncaring and irresponsible. In the eyes of these satirists, it was a time of spiritual waste, and one manifestation of this was the pursuit of such unnatural diversions as Italian opera. It would thus seem that Gay did indeed intend burlesquing this form, and so called his creation an opera.

Gay moved in the fashionable and aristocratic circles, whose members interested themselves, as a matter of course, in the opera, and he naturally participated in this diversion. In addition, he was also professionally connected with this medium, for he wrote the libretto for Acis and Galatea which was set to music by Handel in 1719 or 1720. Thus it is likely unlikely that Gay intended a serious attack against a form which he could appreciate. His ridicule is, and was meant to be, lighthearted and affectionate. He would not have

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[11]Pearce, "Polly Peachum", p. 10.

wanted to put into oblivion an entertainment admired and patronised by his friends. Yet he could see the absurdity of operas which were bound by rigid rules and conventions. The whole question of Gay's treatment of Italian opera is ably summed up by Professor Bronson as follows:[12]

> Intrinsically, there is nothing in The Beggar's Opera which even approaches significant criticism of serious opera; and Professor Dent, in contrast to most who have written on the subject, has sound sense on his side when he declares: "The Italian opera was killed, not so much by the fact that The Beggar's Opera made its conventions ridiculous (for its conventions could at that time have been ridiculous only to quite unmusical people), as by the incontestable attraction of the new work itself". Everything considered, The Beggar's Opera may more properly be regarded as a testimonial to the strength of opera's appeal to John Gay's imagination than as a deliberate attempt to ridicule it out of existence.

Professor Bronson also examines at some length, the contemporary operas of Handel, in order to prove instances of parody, both general and particular in The Beggar's Opera.[13] Ariosto and Buononcini are also suggested as unexplored possibilities for sources of Gay's parody.

The Philistinism of the British towards certain forms of art is another observation made by Professor Bronson. This attitude he believes, found cheap support in

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[12]Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Beggar's Opera", in Studies in the Literature of the Augustan Age, ed. Richard C. Boys (Ann Arbor, Michigan: George Wahr, 1952), pp. 216-217.

[13]Ibid., pp. 212-217.

the constant gibes directed against the absurdities of opera. It might be interesting at this point, to glance at some contemporary expressions of this attitude. The Spectator, which accurately reflects the attitudes both felt and adopted by the middle classes, serves our purpose well. Beginning with number five, March, 1711, we find under attack operas' sole purpose of gratification of the senses, its unnaturalness, forced expressions and thoughts.[14] Perhaps the most famous paper on the subject is number thirteen, a brilliant description of the episode of the famous singer, Nicolini, and the lion, in which the ridicule is superb.[15] Turning to number eighteen which purports to be a faithful account of the Italian form, Addison remarks:

> For there is no Question but our great Grandchildren will be very curious to know the Reason why their Forefathers used to sit together like an Audience of Foreigners in their own Country, and to hear whole Plays acted before them in a Tongue which they did not understand.

He then proceeds to tell of the suggestion made to create native operas on the Italian model, which idea so alarmed the poetasters that they immediately "laid down an establish'd Rule, which is receiv'd as such to this Day, That nothing is capable of being well set to Musick, that is not Nonsense".

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[14]Joseph Addison, The Spectator, ed. Donald F. Bond (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), I, 22-27.

[15]Ibid., 55-59.

Then he adds:

> This Maxim was no sooner receiv'd, but we immediately fell to translating the Italian Operas; and as there was no great Danger of hurting the Sense of those extraordinary Pieces, our Authors would often make Words of their own which were entirely foreign to the Meaning of the Passages they pretended to translate; . . . .And it was pleasant enough to see the most refined Persons of the British Nation dying away and languishing to Notes that were filled with a Spirit of Rage and Indignation.

Continuing his account, Addison tells how the imported Italian leads would sing in Italian while the English artists would reply in English. He adds: "One scarce knows how to be serious in the Confutation of an Absurdity that shews itself at the first Sight. It does not want any great Measure of Sense to see the Ridicule of this monstrous Practice; but what makes it the more astonishing, it is not the Taste of the Rabble, but of Persons of the greatest Politeness which has establish'd it".[16] Finally mention may be made of paper number thirty-one, in which a would-be producer describes a plan to create an opera in which all the remarkable shows then popular in London would be included in the scenes and decorations.[17] These shows included dancing monkeys, Rary-shows, lions, and puppet shows, to name but a few. It is also evident from papers fifty-eight and one hundred and twenty-four, that these papers

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[16] Addison, The Spectator, I, 78-82.

[17] Ibid., 127-132.

on the opera were so well received by the public, that several people had these particular numbers bound. Thus it seems certain that the views expressed by Addison in these papers were agreeable to, and shared by a large part of the literate public of the day.

It is not surprising then to find Gay remarking in his Introduction as follows: "I have introduced the similes that are in your celebrated operas: the swallow, the moth, the bee, the ship, the flower, etc." He then adds: "I hope I may be forgiven, that I have not made my opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no recitative. Excepting this, as I have consented to have neither prologue nor epilogue, it must be allowed an opera in all its forms". Gay is here evincing a degree of anti-intellectualism which is also revealed in the other two large works from the Scriblerus club, The Dunciad, and Gulliver's Travels. The falsity, shallowness, and pretensions of contemporary society angered these Scriblerans. The scheme of things was to their minds, all awry, and to express this, we find these men subscribing to an attitude of anti-intellectualism, and what seemed to be a denial of the age's philosophy of Reason. The dunces and the false wits who represented ostentation, waste, and most of all, pride, were all men of Reason.

Looking back to his letter to Swift of February 3, 1723, we get an idea of Gay's attitude towards the opera.

He remarks:

> As for the reigning amusements of the town, it is entirely music; real fiddles, bass-viols and haut-boys; not poetical harps, lyres and reeds. There's nobody allowed to say, I sing, but an eunuch or an Italian woman. Everybody is grown now as great a judge of music, as they were in your time of poetry, and folks that could not distinguish one tune from another now daily dispute about the different styles of Handel, Bononcine, and Attilio. People have now forgot Homer and Virgil and Caesar, or at least they have lost their ranks. For in London and Westminster, in all polite conversations, Senesino is daily voted to be the greatest man that ever lived.18

How reminiscent are these ideas of Pope's expressions regarding the dunces. We feel here the scorn of one who is a true musician, for those who only pretend to be interested in or understand that art. Gay realized that the patronage of the opera was to a great extent, affectation on the part of many. His interest in music was serious, catholic and intelligent. It is not insignificant that after his visits to Paris with the Pulteneys he wrote the "Epistle to the Right Honourable William Pulteney, Esq.", in which he describes the French opera.

> Adieu, Monsieur -- the Opera hours draws near.
> Not see the Opera! all the world is there;
> Where on the stage th' embroider'd youth of
> France

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[18]Melville, Life and Letters of John Gay, p. 58.

In bright array attract the female glance:
. . . . . .
But hark! the full orchestra strike the strings;
The hero struts, and the whole audience sings.
My jarring ear harsh grating murmurs wound,
Hoarse and confused, like Babel's mingled sound.
Hard chance had placed me near a noisy throat,
That in rough quavers bellow'd ev'ry note.
Pray, Sir, says I, suspend awhile your song,
The Opera's drown'd; your lungs are wondrous strong;
I wish to hear your Roland's ranting strain,
While he with rooted forests strows the plain.
Sudden he shrugs surprise, and answers quick,
Monsieur apparemment n'aime pas la musique.
Then turning round, he join'd th' ungrateful noise;
And the loud chorus thunder'd with his voice.

O soothe me with some soft Italian air,
Let harmony compose my tortured ear![19]
(ll. 185-204)

From what has been said so far, there is no doubt that Gay was very familiar with the operatic form, and aware of its beauties and absurdities, deliberately set out to parody it.

In the Introduction to The Beggar's Opera, the Beggar is made to say as follows: "As to the parts, I have observed such a nice impartiality to our two ladies that it is impossible for either of them to take offense". As Professor Schultz points out in his excellent study of the play, the reference has no bearing on the two girls of the play, but does refer to the famous quarrel between the two

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[19] Gay, Poems, I, 198-199.

Italian singers, Cuzzoni and Faustina.[20] No one in London could have been ignorant of this notorious affair, as the singers actually attacked each other on stage. Thus the rivalry between Lucy and Polly takes on added comic significance. In 1726 Handel wrote an opera, Alessandro specifically for these two Italian singers. The idea was to give both ladies a chance to sing in the same opera, with the music divided equally between them. What is interesting here is that the story of the opera is concerned with the rivalry existing between two women for the love of Alexander, who seems to favor whoever is close to him at a particular moment. One is naturally led to think of Macheath as he sings Air XXXV, "How happy could I be with either, / Were t'other dear charmer away". It is not unlikely that Gay had this particular opera in mind, although most of the Handel operas could be seen as sources for situations parodied by Gay.

In calling his work a ballad opera, Gay initiated a new dramatic form which remained popular until about 1750. The ballad music, realism, and satire which characterise Gay's play and its imitators, was in marked contrast to the irrationality and extravagancies of opera. This form which he devised, allowed Gay, because of its scope for variety,

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[20]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 144.

to be entertaining while portraying with Hogarthian realism the evils obtaining in his society. As in opera, he could present dance, music, and spectacle, but in using dialogue instead of recitative, and popular and familiar tunes instead of tunes composed for the occasion, he remained in the recognisable realm of humanity.

Although possessed of such a slight fable, The Beggar's Opera yet fulfills the minimum requirements for action and could exist by itself without the songs. However, Gay daringly elected to include sixty-nine songs set to tunes old and long familiar to Englishmen, and thus create an opera which in employing songs unfit for deity, princes, and supernatural beings, was, to say the least, exciting and different.

At first the songs were designed to be sung unaccompanied, but during the rehearsals, at the suggestion it seems of the Duchess of Queensbury, Gay's close friend, the musical accompaniments were added. Dr. Pepusch, a German, then director of Lincoln's Inn Fields, was enlisted to write the orchestration and an overture which was done in the French manner and based on Air XLVII. It was quite natural for Gay, musician though he was, to have someone like Dr. Pepusch arrange the airs for presentation in the theatre. But it seems erroneous to ascribe to Pepusch, as has been done, credit for helping Gay in the selection of the tunes, and even in writing some of the songs, for Gay

first chose the airs and then composed the lyrics, and Pepusch was only called in after rehearsals began. As in published operatic pieces the musical score was in most editions prefixed to the songs.

In English comedies, when songs were introduced, it was customary to make them part of the action, for example at a ball or masque which was part of the story. We also find that such characters as shepherds, fools, supernatural beings and lovers, often burst into song as this was considered in character. In general though, the music was preceded in the dialogue by some sort of rationalization for its inclusion, which was, more often than not, quite awkward. We have only to examine a few Restoration plays to find the truth of this observation. In Act III, scene iii, of Congreve's Love for Love, Scandal, Tattle, Valentine and Angelica are gathered. To bring to an end Tattle's accounts of his amorous exploits, a song is introduced:

> Tattle. ". . . -- Pox on it! now could I bite off my tongue.
> Scandal. "No, don't; for then you'll tell us no more. -- Come, I'll recommend a song to you upon the hint of my two proverbs, and I see one in the next room that will sing it".

In Act II of The Old Bachelor, Bellmour has been speaking of his love in fiery language which Belinda dislikes and so the scene closes. Scene nine opens thus: "O I am glad, we shall have a song to divert the discourse. -- (To Gavot) Pray

oblige us with the last new song". From these two examples it will be clear that the songs' inclusion is awkwardly justified. However, in The Beggar's Opera, there is no justification sought or offered. The songs, as has been remarked, could be omitted, but besides eliminating one powerful level of communication, their absence would greatly detract from the charm of the piece. Whereas Restoration songs stress or amplify the movement, the songs of Gay's piece serve to intensify or vivify the dialogue. Thus occasionally we find that the action is halted, characters walk to centre stage and, forgetting about the dramatic movement, moralise in song on the situation at hand as if they were outsiders. A good example of this is the scene in which Macheath is arrested. The constables seem to pause to give the prisoner time to sing an aria. This is without doubt a travesty of operatic practice with its sudden shifts from recitative to song.

About two-thirds of the songs which in great measure contributed to the immediate popularity of The Beggar's Opera come from Thomas D'Urfey's Wit and Mirth, or Pills to purge Melancholy. The third edition of this work appeared between 1719 and 1720, shortly before the appearance of Gay's opera, and included songs from current and late Restoration plays, and from single sheets and printed broadside ballads. John Playford's Dancing Master, and William Thomson's Orpheus

Caledonius, were also sources from which Gay drew. For his Scotch airs, Gay seems to have depended on the latter work, his acquaintance with it arising from his friendship with the Duchess of Queensbury who subscribed to it. Although most of the songs date back to the seventeenth century, a number, among which are Chevy Chase and Green Sleeves, are of great antiquity. Still others are by contemporary composers while a few are borrowed from the Irish and French. The variety of the tunes chosen further emphasize Gay's deep interest in the art of balladry.

The tunes from Pills to purge Melancholy were very familiar to those first audiences, especially the male members. Critics denounced the popular Pills on moral grounds, and D'Urfey, the most prolific single contributor, was a quite debauched character. However, for over forty years he was a favorite of the monarchy, and the general public loved his earthy songs. As a rule Gay made the songs less objectionable. His choice in this collection was directed at songs of an amorous nature, and often he retained phrases, refrains, or half lines, or even followed the original verbal patterns when writing his lyrics. We can only imagine the delight and amusement of audiences familiar with the originals, as they listened to Gay's new versions. Their appreciation, participation, and involvement in the play was therefore increased. The tunes run the gamut from

simple folk ditties, jig-like dances and hymn tunes, to very sophisticated art songs by composers like Purcell, and are lively or doleful to fit the occasion. The method of composition seems to have been first the choosing of the airs, and then the writing of the lyrics. This was a difficult thing to do and maintain originality, but Gay succeeds. Despite this wide variety in mood of the airs, homogenity is maintained because they all evoke the atmosphere of eighteenth century London with its coffee-houses, playhouses, and ballad singers.

As a whole, the tunes are well chosen, though some are of course better than others. Often as in Act III, there is very little dialogue between the songs. Their primary purpose seems to be the driving home or expansion of ideas presented in the preceding dialogue, often making the ideas more memorable through the use of specific imagery which creates a pictorial effect. They also tend to make the satire more generalised, more pointed, and even more amusing and charming. Thus when Lucy compares herself to a housewife and Macheath to a rat caught in a trap in Air XXVII, not only is Macheath's character made more vivid while revealing new facets, but the imagery extends the analogy of theft and unpleasantness to men in general. In other words, there is a tendency for the songs to be epigrammatic. The best of the airs are so perfect, and so much a part of the play, that since 1728 they have become known as Beggar's

Opera airs, their originals being entirely forgotten. In such cases Gay had most likely assigned new titles to them.[21] Simplicity, directness, spontaniety, and "charm" characterise Gay's lyrics which are often an improvement on the originals. Professor Bateson writes very enthusiastically of this aspect of the play when he remarks: "The music, of course, counts for much; but it does not explain the unique buoyancy and fascination of the songs. They are, in fact, as good poetry as music".[22] The lilting, melodic, quality of the lyrics which so strike him are undeniable, for Gay's heart was in these songs. This was what he could do well.

In order to appreciate Gay's remarkable skill and artistry in fitting his new words to the old tunes, it is necessary to compare his versions with the originals. This exercise reveals quite a degree of originality on the part of Gay. Much of his material is new, while the remainder is borrowed or adapted, and in some cases, he is actually parodying the originals. On the whole, Gay's songs are closely interwoven with his fable, that is, they are concerned with, and not extraneous to, the actions of the play.

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[21] Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 160.

[22] F. W. Bateson, English Comic Drama 1700-1750 (New York: Russell & Russell, 1963), p. 100.

Let us first examine a song in which Gay keeps fairly close to the original. His Air XIV, "Pretty Polly, say", is based on the old tune which appeared in Pills to purge Melancholy as a translation from the French, and goes as follows:

Pretty Parret say,
when I was away,
And in dull absence pass'd the Day;
What at home was doing;
With Chat and Play,
We are Gay,
Night and Day,
Good Chear and Mirth Renewing;
Singing, Laughing all,
Singing Laughing all,
like pretty, pretty Poll.

We can see how very little Gay altered the original, and yet how appropriate is his version to the situation. The comparison of Polly and parrot certainly throws some light on the sentiments she utters.

Now for a few examples of songs in which Gay displays his originality. Gay's Air I, "Through all the Employments of Life" uses the old tune, "An Old Woman Cloathed in Grey" from Playford's Dancing Master. The original words read in part as follows:

An old woman cloathed in grey
Whose daughter was charming and young
But chanc'd to be once led
astray,
By Rogers false flattering Tongue
With whom she too often had been,
Abroad in the meadows and Fields.

The only similarity between the two versions lies in the

falsity which Gay sees as a common factor in men. Gay's lyric which is a sharp satire, is without doubt artistically superior with its carefully balanced lines, and the subtle and ironic closing twist. "Can Love be Controul'd by Advice?", Gay's Air VIII, is based on the air, "Grim King of the Ghosts, &c." from Pills to Purge Melancholy. Here is the first stanza:

> Grim King of the Ghosts make hast,
> And bring hither all your Train;
> See how the pale Moon do's wast!
> And just how is in the Wain:
> Come you Night-Hags, with your Charms,
> And Revelling Witches away,
> And hug me close in your Arms,
> To you my Respects I'll pay.

This is a good example of an entirely original creation on the part of Gay. His choice of this old tune for Polly's song in defense of her love, might have been dictated by the dark and romantic qualities it possesses. As the audience recalled the old song which tells of the lover gone mad and appealing to supernatural powers for aid, the romantic and sentimental elements of the play would be heightened, and in particular those elements of Polly's nature. Perhaps the viewers would have become even more involved in her dilemma. In his Air II, "'Tis Woman that Seduces all Mankind", Gay once again reveals his skill in choosing the proper tune as he takes the opposite point of view from that of his original. Recalling the latter, the audiences would surely have been amused. Here is the second

stanza as it appeared in the Pills:

> Upon my bosom Jockey laid his head,
> And sighing told me pretty tales of Love;
> My yielding heart at ev'ry word he said,
> Did flutter up and down and strangely move:
> He sigh'd, he Kissed my Hand, he vow'd and
> swore,
> That I had o'er his Heart a Conquest gain'd;
> Then Blushing begg'd that I would grant
> him more,
> Which he, alass! too soon, too soon obtain'd.

Gay's world in which woman is the clever seducer, is calculating and realistic, whereas the world of the old song in which woman is seduced, is idealistic and romantic.

For a number of his lyrics, Gay takes hints from the subject matter of the originals, for example in his Air XXXIII, "If you at an Office Solicit your Due", which makes use of the old air, "London Ladies" which appeared in the Pills, and reads in part as follows:

> Ladies of London, both Wealthy and Fair,
> Whom every Town Fop is pursuing;
> Still of your Purses
> and Persons take care,
> The greatest Deceit lies in Wooing.

In both versions worldly advice is being given.

As Macheath approaches his last moments, Polly and Lucy visit him in the condemned hold, and the atmosphere is one of mock tragedy. And so Gay cleverly makes use of the ballad found in the Pills, entitled, "A Hymn upon the Execution of Two Criminals, by Mr. Ramondon". It goes as follows:

All you that must take
    a leap in the dark,
Pity the Fate of
    Lawson and Clark;
Cheated by Hope, by Mercy amus'd,
Betray'd by the sinful ways we us'd:
Cropp'd in our Prime
    of Strength and Youth,
Who can but weep at
    so sad
    a Truth.

This was a serious ballad composed about two real criminals who publicly repented before their deaths. Gay's lyric, Air LXVIII, is divided between the three characters, and is a parody of the original. Thus he tries to create an atmosphere of mock tragedy around Macheath. As in Air XIV already examined, it is apparent that by skillfully choosing the appropriate air, Gay helps to create or intensify the existing tone, which in Air XIV was one of fatuity. At the same time, in Air LXVIII, the comic stance of the play is maintained by the use of the trio, and the introduction of liquor as the source of courage in this tragic hero.

Throughout the play it will be seen that the songs are made to fit the people who sing them, for example Air V, "Of all the Simple Things we do", with its love and money imagery, is sung by Mrs. Peachum for whom the two things are identical.

As I have elsewhere remarked, Gay did not limit himself exclusively to old tunes or ballads. The air which Gay adopted for his lyric IV, was by the Italian composer of

operas, Bononcini, while Air VI, "Virgins are like the Fair Flower in its Lustre", is based on the song, "What shall I do to Show how much I Lover her?" by Purcell, from his opera Dioclesian. Air XX consists of the march from Handel's opera Rinaldo. Gay also introduced quite a number of French tunes of which Airs XIII and XIV are examples.

The repeated use of duos in the manner of the contemporary opera, lends further credence to the idea that Gay was satirising Italian opera. In addition, there are a few choruses and some dances and scenes of spectacle all in the manner of the opera. These while adding variety to the entertainment, also intensify the burlesque.

All that is needed to create a perfect travesty of the opera is the recitative, and Gay parodies this element in Macheath's long monologue meditation in his last hours. As Gay had pointed out in his Introduction, the ladies were all partial to prison scenes, a recurrent feature of opera which they found "charmingly pathetic", and in this scene, in which Macheath is all alone bewailing his lot and rationalising and philosophising like a drunken lord, a mock recitative is in order, and is most "charmingly pathetic". The Airs in this scene, dramatic, pathetic, and eminently comical as they are, represent Gay's cumulative assault on the minds of his audiences. They could not remain unmoved.

Gay's lyrics add a bite and bounce all their own to the general satire of the play. The handling of different meters is always skillful, and the lyrics he creates are unfailingly appropriate to the tunes chosen. His ironic wit and deftness at matching tune with words are evidenced throughout, and delightfully so in Air XXVI, "Man may escape from Rope and Gun", sung just after Macheath enters prison for the first time. This mocking comment on his own experience could have found no more fitting tune than that of "Courtiers, Courtiers, think it no Harm" from the Pills. Here is the original:

> Courtiers, Courtiers, think it no harm,
> That silly poor Swains in Love should be;
> For Love lies hid in Rags all torn,
> As well as silks and Bravery:
> For the Beggar he loves his Lass as dear,
> As he that hath Thousands, Thousands, Thousands,
> He that hath Thousand Pounds a year.

Some tunes of which Air XXXIII is an example, move with the speed of a Gilbertain lyric. With the song, "Cotillion" of Act II, scene iv, "Youth's the season made for joys; / Love is then our duty;" we are drawn back into the courtly and hedonistic world of the Renaissance. In such variety of experiences and emotions musically expressed, lies part of the "charm" and success of the play, and Professor Bronson has correctly summed up this element in the following lines:

> In approaching this aspect of the play, we move at once from the ephemeral causes of its popularity to grounds which have permanent validity. Gay's easy grace, his power of being witty whilst remaining fluent and singable, have never been touched unless by poets who have written with a tune in mind . . . . In mere singing quality, few English lyric poets have surpassed Gay at any time since Elizabethan days, and probably none save Burns since his own day.[23]

[23] Bronson, The Beggar's Opera, pp. 217-218.

CHAPTER III

THE CREATION OF A SUCCESSFUL PLAY

The numerous revivals of The Beggar's Opera testify that it is without doubt very good theatre and extremely entertaining; every age has concurred in this opinion. The play was performed almost every year from 1728 to 1886 not only in London, but in other parts of England, as well as Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. It was first performed in the United States in 1750, and revivals have continued up to the present century. In 1928 Bertolt Brecht wrote his Three-penny Opera. This was an adaptation of Gay's play, and in broad plot structure, some of its characterization, and some of its music, it departed very little from its original. Brecht's success was astounding. Among the many translations of Gay's play, mention may be made of the French and German versions done during the eighteenth century, and the Polish version published in the mid 1940's. In 1953 Sir Laurence Olivier starred in a film version which, while receiving mixed reception, left most critics with enthusiasm for the powerful "charm" of the original which was captured by the film. This quality of "charm" is one that was exalted by the play's earliest critics. Apart from such obvious causes for its original success as the witty employment of popular tunes, the burlesque of contemporary literary forms, social

and political satire or its use of the exciting criminal world of eighteenth century England, the perennial, and one might say universal, popularity of the piece is due to its simple and direct dramatic impact and theatrical power. This stands apart from most of the issues with which the play deals, and has survived long after the disappearance of highwaymen and corrupt jailors. A study of the play's structure will reveal this impact.

The first thing that will be apparent is that Gay was in fact inaugurating a revolution in drama. By producing a ballad opera which was a blend of popular ballad tunes and a slight story of a highwayman and his associates, Gay effected a modification of such existing dramatic forms as heroic tragedy and sentimental comedy. Getting rid of the traditional five acts, and substituting three, which are broken up into a great number of rapidly changing scenes was also a novel device, one associated with farces, after -- pieces and similar trivia, rather than full length plays. Gay might of course have been only extending his parody of opera which traditionally made use of three acts. The ideas with which he deals, particularly the explicit and localised allusions to the class distinctions and politics of eighteenth century London, were intriguing and different. Equally significant is the fact that the characters, with the possible exception of Macheath, are not individualised,

as if Gay were deliberately devaluing the individual portrait which had hitherto been a staple of drama. When we look at society as a whole, Gay implies, we find no heroes of stupendous stature, will or engery, such as peopled the dramas of the day, but rather a group of pitiful people who are remarkably similar in pursuits and even in appearance. In such a gathering, we find not heroes but anti-heroes such as had appeared with the dawn of rogue literature.

The world which Gay describes is harsh and real, but because his characters at one and the same time pretend to be what they are not and yet remain true to thier natures and believable, an air of unreality is created. This quality of unreality is also heightened at those moments when these sordid people are transformed by their sentiments and language into idealistic ladies and gentlemen. Is it any wonder that audiences were shocked and fascinated at first, and continue to be fascinated over the years?

This lack of individualisation represents a new social awareness which began to develop as the century advanced. Pope displays this awareness very clearly, notably in the Essay on Man, in which he continually speaks of self-love and social being the same. Whereas the seventeenth century had been agressively individualistic, the eighteenth began progressively to stress the group, man in society, a part of the great Chain of Being. People who step out of

their appointed places on the scale, who try to be better than they are, are morally wrong. But people misbehave, not of themselves, for human nature is basically good. It is the false values of society which are to blame for man's vanity and pride in stepping out of place. This new feeling for humanity brought about the phenomenon of sentimentalism in literature, which in the decades following the play, gave rise to various social reforms. Man was now seen as Pope saw and described the Man of Ross in the Epistle to Bathurst, as responsible for his neighbour. But in The Beggar's Opera, the people who Gay portrays are, above all, men of Reason, unemotional and self-interested, reflecting and preaching the philosophy of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the philosophy of The Rape of the Lock rather than that of the Essay on Man. However, the new social sense of which Pope and Swift soon became prophets, is heard too in the person of Macheath, whose character thus becomes complex and fascinating.

It will become apparent, that while Gay laughs at the absurdities of sentimentalism, his characters are, many of them, quite sentimental. Because of the profound irony of the play, Gay's sentimentalism is not obvious. However, he did believe that a virtuous heart will cover a multitude of sins, and so Macheath is not a treacherous, vicious high-

wayman, but a noble one, too generous and good-natured to be totally convincing, while Polly whose familiars are thieves is made thoroughly sentimental and appealing. Thus Gay assumes two points of view at the same time. The play while being ostensibly a burlesque of opera, is at the same time a real opera in its form, and Polly is a caricature of a sentimental character as well as a true one. The Polly who remarks in Act I, scene xiii, "Nay, my dear, I have no reason to doubt you, for I find in the romance you lent me, none of the great heroes were ever false in love" is a caricature of the sentimental heroine. But in the same Act, scene viii, it is a genuinely sentimental heroine who remarks: "I did not marry him (as 'tis the fashion) coolly and deliberately for honor or money. But I love him". Polly the only representative of morality and idealism is a truly sentimental character; but it is also quite clear that the mocking Gay is at times laughing at her, particularly in the love scenes.

In the famous letter to Pope, dated August 30, 1716, already referred to, Swift writes:

> There is a young ingenious Quaker in this town who writes verses to his mistress not very correct, but in a strain purely what a poetical Quaker should do, commending her look and habit, etc. It gave me a hint that a set of Quaker pastorals might succeed, if our friend Gay could fancy it, and I think it a fruitful subject; pray hear what he says. I believe farther, the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted, and that a porter, footman, or

> chairman's pastoral might do well. Or what think you of a Newgate patoral, among the whores and thieves there.1

Two years previous to this letter, Gay had, at the suggestion of Pope, written The Shepherd's Week, a highly successful parody of the unrealistic pastorals of Ambrose Philips. The idea of the Quaker pastoral mentioned in Swift's letter, was translated into the poem "The Espousal", but the Newgate idea (after being played with for some time) was put aside until 1727. During this period in which Gay had produced some of his own dramatic ventures, notably The What D'Ye Call It, much had been happening on the London scene -- for example, the careers of Jonathan Wild and Joseph Blake -- to impel Gay to write a Newgate drama instead of a pastoral. After the success of the above mentioned play, Gay became a popular dramatist and was a frequent visitor in the world of high society. In 1715 and 1716 he was a guest of Lord Burlington in Devonshire. After the comparative failure of Three Hours After Marriage in 1717, Gay appeared to write nothing, and had no visible means of income. But in 1717, and again in 1719, he accompanied the Pulteneys to France as their guest, and was perhaps paid a salary as a secretary. From letters of this period, it is evident that

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[1]Swift, The Correspondence, II, 215.

Gay was now very popular in fashionable circles, having also many friends at court, among whom were the Maids of honor. He had high hopes for preferment at this time especially through the influence of Mrs. Howard his close friend and the favorite of the king and queen. However all her efforts to help Gay resulted in very little.

With the publication in 1720 of Poems on Several Occasions, Gay made a large sum of money, for his noble friends all subscribed heavily to the collection. Unfortunately, Gay lost most of his money in the South Sea Bubble, and was now in worse financial straits than ever before. As usual his indulgent friends ralled to his aid. He felt that he deserved a position in the government or at court. He had been secretary to Lord Clarendon in Hanover, he had praised members of the royal family in verse, and he had a host of noble friends. Why could a position not be found for him? He became petulant and unhappy, and this mental state affected his health so that in 1721 and 1722, he had to visit watering places. In a letter to Swift dated December 22, 1722, Gay writes:

> I was there (at Bath) for near eleven weeks for a colic that I have been troubled with of late; but have not found all the benefit I expected . . .I lodge at present at Burlington House, and have received many civilities from many great men, but very few real benefits. They wonder at each other for not providing for me, and I wonder at them all.

> Experience has given me some knowledge of them, so that I can say, that it is not in their power to disappoint me.[2]

In 1723 he at last received some help in the form of a Commissionership of the State Lottery. But Gay, as he wrote to Swift, still expected something better and more secure. It seems then that Gay's experiences, both in the world at large, and at court in particular, provided him with much food for thought on the nature of his society. There was much to be satirised. He had been, in his opinion, hurt by the courtier's world, but he was for a long while willing to be recompensed.

With few exceptions, Swift being one of them, critics have tended to believe that Gay's approach to the ills of society was not deeply philosophical. Pope's view in his Essay on Man was that the evils were universal and of cosmic significance. But Gay's satire, though it embraces both the topical and general, seems to many as of narrower scope. It is true that it is thoroughly lighthearted in presentation. Yet it is no less trenchant, for like Hogarth's prints, the satire is vivid and sharp. It seems to be essentially an attack upon the surface evils of contemporary

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[2]Melville, Life and Letters of John Gay, p. 55.

life. "For writing in the cause of Virtue and against the fashionable vices, I am look'd upon at present as the most obnoxious person almost in England."[3] Thus Gay wrote to Swift in March, 1729 in regard to Polly, but his remarks are equally applicable to The Beggar's Opera. Gay's contemporary critics, as Professor Irving points out, felt that Gay had "given up his moral for a joke".[4] Dr. Johnson in his study of Gay remarks: "The play, like many others, was plainly written only to divert, without any moral purpose, and is therefore not likely to do good".[5] Schultz in his assessment of the play, concludes that "Gay intended no moral in The Beggar's Opera, no serious message for his time".[6] However, to justify his sections on satire, Professor Schultz concedes that the play does have some sound satirical advice thrown in for good measure. Professor Irving in his biography is of much the same opinion when he remarks that the play has no morals,[7] and when he makes the

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[3]Melville, The Life and Letters of John Gay, p. 108.

[4]Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, p. 270.

[5]Johnson, Lives, II, 40.

[6]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 268.

[7]Irving, John Gay, Favorite of the Wits, p. 251.

following quotation from the Parrot, IX, 1746, with which he is in accord:[8]

> The late witty and ingenious Mr. Gay, in his most diverting Dramatic Entertainment, intitled, The Beggar's Opera, tells us, I very well remember,
>
> Your little Villains must submit to Fate,
> That great Ones may enjoy the World in State.
>
> I should be extremely sorry indeed to be assured that this Piece of Satire were as just as it is severe; but till I am so, will not give myself the Mortification of thinking it any more than the Over flowings of a momentary Spleen; -- a short Sally of luxuriant Fancy, which the Author himself, who was doubtless a Man of great Good-nature, did not enough consider to correct.

So it is clear that the tendency was, from the very beginning, to minimize the satire of this drama, on grounds of an absence of morality. Yet, from his vantage point, can Swift be wrong when he alludes to it as a "very severe satire upon the most pernicious villanies of mankind"?[9] Some remarks of F. W. Bateson might at this point prove very enlightening:

> Gay is one of the few masters of irony in English. He has a peculiar irony of his own, as distinct from the teasing irony of Pope as from the indignant irony of Swift. Suaver, more assured, it is characterized by a stereoscopic ability to assume at one time two or more points of view . . . .An irony of this kind could only be the product of a mind intellectually and imaginatively agile. I believe that Gay's

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[8] Ibid., pp. 252-253.

[9] Swift, The Correspondence, IV, 53.

> intelligence was freer than any of his contemporaries, except Congreve. Addison, Swift, Pope, and Defoe, though they saw farther, did not see as clearly as Gay. They were the victims of certain prepossessions -- emotional, political, and moral -- which the shallower Gay escaped. That is why he seems much more 'modern' than the others. In Swift, and Pope, and still more in Addison and Defoe, the reader is always coming up against the limitations which the eighteenth century imposed. It is the principal justification of the genial scepticism which did duty for a philosophy with Gay that it was blandly innocent of these unconscious limitations.10

Gay's approach to life then may not have been as deep as Pope's but it was more discerning and sprung from a moral stand which uses clever satire as support.

But what exactly is the subject of Gay's satire? The abuse of power, the gulf between profession and practice among the governing class in particular, the ceaseless defeat of principles by money, the oppression of the poor, the immorality and selfishness of the privileged, all these are his themes. These are also the usual concerns of Swift whose frequent device is to show how much more detestable are those whom the world admires than those whom it despises. Gay's satire, however, partakes of other qualities. It was very obvious to him, that because of man's inner predatory nature, and the fact that he is a member of society, it is impossible for him to live up to the admirable ideals he

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[10]Bateson, English Comic Drama, pp. 102-103.

professes. The opposition of class against class, and sex against sex, is as inevitable as it is natural. Private interest and public good seldom coincide, and the former always has the upper hand. The conclusion is that existence itself is ironic, and so mankind is seen as all alike. Swift, who was at heart a romantic, saw this irony as comical as does Gay, but the former became bitter because he believed man was perfectible. Gay accepted mankind as he is, and saw the possibility of attaining an orderly balance in the Popean sense. So Gay kept a good-humored view of things. In his words, "Life is a jest; and all things show it. / I thought so once; but now I know it".[11] This epitaph which Gay composed for himself is of a piece with his particular brand of satire. Man is obviously not perfectible. Indeed his resemblances to the lower animals is striking. Since life is the way it is, a cosmic joke, the only thing to do is to reform the evils existing in the present order which is unchangeable, and substitute social for self-love. Perhaps this view of life can be seen as an explanation for the use of animal imagery and the imagery of hanging throughout the play. Life is held cheaply. Murder is a fashionable crime, and death by hanging is the constant companion of Peachum's world, and is faced with stoicism.

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[11]Gay, Poems, ed. J. Underhill, II, 257.

The satirical line taken by Gay in The Beggar's Opera, is a culmination of the trend begun in the Fables, 1727. Previous to these two works, when he had ventured into satire, it had been literary in nature as in The What D'Ye Call It, and personal as in Three Hours After Marriage. Now all mankind is his subject. But there is no reforming zeal here as is apparent in Swift, no anger or overt vituperation. His attitude is derisive. As in the Fables, he regards man and his pretensions to superiority as ridiculous. Life is indeed all a jest. His reactions to humiliations and disappointments was ridicule, laughter, and satire, and his songs were cleverly used to alleviate the sharpness of his criticisms and to make his satire more universal. This universal approach has without doubt, contributed to the unwaning popularity of the drama. The nature of his satire is determined by an unconscious nihilism, resulting partly from a belief in the falsity and absurdity of existing moral values, and the inability of man ever to live up to his ideals. Man is after all only one rung above the animals on the Chain of Being, and he is as a rule more unjustified in his rapaciousness and selfishness than the lower animals. As Gay cleverly blends high and low life, aristocratic manners, and coarseness, he reveals not only mockery, but some inevitable disillusionment, thus imparting to the play an air of cynicism. Yet the piece is unquestion-

ably entertaining and full of fun as all critics have observed. The result is that the play can be, and was interpreted from the earliest performances, according to the inclinations of each viewer. Gay's indictment of humanity is as cutting as Swift's: "Of all animals of prey, man is the only sociable one. Every one of us preys upon his neighbour, and yet we herd together".[12] But this severity is obscured or undermined by the wit and humor, the pacing of the scenes, and the uncertainity of how to interpret the piece. Gay did not aim to change the system which allowed someone like himself to live without too much exertion -- a system which was upheld and perpetuated by his aristocratic friends. Existence after all was merely a joke. It would do no good to change the system. However, his humanitarian nature as well as his own growing disillusionment, already visible in the Fables, made him feel that the evils within the system had to be revealed. This revelation was his only aim.

It must be borne in mind that Gay was a member of the Scriblerus club, and despite his carefree and irresponsible nature, did share the ideas of the group. It is there-

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[12]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene ii, p. 61.

fore not surprising to find that about ten years after the dispersal of the club, Gay, Swift, and Pope, all brought out a major work, each of which bore a strong resemblance to the others. These were The Beggar's Opera, The Dunciad and Gulliver's Travels, all three of which exhibit a kind of anti-intellectualism. In Gay this is felt for example in the use of language. He seems to be saying that anyone can speak in a highly rhetorical style, or utter empty sentiments, or be a moralist or a philosopher. As these three members of Scriblerus ridiculed all intellectual pretensions, their works took on elements of the absurd and fantastic, and in Gay this heightened the light-hearted effect of the work.

Gay's satire springs from the newly awakened social consciousness of the age. The quite affectionate portrayal of Macheath and his gang, and the obvious sympathy displayed towards them, indicate a basic assumption that there is goodness in all men, even something to admire. However, this inherent goodness can only emerge in a sensitive and responsible social system. Each one should remain in his place in the scale, and the upper classes should look after the lower. This was the former's duty, which it was, in eighteenth century London, disregarding. The result was that men sought survival by any means. The men in power as exemplified satirically by Lockit and Peachum, are self-seeking and unjust, disregarding the cries of the rest of

the world. So the energy of these unfortunates is diverted towards crime and a constant struggle on every level of existence. This is the nature of his satire. While Swift is pessimistic and harsh, exuding a strong revolutionary glow, Gay, on the whole, exhibits a great deal of optimism and sympathy, as a result of his more accepting or stoical and tolerant nature. The Beggar's Opera is one long illustration of the apparent triumph of the pursuit of self-love and self-interest. Therefore, when Gay thwarts the instruments of this doctrine in the peripatei, he is not only satirising Italian opera, but implying that society can be saved only with the defeat of this view. Macheath is reprieved, in part, because of the philosophy of life he is made to expound. "When my friends are in difficulties, I am always glad that my fortune can be serviceable to them. You see, gentlemen, I am not a mere court friend, who professes everything and will do nothing."[13] Here Gay is making a personal reference. Again, when Matt of the Mint designates a certain man to be robbed, Macheath remarks: "What do you mean, Matt? Sure you will not think of meddling

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[13]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene iv, p. 63.

with him! He's a good honest kind of a fellow and one of us".[14] Lockit, on the other hand, whose views are shared by Peachum, utters the following sentiments: "Peachum is my companion, my friend. According to the custom of the world, indeed, he may quote thousands of precedents for cheating me. And shall I not make use of the privilege of friendship to make him a return?"[15] Pitted against such men, Macheath is made an advocate of social as against self-love. He is well on his way to being the man of Sentiment. Lockit argues logically and unemotionally like the man of Reason.

The conflict among the members of the criminal world becomes a symbol for that which Gay saw as existing in the world at large, and is the basis of his political satire, while the values upon which the whole work is based are those which led to the social reforms that took place later on in the century. But Gay is not to be thought of as a revolutionary, although as has been pointed out, The Beggar's Opera foreshadows the Beaumarchais of Le Mariage de Figaro.[16] This play, written in 1776, was prohibited by the censor until 1784 because it prophesied the revolution to come. Beaumarchais saw that the ancien regime and the traditions

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[14] Ibid., p. 64.

[15] Ibid., p. 61.

[16] Bronson, The Beggar's Opera, p. 228.

it perpetuated had to perish. Gay does not herald, or even wish the demise of the old order. What he does do is point up the evils and abuses which are practised by the privileged. There was no English revolution after Gay's play as there was a French after Beaumarchais' because there was in the earlier play no character comparable to Figaro, who, while he wanted democracy, upheld the conventional virtues of society. Despite Macheath's benevolence and sense of honor, and Ben Budge's remarks, that the gang is "for a just partition of the world, for every man hath a right to enjoy life",[17] which is uttered gleefully and is intensely ironic -- (he is rationalizing the gang's career of stealing) -- we know that their only concern is self-interest. Gay's characters only prove that men are all alike, and the author's zeal is diluted by his view of the ironical and intensely comic situation of men.

The satire of The Beggar's Opera cannot be considered apart from the question of morality. From the earliest performances, the play was attacked on moral grounds, because, it was argued, it made crime and its practitioners too attractive. It is true that the characters are sympathetically presented. But despite this, they remain despicable criminals, if not outright villains. Thus Lockit and Peachum, the principal proponents of evil, are finally thwarted, while Macheath seems to be reformed as he settles down with one wife. As for the rest of the gang, it is implied in Act III,

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[17]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene i, p. 32.

scene xiv, that they will all, sooner or later, be punished by transportation or hanging. "But 'tis what we must all come to." Gay therefore seems to be writing from an intensely moral stance, and the thesis which is presented with superb wit and irony at every turn, forces a restatement of what constitutes morality. The satire then, is a clue to his moral position. Yet it is clear that Gay was no narrow moralist, but a man who, as a Christian, took morality for granted, and this attitude consequently colours the tone of his satire. The play is as a result, not platitudinous in its morality. On the contrary, throughout the entire action, the characters, with the possible exception of Polly, exhibit a flagrant amorality. Under every situation, they attempt to justify their actions which reveal gross insensibility to others, over weening self-interest, and greed. Their justifications take several forms. Sometimes it is an appeal to nature, as in the reference to Macheath's sexual prowess and laxity in Act II, scene iv, where he is likened to a rooster!

> Before the barndoor crowing,
> the cocks by hens attended,
> His eyes around him throwing,
> Stands for awhile suspended.
> Then one he singles from the crew,
> And cheers the happy hen,
> With how do you do, and how do you do,
> And how do you do again.

Appeals are also made to the norms of society, for example, in Act I, scene x, when the Peachums are persuading Polly to

impeach her husband, Peachum remarks: "Fie, Polly! What hath murder to do in the affair? Since the thing sooner or later must happen, I dare say, the Captain himself would like that we should get the reward for his death sooner than a stranger. Why, Polly, the Captain knows that as 'tis his employment to rob, so 'tis ours to take robbers. Every man in his business. So that there is no malice in the case". Later on he concludes: "Then, indeed we must comply with the customs of the world, and make gratitude give way to interest. He shall be taken off".[18] These sentiments, twisted, inhuman, and unemotional as they are, have a logicality and correctness which make them indisputable, and Gay appropriately couches them in language reminiscent of the Spectator with its many bland truisms. The characters thus use the traditional methods of moral evaluations, but they comically misapply them: the rooster's polygamy, for example, is no valid example for a man's. It is after all Satan who comments, "Shall that be shut to Man which to the beast / Is open?"[19]

Gay's material was to say the least daring and novel in 1728. The whole play is structured around an all per-

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[18]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act I, scene x, p. 26.

[19]John Milton, Paradise Lost (New York: New American Library, 1964), Bk. IX, ll. 691-692.

vading irony, the inversion of the classes. The criminal class is portrayed as identical with the privileged classes, and this is the basis of his social satire. But the irony extends evern further as the following lines sung by Peachum in the first air of the play indicate: "And the statesman, because he's so great / Thinks his trade as honest as mine". The ruling class because of its great power, does more harm than the criminals, and so is more dangerous and despicable. Peachum is consequently more honest than Walpole. "See the partiality of mankind! One man may steal a horse, better than another look over a hedge. Of all mechanics, of all servile handicrafts-men, a gamester is the vilest. But yet, as many of the quality are of the profession, he is admitted among the politest company. I wonder we are not more respected."[20] The irony continues as we see that where they do exist, the morals of the upper levels of society are base. A gentlewoman marries only for a "jointure" and to assume the profitable state of widowhood, while a court lady keeps a dozen young sparks for her pleasure. High society was truly amoral, and so Peachum and his friends, in imitation of their betters, display a

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[20]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene iv, p. 64.

blissful unawareness of any morality. Society, Gay implies, consists of a group of men, each exhibiting a different degree of ciminality, and it is merely a matter of chance that some are designated criminals and others not. These were indeed bold ideas, and perhaps accounts for Gay's assuming the mask of Beggar. It afforded him greater freedom of speech.

The play evolved not only as satire, but as burlesque of many things with which the audiences were too familiar, such as sentimental comedy and heroic tragedy. In the former, the appeal is to pity rather than laughter, and the real concern is with morality. It is not true comedy, but a combination of comedy and tragedy, while the appeal to tears creates a feeling of insincerity. In heroic tragedy, rant and bombast is the rule. Characters are large and unyielding, utterers of tumultuous curses and vows, and given to extravagant emotions. Italian opera, whose popularity was for a long while a threat to other dramatic forms, was another fad ripe for parody. Opera was first introduced into England by D'Avenant with his Siege of Rhodes, 1656. For the next fifty years, French music was the main influence in England, and this included operas. The English versions were closely aligned to the masque and romantic drama and so were most fanciful and unrealistic. Such was The Tempest which involved extravagant decorations, machinery, and dancers. Dryden at first decried operas, but soon joined

the field with his Albion and Albanius. Italian opera gradually began to take over the stage, first in Anglicized versions, then bilingual ones, and finally completely in Italian. Operas then, of whatever variety, were spectacular, unnatural, employing gods and their familiars, and were highly improbable in plots, which centred on wars and heroic love. All these artistic forms were easy prey for the parodist.

Gay must have decided that because of the nature of his material, and the premise around which he would work it, his play must move with incredible swiftness and be one continuous movement of excitement to keep the interest of the audience at its maximum. With this in mind, he created a large number of scenes of varying length, succeeding swiftly one on the other or taking place simultaneously. There is a shift or change of focus with each scene, yet the actions thus presented are all related. As a result of this construction, the movement never lets up and has great dramatic intensity. The speed of the action is further highlighted by the effective use of spectacle, and the entrance of the women in Act II, scene iv is a good example of this. Macheath is sitting alone in the tavern awaiting the arrival of his guests the prostitutes, when they all enter, women of various sizes and shapes, dressed in the lastest fashions. It is like a court reception, as Macheath greets each one with

an appropriate little salute. The very brief period of time with which the play is concerned, one day, as well as the careful balance of characters, twelve men and twelve women, contributes to the dramatic intensity and tautness of the play. In having such an equal number of characters, Gay was no doubt parodying opera which demanded six principal characters, three men and three women.

The first Act is comprised of thirteen scenes. Some, like the first, consist of but a few lines of soliloquy and a song, while many scenes are quite extended. However, the majority tend to be quite brief in keeping with the author's desire for rapid change of focus and high interest level. Act II consists of fifteen scenes, while Act III has seventeen. In all there are forty-five scenes requiring a number of scene changes.

Act I takes place in Peachum's house and there is no change of scene. It seems likely that the right section of the stage was intended to represent the shop and front entrance to the Peachum house, while the left side was the private apartments of the family. Characters keep leaving and appearing on stage so that there is continuous movement. In the second Act, the scene shifts from a tavern near Newgate to three different locales within the prison. Crowds come and go, and the pace and visual variety is quickened in this Act. Act III is again inside the prison, but the locale is different from the closing scene of Act II. We

are back in Lockit's room, from whence we are shifted to a gaming house, then to Peachum's lock, and finally back to Newgate. In short, the audience's interest is never allowed to wane; it is assaulted by this constant variety of scene and hectic movement, and its every emotion played upon -- indignation, pity, excitement, laughter.

As we examine the play, it seems that some of the scenes exist primarily as vehicles either of parody or satire. For example, the scene in which Peachum goes over his accounts with Lockit is most likely satire aimed at Walpole and the corruption existing in his government -- the dishonesty, spying, and disregard of scruples and values. The scene could even be regarded as mere polemic. However, it is not isolated from the rest of the play, but is connected to it by the Macheath arrest. The same applies to many other scenes which seem to have no direct connection with the story. What emerges from a study of these scenes then, is that Gay is observing a pattern throughout, in which small parodic and satiric sketches are being held together by the love story of Polly and Macheath. These sketches, as it were, form the background, and are the circumstances which allow this story to evolve. Further, the play's unity is assured by the irony which is the basis of its structure. In part, it is not unlike the irony expressed by Pope in The Rape of the Lock, which is in essence, that the ostensible values that governed the upper classes are empty,

risible, and reprehensible. Their observance results in a world that is unreal and unattractive.

The simple story line which ties the play together, is in keeping with the ballad idea of direct and straightforward narrative, taking account of only the bare essentials necessary to the plot. It is uncomplicated. In The Common Muse, the editor remarks of the street ballad: "Her characteristic virtues are those of the middle way: directness, simplicity, and honest earthly realism".[21] Gay's story in its simplicity, social criticism, and humor is thus very akin to the street ballad. This type of story was also, in part, an implicit rebuke to opera and heroic tragedy, and the result of this concern with ballad traditions and mockery of over-sophisticated dramatic forms was a very unified, tightly constructed play. The rapidly changing scenes also allowed Gay to build up to dramatic climax and theatrical surprise as often as he wished, and the fascination of the play for audiences is proof of the success of this plan of construction.

The success of The Beggar's Opera is also due in part to Gay's verbal elegance. This was an aspect of his work always admired by his contemporaries who often compared

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[21]Vivian De Sola Pinto and Allan E. Rodway, eds., The Common Muse an Anthology of Popular Ballad Poetry 15th-20th Century (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 28.

him to Congreve. The dialogue in The Beggar's Opera is light, witty, brilliant, and aphoristic. The sudden twist at the end of a sentence -- usually in the form of an unexpected smile or abrupt antithesis -- occurs quite frequently; "For a husband hath the absolute power over all a wife's screts but her own.".[22] Gay had already demonstrated, for example in Trivia, how low life and commonplace material could be elevated by his grace and elegance of diction. In The Beggar's Opera, this skillful use of language makes the work so eminently readable even today, that even removed from the stage, and minus the music, it remains alive and exciting. His lucid and precise style is a very suitable one for the expression of a satiric point of view. Here is Macheath in Act I, scene xiii, protesting his love to Polly: "Is there any power, any force that could tear me from thee? You might sooner tear a pension out of the hands of a courtier, a fee from a lawyer, a pretty woman from a looking glass, or any woman from quadrille. But to tear me from thee is impossible".

Another feature of the style is the movement from a particular idea to a generalisation. This is quite noticeable when characters are moved to justify their selfish actions.

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[22]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act I, scene iv, p. 13.

As Peachum and his wife plan the death of Macheath, Mrs. Peachum remarks: "But in a case of necessity -- our own lives are in danger. To this Peachum replies: "Then, indeed, we must comply with the customs of the world, and make gratitude give way to interest. He shall be taken off".[23] So language becomes for Gay, a medium for reflecting the ironies of the play. It may be argued that the epigrammatic nature of the majority of the speeches departs from strict realism. However, dramatic impact is increased because of this device, as is the power of the satirical thrusts. How dramatic is Macheath's speech in scene viii of the second Act in which he is bewailing his sorry lot in prison: "Do all we can, women will believe us, for they look upon a promise as an excuse for following their own inclinations". Many speeches are a replica of contemporary idiom, and so are racy and realistic. Such is Lockit's address to Filch in the third Act: "Why, boy, thou lookest as if thou wert half starved, like a shotten herring".[24] Generous use is also made of similes, and except for the obviously ludicrous ones, they are all of operatic origin, and so uphold the qualities of elegance and "charm" which are identified with the play. Mrs. Peachum's reference in Air IV to a virgin

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[23] Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act I, scene ix, p. 26.

[24] Ibid., Act III, scene iii, p. 62.

being like a "moth", or Polly's reference to herself in Air XXXIV as a "swallow" are undoubtedly of operatic origin. Thus we may see that Gay displays the same happy control over dialogue as he does in the adjusting of phrases of lyrics to tunes.

Let us now turn to an analysis of the play. As the curtain rises, Peachum is seen at his accounts, and at once we are introduced to the ironical thesis upon which the play revolves, as Peachum is made to behave and look like a chief justice. But as he bursts into song after a brief speech, Gay also establishes the tone of burlesque and ridicule which will dominate the play, and the two-fold purpose of the scene becomes evident. In words, both sung and spoken, the auidence is gradually made aware that roguery and self-interest make it impossible to distinguish the classes from each other, that the man who looks like, and has the power of, a chief justice is actually a criminal, and that this will be the state of events in the play. The obvious parody of opera here, arising in part from the absence of the music used to quieten the house, and the irony created by the difference between appearance and actuality, would not only puzzle the audience but would certainly arouse their interest.

Having created this mood of uncertainity, Gay then proceeds to amplify his ironical thesis. With the entrance

of Filch, a young member of the underworld with news of Newgate and the Old Bailey, the audience is being made aware that in this world, the classes are reversed, as Peachum is revealed in all his power of determining the life and death of his fellow men. Now Gay begins to introduce touches which help to create an element of fancy. Such is Peachum's sporting reference; "A good sportsman always lets the hen partridges fly, because the breed of the game depends upon them".[25] This picture would conjure up for the audience, romantic images of chivalry and country gentlemen, but in the next breath the world of Newgate is again mentioned. Once again the audience would be mystified regarding the true nature of Peachum, and as Filch describes women as the cause of man's ruin and his spur to venturing into robbery, his language evokes both the underworld and the world of romance, and the juxtaposition results in humor. Words are at odds with the facts, for criminals steal through necessity and not for amorous reasons as the audience well knew. The irony lies in the fact that Filch is quite unaware of this, precisely because of the inversion of the classes. So far there is no sign of a plot, but the audience is by now in a state of "willing suspension of disbelief", and content to witness developments.

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[25]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act I, scene ii, p. 8.

The main purpose of the next brief scene is the strengthening of the audience's acceptance of this inverted world order, as Peachum, a seeming officer of the law, goes over his register of his people, the habitués of Newgate, whose names are reminiscent of Jonsonian characters. Again there is comical inconsistency between appearance and the sentiments uttered.

Having established the premises and tone of the play, Gay proceeds in scene iv to introduce his plot. Mrs. Peachum, a plump, coarse woman, quickly reveals that her daughter Polly is in love with a highwayman, Macheath, with whom marriage is undesirable both for social and economic reasons. There is very pointed social satire against marriage in particular, a restatement of the thesis, as Peachum draws a parallel between himself and the prime minister, and the resumption of the theme of woman's treachery towards men. "My daughter to me should be, like a court lady to a minister of state, a key to the whole gang." With the imagery used in this speech of Peachum's, Gay underlines the fact of the similitude between a gang of criminals and the government, and cleverly leaves the audience to wonder if Peachum is disguised as minister of state or vice versa. One gets the feeling that Peachum himself is not sure of this. The utter

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[26]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act I, scene iv, p. 14.

lack of morality which is one of the main themes of the play is highlighted in the satire against marriage, the government, and the fashionableness of murder.

From the views so far expressed concerning love and marriage, Gay sees idealism as dead, and with it romantic notions of all sorts. His characters are men of Reason, unemotional, unattached, and amoral, who rationalize their every action in a money-oriented world. The next scene's only purpose seems to be to stress points already made regarding the amorality of society and its consequent mercenary attitude towards marriage. As Mrs. Peachum elucidates these attitudes, dramatic tension increases as both she and the audience ponder Polly's marital status.

Having brought the audience to this state of emotional involvement, Gay introduces a theatrical episode with the entrance of Filch, and his stolen booty. Gay's purpose here as Mrs. Peachum discusses Filch's career, is to stress the mistaken sense of values that obtained. Filch's elegant language, "cut off in the flower of my youth", and Mrs. Peachum's speech which follows, are uttered with such complete seriousness and unawareness of the irony, that the result is humorous. Here is Mrs. Peachum: "You should go to Hockley in the Hole, and to Marybone, child, to learn valor. These are the schools that have bred so many brave men. I thought,

boy, by this time, thou had'st lost fear as well as shame".[27] The irony which so far has been a unifying element, is felt as Mrs. Peachum talks of the family honor and her abhorrence of lying. The dramatic suspense continues to increase as again mention is made of the relationship existing between Polly and Macheath.

The love story is now picked up as Polly denies in this her first appearance on stage, that she is married, and the scene is linked to previous ones by the juxtaposition of love and money, and the reference to the morality of court ladies. Her exquisite song, Air VI, is a neat operatic parody which reveals that, unlike the other characters, she is an idealist. So the scene comes to a dramatic climax as Peachum threatens her with violence if she is indeed married.

Now that the audience's emotional involvement has just been increased, Mrs. Peachum returns to the stage with the news of Polly's marriage. The timing is excellent, and the scene develops logically from the previous one. Parody is at its height as the presence of angry operatic aria, and the histronics of sentimental comedy testify. So far the play is remarkably consistent in its mixture of the comic and serious. The characters while they are made to parody

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[27] Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act I, scene vi, p. 16.

their betters, and are often their direct counterparts, never become caricatures. Here, for example, Mrs. Peachum is at once the society matron weeping over a mésalliance, and her own cheap self. The scene is full of fun and farce as Mrs. Peachum faints from the news, and Polly screams shrilly at being pinched by her father.

The Peachums now attempt to make Polly's disastrous marriage work to their advantage, allowing Gay once more to satirise the fashionable attitudes towards marriage and morals.

The Peachums, guided by self-interest, money and reason, have now decided to indict their son-in-law, and to create the proper atmosphere of mock pathos and tragedy, Gay indulges in burlesque of heroic tragedy and opera. As the Peachums, behind Polly's back, continue plotting Macheath's death, the parallel between the ruling class and the criminal is again stressed. The members of the audience could easily believe that they were listening to the glib and well-reasoned arguments of ministers of a political party. So Gay presses home his political satire.

The plot continues to hasten towards a crisis, as Polly in a scene which superbly parodies both sentimental comedy and heroic tragedy, despairs over the fate of her husband, who she envisions on his way to be executed. Tension is high as she leaves the stage to warn Macheath and

help him to escape.

Gay's sense of timing and dramatic impact are apparent as Macheath now appears for the first time, a dashing figure of a gentleman. This climax has been carefully approached, as the audience has been waiting to see Macheath. Opera is parodied as Polly and Macheath sing a love duet full of ludicrous sentiments, and Polly is revealed as ridiculously sentimental. Warned of the danger, Macheath goes off into hiding.

In order to maintain the predominant tone of ridicule, Gay had made the parting of the lovers ludicrous because of Macheath's pretended sentimentality. So he begins the second Act with a spectacular and dramatic tavern scene which is a mélange of realism and fancy, as the motley gang of robbers, variously dressed, discourse in a manner indistinguishable from that of a group of fiery young noblemen. Thus the play's ironical premise joins these two Acts. As the gang members rise to rhetorical and oratorical declamation, and Gay parodies the bombast of heroic tragedy -- Julius Caesar comes to mind -- Macheath enters. The impression deliberately created is of a conquering hero, an Alexander. These polemical scenes seem to exist as a means of literary parody and restatement of Gay's thesis, but the one in which Macheath enters also furthers the plot as he reveals his plan to hide out from Peachum for a week. The imitation of the speech of

the gentry is delightful, and theatricality is heightened as the gang lines up, pistols set, and singing a rousing marching song, leave the stage.

Left alone with his drink in the tavern, Macheath soliloquises on the bond between love and money as he awaits the arrival of the prostitutes for whom he has called to ease his loneliness. This scene which satirises gentlemanly love affairs, mainly serves to delineate Macheath's character.

The arrival of the ladies is the occasion for a clever parody of Restoration comedy in which rival ladies would murder each other with compliments, as well as for parody of opera with its choruses and dances. Macheath appears as the young cavalier of Restoration comedy who effortlessly charms and flatters his women. Finally, these same women, treacherously disarm Macheath by means of their obvious charms, and so he is arrested by Peachum and the constables.

The farcical quality of the play comes to the fore as Macheath is now led off to prison, not putting up a fight, but scowling and abusing the women. He is a passive figure, a parody of the active heroes of heroic tragedy. Gay thus satirises society women, their influence, and amorality.

With the arrival of Macheath at Newgate, Gay attacks the prison system, as represented by the corrupt turnkey Lockit. At last Gay can introduce the prison scene of which

he had remarked that the ladies were inordinately fond. It is quite romantic as Macheath gazes through his bars singing of the treachery of women. But he has been equally treacherous, as the pregnant Lucy, Lockit's daughter, makes clear. As she rushes out to arrange their marriage which of course would be illegal, the scene shifts to that memorable parody of the Brutus/Cassius Walpole/Townshend quarrel, as Lockit and Peachum attack each other and then are quickly reconciled while still distrusting and ready to cheat each other. Social, political, and personal satire are here admirably combined in this farcical scene. As Lucy pleads with her father for the life of her lover, the love-money theme is again sounded as we hear these people justifying their evil by appeals to social traditions. A husband's death is a time for rejoicing. But Lucy hard as she is, is really in love, and so returns to Macheath's cell to help him escape by bribing her father. At this instant Polly enters, creating a moment of dramatic suspense. Macheath's efforts to convince Lucy of his love are thus destroyed as the girls attack each other and their common lover with much exaggeration and rant: "O villain, villain! Thou hast deceived me". Just then Peachum rushes in and forcibly drags Polly away underlining the farcical bias of the play. Left alone with Lucy, Macheath is once more able to convince her of his loyalty and she plans to steal her father's keys and effect her lover's escape.

The third Act begins about an hour later in Lockit's room within the prison, where he and Lucy are arguing violently about Macheath's escape. Gay satirises the prison system as he shows us that Lockit's concern is neither with fulfilling his duties as an officer of the law, nor with the happiness of his daughter but with money. The exhibition of his greed is amusing, and the scene reverts to farce as he attempts to slap this vengeful, jealous heroine of heroic tragedy which Gay is here burlesquing.

As Lucy runs off to escape her father's violence, and Lockit reveals his intention to find Macheath through Peachum at any cost, Gay is seen at his most cynical. The scene's main concern seems to be to point out the predatory and vicious nature of man, and to keep the comic balance, we are switched to a new scene and a new point of focus.

Filch, looking very exhausted, appears to acquaint Lockit with the whereabouts of Peachum, and his apparance, and talk of his new job of child-getter, which he has inherited from Macheath whom he sees as a knight-errant, is highly comical. This light and incidental scene serves the purpose of filling in background information, and balancing the previous scene.

The scene abruptly changes to a gaming house where Macheath is discovered at play, and in his magnanimity is made to appear superior to his peers. At this point, Macheath

seems like an outsider as he declares that he and his gang can break through the corruptions of the world because they still have a sense of honor. He will of course be proven wrong. This is another incidental scene which in no way advances the plot, yet while Gay is satirising the vice of gambling among the aristocracy, he describes with great realism the harshness of the criminal world. Macheath plans his robberies with perfect naturalness and a clear conscience. He seems to feel that he is doing nothing morally wrong in stealing from the types of people he designates to his gang.

The next scene in which Lockit and Peachum are discovered going over their accounts like legitimate business men, is one of personal and political satire aimed at Walpole and his administration. Both Lockit and Peachum display the craftiness of politicians and this would not be lost on the audience. At this point Mrs. Diana Trapes is announced, and once again there is comical inconsistency between her coarse and vulgar actions, all of her business dealings with her fellow prostitutes, and her appearance of lawful business woman. This episode which discloses the fact that Macheath is with one of his ladies, satirises the practice among the gentry of keeping mistresses from the lower classes.

After being paid for her vital information, Mrs. Trapes departs, and we are shifted to Newgate and a scene which brilliantly parodies heroic tragedy. Like Nathaniel Lee's Roxana in The Rival Queens, Lucy is seen as a jealous, treacherous woman, plotting to poison her rival Polly. But while the atmosphere of tragedy is being built up, the elevated language she employs creates a feeling of unreality which makes the play in general, and this scene in particular humorous and ludicrous. By moving on more than one level at once, the play could be and was in the beginning viewed both as tragedy and witty comedy. Herein lies one of the sources of the play's dramatic power.

With the entrance of Polly, the girls, aping society ladies, apologize to each other with obvious insincerity for their late discourteous behaviour to each other. This drawing-room behaviour in the milieu of a prison, makes for more of Gay's ridicule of the pretensions of these pathetic people who imitate their peers. As usual the characters are perfectly serious in what they say, for it is very rarely that they participate in the humor of the play, thus strengthening its irony. As Lucy tries to persuade Polly to drink the poisoned drink, and the latter becomes more adamant in her refusal, quite unaware that she is being offered poison, Macheath enters, once more in custody, and with an anguished cry Polly lets fall the poisoned drink. This is a brilliant

piece of theatre which breaks the accumulated dramatic tension. The mock-tragedy had to be averted. The literary parody continues as both girls, with pitiful cries, embrace a Macheath who seems uncaring about his predicament, thus emphasizing the comic tone of the play. What bothers him is the quandary in which the possession of two wives places him. Like a noble hero, unafraid of death he is led to the Old Bailey singing the following song, Air LVII:

> The charge is prepared; the lawyers are met;
> The judges all ranged (a terrible show!).
> I go, undismayed, for death is a debt,
> A debt on demand, so take what I owe.
> Then farewell, my love -- dear charmers, adieu.
> Contented I die. 'Tis the better for you.
> Here ends all dispute the rest of your lives,
> For this way at once I please all my wives.

But his song is suffused with a mockingly humorous air, and this tone is sustained as the prisoners whose trials have been postponed emerge on stage doing a wild and fantastic dance. This episode has nothing to do with the story, and is merely a parody of operatic spectacle.

The scene is now the death cell at Newgate, where Macheath is trying to fill himself with courage by consuming great quantities of liquor. The description of this process is done with great wit and humor as Gay blatantly parodies opera and heroic tragedy. The situation abounds in mock pathos and tragedy, but the actions of Macheath reduce it to comedy. Thus Gay once more evinces his powerful sense of theatre in a scene whose main concern is literary burlesque.

Now the plot is resumed as two members of Macheath's gang visit him, and we learn that he has been betrayed by one of this group. "Tis a plain proof that the world is all alike, and that even our gang can no more trust one another than other people."[28] With these comments of Macheath, Gay once more proves the truth of his thesis, and makes a mockery of all the talk of honor. Macheath's exhortation of his friends to avenge his death is in the best tradition of heroic tragedy, but the seriousness of the charge is dissipated by the remark that they are all going to end up ingloriously on the gallows.

The play now moves inexorably towards its seemingly tragic climax with another parody of sentimental comedy, with its tears and comic exaggeration. Then Lucy remarks: "There is nothing moves one so much as a great man in distress".[29] Thus Gay in these final scenes enhances the tone of mockery and ridicule, and with the arrival of four more wives and their offspring, the element of farce springs to the fore, as Macheath begs to be taken to his death rather than face this bevy of accusing women. At this point, the audiences must have been impatient to see what would finally

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[28] Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene xiv, p. 80.

[29] Ibid., Act III, scene xv, p. 81.

happen to this condemned man, Macheath.

Now the Player and Beggar return to the stage and observing the characters, begin to discuss the ending of the play. Theatre morality and sentimentality are dealt the last and most severe blow as the ending is without reference to poetic justice or logicality, suddenly changed from tragedy to comedy. But, being an opera as the Player remarks, events must end happily. The self-conscious and artificial moralizing which marked sentimental comedy is ridiculed, as all the wicked people are for the moment allowed to go free. Gay of course was simply trying to show that these evil people acted no differently from the rest of the world, and were no more wicked. The actions of the characters are reprehensible but also amusing. Once more the moral and thesis are stated:

> Through the whole piece you may observe such a similitude of manners in high and low life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable vices) the fine gentlemen imitate the gentlemen of the road, or the gentlemen of the road the fine gentlemen. Had the play remained as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent moral. 'Twould have shown that the lower sort of people have their vices in a degree as well as the rich and that they are punished for them.30

But the play does not end in this way and so Gay makes his final satiric hit.

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[30]Gay, The Beggar's Opera, Act III, scene xvi, p. 82.

CONCLUSION

In this study now to be concluded, an attempt has been made to show that the success of The Beggar's Opera, an unparalleled one in its day, was the result of deliberate and consummate artistry. It has been pointed out that Gay had two major concerns, the creation of an entertainment, and the presentation of his view of life.

From our examination it has doubtlessly become apparent that the careful technical construction of the play was to some degree a contributing factor in the success of the work. Audience interest was never allowed to wane, not only because of the tight control, disposition and handling of the scenes, but because of the choice of story, its farcicality and hilarity, its topicality and romantic appeal. There was method in all the ridiculous and extravagant action and topsy-turvydom. Moreover, we have seen that audiences were ready for a return to realism in literature after the rule of the heroical and sentimental. Yet these audiences did not wish to entirely forego romance. Accordingly we found Gay accommodating them not only in his choice of story, but by the introduction of his lyrics, most of which tended towards the amorous, and in the sentimental cast of several of his characters. Both songs and story possessed great popular appeal.

Finally, it has emerged that Gay's opinion, as expressed in the play, was that man's very existence was an irony, that things were the way they were and unchangeable. However, we have seen that his view of the situation was deeply comic and good-natured, unlike Swift's. The result of Gay's attitude is that The Beggar's Opera is a work full of "charm", sheer fun, subtleties, criticisms, and occasionally, bitter cynicism. However the pervading atmosphere is one of fun and ridicule. Coupled with this is expressed, through the portrayal of the characters, a deep sympathy for mankind with its ideals, aspirations, and pretensions, little and big. Human nature is essentially alike in all walks of life is the thesis proved, and Gay's triumph lay in making his entire audiences aware of this conclusion while he cleverly amused and entertained.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF PERFORMANCES GIVEN DURING THE FIRST SEASON SEPTEMBER 1727 TO SEPTEMBER 1728

The Beggar's Opera was the main event of the season with a run of thirty two consecutive nights and a total of sixty-two performances at Lincoln's Inn Fields during the winter and spring. Previous to this, a run of nine nights had been regarded as excellent, and one of twelve extra-ordinary. Gay's record was unmatched for years to come. During the summer of 1728 there were fifteen performances of the play at the Haymarket Theatre.

January 1728

Monday 29	The Beggar's Opera.	Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Wendesday 31	The Beggar's Opera,	Lincoln's Inn Fields.

February 1728

Thursday 1	The Beggar's Opera.	Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Friday 2	The Beggar's Opera.	Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Saturday 3	The Beggar's Opera.	As above.
Monday 5	The Beggar's Opera.	As above. Benefit the author.
Tuesday 6	The Beggar's Opera.	Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Wednesday 7	The Beggar's Opera.	Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Thursday 8	The Beggar's Opera.	As above. Benefit

	the author.
Friday 9	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Saturday 10	The Beggar's Opera. As above.
Monday 12	The Beggar's Opera. As above. Daily Journal, 12 February: The Beggar's Opera is continued acting . . .with the greatest Applause, and to an Audience as numerous as ever. And we are informed, That most of the Boxes are taken to the 25th Night.
Tuesday 13	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Wednesday 14	As above.
Thursday 15	AS above. Benefit the author.
Friday 16	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Saturday 17	As above.
Monday 19	As above.
Tuesday 20	As above.
Wednesday 21	As above.
Thursday 22	As above. Royal family present.
Friday 23	As above.
Saturday 24	As above.
Monday 26	As above.
Tuesday 27	As above.
Wednesday 28	As above.
Thursday 29	As above.

March 1728

Friday 1	As above.

Monday 4	As above.
Tuesday 5	As above.
Wednesday 6	As above.
Thursday 7	As above.
Friday 8	As above.
Monday 11	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields. Benefit Mrs. Younger.
Tuesday 12	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields.
Saturday 16	As above.
Tuesday 19	As above.
Saturday 23	As above.
Tuesday 26	As above.
Saturday 30	As above.

April 1728

Tuesday 2	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields. Fortieth night.
Monday 8	As above.
Tuesday 9	As above.
Thursday 11	As above.
Saturday 13	As above.
Monday 15-Saturday 20	Passion Week.
Thursday 25	The Beggar's Opera. As above.
Saturday 27	As above.

May 1728

Wednesday 1	The Beggar's Opera. As above.
Saturday 4	As above.

Tuesday 7	As above.
Thursday 9	As above. Fiftieth night.
Friday 10	As above.
Friday 17	As above. Fifty-second night.
Tuesday 21	As above. Fifty-third night.
Friday 24	As above. Fifty-fourth night.
Tuesday 28	As above. Fifty-fifth night.
Friday 31	As above. Fifty-sixth night.

June 1728

Tuesday 4	The Beggar's Opera. Lincoln's Inn Fields. Fifty-seventh night.
Friday 7	As above. Fifty-eighth night.
Monday 10	As above. Fifty-ninth night.
Wednesday 12	As above. Sixtieth night.
Friday 14	As above. Sixty-first night. Being the last Time of the company's performing this season.
Wednesday 19	As above. At the particular Desire of several Persons of Quality. Being positively the last Time of the Company's performing this season.
Monday 24	The Beggar's Opera. Haymarket. By a New Company.
Wednesday 26	The Beggar's Opera. Haymarket.

July 1728

Wednesday 3	The Beggar's Opera. Haymarket. At the particular Desire of several Persons of Quality.
Monday 8	As above.

Wednesday 10	As above.
Monday 15	As above.
Monday 22	As above.
Wednesday 24	As above.
Monday 29	As above.
Wednesday 31	As above.

August 1728

Monday 5	The Beggar's Opera. Haymarket. Benefit Lucy Lockit.
Wednesday 7	The Beggar's Opera. Haymarket.
Wednesday 14	As above.
Friday 16	As above.
Tuesday 20	As above. The Fifteenth day.
Thursday 22	As above. Benefit Mrs. Rayner. Being the last Time of performing it till the Fairs are over.
Saturday 24	The Beggar's Opera. Bartholomew Fair. By Posture-Masters. At Yeate's Booth.
Saturday 24	As above. At Fielding-Reynolds Booth.

September 1728

Friday 6	The Beggar's Opera. Southwark Fair. At Fielding-Reynolds Booth.
Friday 6	As above. At Yeate's Booth.

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