



The Beggar's Opera

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The Beggar's Opera

by John Gay

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The Beggar's Opera

by John Gay

January 16 through April 5, 2002

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The Edward Sheldon Exhibition Rooms

The Harvard Theatre Collection

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For further information please call 617-495-2445



"I must and will have a kiss to give my wine a zest."
 Jenny Diver to Captain Macheath in the Tavern, Act 2.
 Engraving by Francesco Bartolozzi (1727-1815).
 Printed for C. Cooke, 1819.

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

The Beggar's Opera, by John Gay, was originally produced by John Rich at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, London, on January 29, 1728. Its appearance represents one of the most important events in the development of English opera, and it continues to be one of the most frequently performed musical theater works in English.

Henry Purcell's brief opera *Dido and Æneas*, produced in 1679, is generally regarded as the first true English opera. It was an indirect product of the Restoration in England: Charles II sent Pelham Humphrey to Paris to learn from Lully's success in opera, and Purcell was a pupil of Humphrey's. Before *Dido and Æneas*, the court masque held the same position as the ballet on the continent; one of the first masques was written by Ben Jonson, with a musical score by Lanière.

The Beggar's Opera was effectively the first of a genre called "ballad opera," so called because the many brief songs were adapted from the ballads well known to the audiences of the time, with different, often satirical, words. The play was said by Alexander Pope to have been instigated by Gay's friend Jonathan Swift, who supposedly remarked to Gay, "A Newgate [Prison] pastoral might make an odd pretty sort of thing." It was to be a lampoon against foreign affectation and pretentious attitude, as well as a social satire, and a particularly target was the supposedly stilted and artificial Italian school of opera. In fact, it was originally intended that the songs in *The Beggar's Opera* were to have been sung without accompaniment, but at a late stage the sixty-nine brief songs were arranged straightforwardly by Dr. Johann Christoph Pepusch, a German who settled in London. The success of *The Beggar's Opera* significantly altered the course of opera in England, and proved something of an antidote to the florid and more slowly-moving operas of Handel. It is the most important antecedent of the great tradition of English musical comedy.

The work had been first offered to Colley Cibber for the Theatre Royal in Drury Lane, but it was declined, perhaps owing to its originality, or perhaps to its unflattering (though not explicit) references to Sir Robert Walpole, the Whig Prime Minister. Its original run of 62 performances was a record in its day: the saying at the time was that the opera "made Gay rich, and Rich gay." Lavinia Fenton, the original Polly Peachum, became the darling not only of the general public, but also of

one particular lord: she was later to become the Duchess of Bolton — whereupon any number of ambitious young actresses pursued the rôle, in pursuit of the fortune they imagined attended it.

The plot concerns Captain Macheath, a notorious but fascinating highwayman, who is loved by all the ladies. Even when apprehended and imprisoned, the rival sweethearts to whom he has behaved shamefully come to his aid. Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, the parents of his beloved Polly, provide social satire, and a cynical jailkeeper and a bevy of low-life doxies and thieves supply further social comedy.

Gay followed *The Beggar's Opera* with a sequel, entitled *Polly*, but it did not reach the stage during Gay's lifetime. It was suppressed, largely as a response to the offense felt in official circles (meaning, principally, on the part of Walpole) as a result of *Polly's* famous predecessor. The ban on performance, which did not extend to publication, resulted in a huge sale of the libretto of *Polly*, and so this rather less interesting piece contributed even more than *The Beggar's Opera* to make Gay's fortune.

The Beggar's Opera was revived repeatedly during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was first seen in New York in 1750, preceding the arrival of Italian opera by several decades. A notable revival took place in London in 1886, with the famous tenor Sims Reeves as Captain Macheath. Nigel Playfair had extraordinary success in a revival at the Lyric Theatre, London, with music adapted by Frederic Austin (who played Peachum) and designs by Claud Lovat Fraser. This revival opened on June 5, 1920, and ran for 1,463 performances — more than three years. John Gielgud directed an important production at the Haymarket Theatre in 1940, with Michael Redgrave as Macheath, and Laurence Olivier and Peter Brook made a film version in 1953 starring Olivier. Benjamin Britten and Tyrone Guthrie created an ambitious version for the Cambridge Opera Group, with Peter Pears as Macheath. In addition to the musical arrangements of Pepusch, Austin, and Britten, adaptations have been made by Thomas Linley, Joseph Hatton, Edward Dent, Manfred Bukofzer, Denis Stevens, and Arthur Bliss, among others. *Die Dreigroschenoper* was an adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera* by Bertholt Brecht, with a score by Kurt Weill; it first appeared in Berlin in 1928. Translated by Marc Blitzstein as *The Threepenny Opera*, it was produced at the Empire Theatre, New York, in April 1933, and has been revived often since then.

The Beggar's Opera has been produced several times at Harvard Uni-

versity, in various forms. Lowell House Opera produced *The Beggar's Opera* in 1935, the direct antecedent of the annual Lowell House Opera. Subsequently, Lowell House Opera produced *The Threepenny Opera* in 1955 and Benjamin Britten's version of *The Beggar's Opera* in 2000. A notable *Beggar's Opera* was presented at Adams House in 1965, directed by John Lithgow, who also played the Beggar, and conducted by Isaiah Jackson. This production was later seen at the Loeb Drama Center. Other local productions have included a Cambridge Drama Festival presentation of *The Beggar's Opera* at Sanders Theatre in 1956 (the stars, Jack Cassidy and Shirley Jones, were married on August 5th between the matinée and evening performances), a Boston Academy of Music production in 1998, and in 2001 the Boston University School of Arts produced *The Threepenny Opera* in the futuristic 1994 London Donmar Warehouse version.

Based in part on essays by Frank Kidson.

JOHN GAY AND THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

John Gay was born in 1685 (in the same year that Bach, Handel, Pachelbel, and Domenico Scarlatti were born) of a genteel family in the small Devonshire town of Barnstaple, but he was orphaned at an early age. After completion of the local, but thorough, grammar school and a brief period of apprenticeship to a silk mercer, the young man made his way to London, where he arrived in 1706 with a small patrimony and high aspirations.

From his first appearance in the society of the London taverns, his keen wit and uncommonly sweet disposition endeared him to the writers and pundits who gathered there. In a comparatively short time, the unknown Gay was found himself in the charmed circle that included such intellects and wits as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, William Congreve, and Joseph Addison. However, according to Dr. Johnson, the affection bestowed upon Gay by his friends was greater than their respect for him, for he seemed to be dependent by nature. His capacity for leaning was as unflagging as his ability to gratify those who eventually adopted him either as colleague or, in effect, as a household pet.

Thanks to the initial efforts of Pope and Swift, Gay secured a series of socially comfortable positions in the homes of the aristocracy. These relationships as secretary-companion and perpetual guest accustomed Gay to plush comforts and high-caloried tables. But there was little financial security in these posts, and Gay was constantly out of funds.

All this time, the bawdy night life of London drew him irresistibly. Long evenings found him stalking through the teeming, dangerous streets, carousing in shady taverns, frequenting the houses of ill fame, taking in the songs and the scenes of the alleys. He became the acquaintance and recorder of pickpockets, desperadoes, and prostitutes. In his plays *The Mohocks* (1712) and *What D'Ye Call It* (1715), in his poem, *Trivia; or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), as well as eventually in his culminating work, *The Beggar's Opera*, Gay portrayed the lower depths of London as indelibly as did his contemporary William Hogarth, the painter. Gay's purpose, however, was not to decry villainy or immorality; he was temperamentally and artistically unsuited for the pulpit.

In 1724, caught up in the popular hysteria aroused by the fantastic exploits of one Joseph Blake, an egregious outlaw, Gay wrote *The Newgate Garland*, a ballad in which he depicted the felon as a romantic highwayman.

When *The Beggar's Opera* appeared in 1728, its immediate appeal was so great that Dr. Herring, an important cleric, appalled by the seductiveness of its vice, thundered against the play in his sermons. This indictment only added to the financial success of the play.

Polly, a musical sequel, was written the following year. The play was banned from the theaters by Sir Robert Walpole, the Prime Minister, who was still smarting from the satire leveled against him in *The Beggar's Opera*. There was no prohibition, however, against the publication of the work, and *Polly* enjoyed the popularity of the censored. His fortune was made by this unproduced work to a much greater extent than even by its hugely popular (and much more appealing) predecessor.

Ironically, now that he had finally achieved wealth, Gay wrote little of consequence until his death three years later. He seemed drained even of the spasmodic energy he had formerly possessed, and was plagued with recurrent bouts of indisposition. In March of 1732 he wrote to Swift: "I find myself dispirited for want of having some pursuit ... I begin to find a dislike of society." By December of that year he succumbed to a violent, ultimately fatal, attack of colic. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, near the tomb of Chaucer. Along with an epitaph by Pope, engraved on Gay's monument is his own couplet:

Life is a jest, and all things show it,
I thought so once, but now I know it.

It is perhaps characteristic of Gay's own sense of modesty that the motto he selected to be printed on the title page of all of the editions of *The Beggar's Opera*, a quotation from Martial, was:

Nos hæc novimus esse nihil.
[We know that this is nothing.]

THE SONGS IN THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

The sixty-nine brief songs in *The Beggar's Opera* were originally

intended to be sung without any accompaniment, which may explain why they seem to flow right out of the spoken dialogue and immediately return to them, hardly interrupting the dramatic situation. It was John Rich, the manager of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, and the original, reputedly grudging, producer of the opera, who is supposed to have demanded at the next-to-last rehearsal that orchestral accompaniments ought to be provided. Some of Gay's friends approved the idea, and it was probably at this late point that Johann Christoph Pepusch, a German-born musician who had settled in London, was called in and asked to perform the necessary musical chores.

Pepusch is sometimes credited with having "composed" *The Beggar's Opera*. He did indeed compose the overture, which is in the French style, and is wittily contrapuntal while at the same time quoting Lucy's song, "I'm like a skiff on the Ocean tossed." He presumably also wrote out the parts for the musicians, using the basses which were eventually included in the 1729 printed edition of the opera, and directed the small band in the theater. But there is no evidence that Pepusch, or indeed anyone else, even helped Gay to select the tunes.

Gay was no musician, and he did not supply or provide for new tunes for his delightful, often trenchant lyrics of the songs in *The Beggar's Opera*. Rather, he found them in the popular musical literature of his day, as well as in the theaters, streets, drawing-rooms, and taverns. The originals of the songs range from simple folk ditties to quite sophisticated art songs by Purcell and others. The single chief source of the songs was Thomas D'Urfey's popular (and, in places, bawdy) song collection, *Wit and Mirth; or, Pills to Purge Melancholy*, edited originally by Henry Playford. (Gay surely knew the work in its final six-volume edition, published in 1719-1720.) Tom D'Urfey, with his long nose, his bass voice, and his impudent, vulgar wit, was the indispensable entertainer of the gentry and nobility for nearly forty years. "The Town may da-da-damn me for a Poet, but they si-si-sing my songs for all that." The use of many of D'Urfey's songs in *The Beggar's Opera* did much to make those songs respectable.

If Gay was no composer, neither were the performers in the original production accomplished singers — or, at least, they came from the dramatic stage and not from the opera house. It was intended that the rôles be played by actors who could sing, rather than by polished singers.

In fact, the artificiality and inaccessibility of opera — meaning, in Gay's day, Italian opera, and most specifically the music of George Frideric Handel, whose long, serious, and musically intricate operas had dominated the London operatic stage — was one of the objects of satire in *The Beggar's Opera*. In the introduction, the Beggar asks the indulgence of the audience for the lack of certain expected operatic characteristics but still claims to have produced a true example of the form: "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."

The directness of simple, often beautiful, tunes, sung in English, furthering the business of the play, with well-written and dramatically apposite parody lyrics, simply presented, was one of the chief attractions of what came to be known as Ballad Opera. The further pleasure of knowing the words — often themselves humorous — which were being so cleverly parodied, and in English, too, is a delight experienced by the early London audiences that we can only imagine.

For a score so lacking in musical originality (it has been described as a score that one whistles going into the theatre) its effects have been singularly far-reaching. It has been suggested, for example, that without the "Ballad Opera," originated by John Gay in this immortal work, there would have been no *Singspiele* (*The Magic Flute* of Mozart, for example), and that it is a direct forbear to all of the genres of musical theater in English — from the works of Gilbert and Sullivan to those of Cole Porter — that have come since then.

ERNEST LEWIS GAY

1874-1916

Ernest Lewis Gay was not a descendant of the author of *The Beggar's Opera*, but rather of another John Gay who came to America in 1630. As an undergraduate at Harvard (in the Class of 1897), he began to collect material related to the poet John Gay. By the time of his death in 1916, he had gathered an extraordinary collection of books, manuscripts, prints, and playbills concerned with *The Beggar's Opera*, Gay's other dramatic works, his *Fables* and *Trivia*, and Gay's contemporaries. This collection was presented to the library in 1927 by his nephew, George Henry Gay, as a bequest of the collector according to the terms of his will.

Many of the items on display are from the collection of Ernest Lewis Gay. Other material assembled for this exhibition has been drawn from other parts of the Harvard Theatre Collection and the Houghton Library. Some items that complement the Ernest Lewis Gay Collection have been acquired recently.

THE STORY OF THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

The Beggar's Opera is framed by dialogues between the Beggar — the supposed author — and the Player — one of the actors. In an introduction, the Beggar explains that except for the absence of recitative, the opera is a true example of operatic form; at the conclusion, the Player persuades the Beggar to change the ending to please "the taste of the town."

Act 1

After the prologue and the overture, Mr. Peachum is discovered reading over his book of accounts. Filch brings news from Newgate Prison, receives instructions, and leaves Peachum to consider a candidate for "a decent execution against next Sessions." Mrs. Peachum enters, and lets slip the possibility that their daughter, Polly, may have fallen in love with Captain Macheath. After privately questioning Filch about Polly's behavior, she returns in a state of agitation with the news that Polly and Macheath are actually married. "Married!" cries Peachum. "The Captain is a bold man, and will risk anything for money; to be sure, he believes her a fortune."

Under questioning, Polly admits that this is so. Mr. and Mrs. Peachum determine that Polly must "secure what he hath got, have him peach'd the next Sessions, and then at once you are made a rich widow," but she will take no part in a scheme that would be untrue to her husband and contrary to her own interests. Her parents attempt in vain to persuade her to "comply with the customs of the world, and make gratitude give way to interest." They resolve that Macheath must hang, and Peachum takes his leave to put a plan into action. Polly warns Macheath, who has been hiding in her chamber. Their tender parting ends the first act.

Act 2

In a tavern, Macheath tells his gang that he must remain hidden for a while. They go off, leaving him sitting pensively, but he is soon enlivened by the arrival of the ladies he has sent for — all of whom, it becomes clear, know the Captain all too well. In the course of their drinking, dancing, and conversation, two of his "dear sluts," Jenny

Diver and Suky Tawdry, disarm him, "take him about the neck and make signs to Peachum and the Constables, who rush in upon him."

The prisoner Macheath is welcomed at Newgate Prison by Mr. Lockit, the jailor, and after negotiating with Lockit for his own comforts while in custody, he is left to face the reproaches of Lucy, who longs "to be made an honest woman." Macheath succeeds in convincing Lucy that she is his wife "in ev'ry respect by the form" (meaning the ceremony), which "may be said over us at any time," and that all the talk of his marriage to Polly is mere rumor: "I say a thousand things to her (as all gentlemen do) that mean nothing, to divert myself; and now the silly jade hath set it about that I am married to her." Just as Lucy agrees to help Macheath escape, Polly rushes in, crying, "Where is my dear husband?" The "unfortunate rascal" Macheath is caught between his two "wives," and he needs to placate them both, since he needs one to help him out of prison and the other to keep him out of danger and give him vital intelligence. He is a master of equivocation: "Really, Polly, this is no time for a dispute of this sort; for whenever you are talking of marriage, I am thinking of hanging." After Peachum comes in and hauls Polly off, Macheath succeeds in persuading Lucy to set him free. Their tender parting ends the second act.

Act 3

Peachum and Lockit discover from Mrs. Trapes, their business associate, that Macheath is in company with Mrs. Coaxer, and they go off to recapture him. Lucy, convinced meanwhile that Polly has been enjoying Macheath's attentions, tries to get rid of her rival by inviting Polly for a reconciliation and then putting rat poison into a cordial, thinking that "so many die of that naturally that I shall never be called in question." But Polly is suspicious of Lucy's sudden friendliness, and avoids drinking with her. To the distress of both, Macheath is brought back in chains for immediate trial and hanging. In a scene famous for its visual and dramatic symmetry, each girl pleads in vain with her father to suppress his evidence out of mercy. In his cell, the "condemned hold," Macheath attempts to bolster his courage with drink. Polly and Lucy both visit him to take their leave; torn between their pleas, and finally confronted with four more wives, each by him pregnant, he cries, in exasperation: "Here — tell the Shereff's officers I am ready."

As the bell tolls for the final procession to the gallows, the Player

and Beggar of the introduction return, and the Player persuades the Beggar to alter his ending in order to have Macheath reprived, "for an Opera must end happily." Suggesting a celebration, Macheath takes Polly for his partner in the dance — "And for life, you slut, for we were really married" — and the opera ends on a note of gaiety.

SKETCHES OF THE CHARACTERS

Most of Gay's character names — Lockit, Filch, and so on — are suggestive or metaphorical, in the way of comedies since Shakespeare's time, at least. "Peachum," for example, comes from the underworld slang "peach," "to impeach," or to inform. Dolly Trull, Betty Doxy, Jenny Diver, Suky Tawdry, and other names for the ladies all suggest women of low behavior.

Mr. Peachum is a businessman who "acts in a double capacity, both against rogues and for 'em." An employer of thieves and pickpockets and a fence for highwaymen, he also informs on them (the going rate is forty pounds each). Once one of his accomplices is confined in Newgate Prison, he has it in his power to have him acquitted at the Sessions in the Old Bailey — or, when it suits his purposes, to have him transported to the Colonies or hung from Tyburn tree.

Filch, a young apprentice thief, has "as fine a hand at picking a pocket as a woman." He also supplements his income "by helping the ladies to a pregnancy against their being call'd down to sentence." A favorite of Mrs. Peachum, he gives her information against his will.

Mrs. Peachum, though "so partial to the brave" that she thinks "every man handsome who is going to the Camp or the Gallows," is the loyal helpmate who complies with her husband on all decisions concerning her family's safety and business. Mr. and Mrs. Peachum consider their daughter naive but not without commercial potential, and they freely offer her parental advice: "do you think your mother and I would have been so happy together if we had been married?"

Polly Peachum is a winsome lass, very useful to her father "in the way of business." Inexperienced and addicted to romantic literature, she incurs her parents' wrath when they learn she has "play'd the fool and married," and to none other than Captain Macheath. Yet she is shrewd enough to hold her own in the tug-of-war over her husband, and in her rivalry with Lucy Lockit for Macheath's affection.

Captain Macheath, a dashing highwayman, is professionally useful to Mr. Peachum, and even admired by him. But his marriage to Polly compels Peachum to plot to eliminate him as a potential threat — and Macheath's weakness for women makes it possible for Peachum to trap him.

Macheath's Gang (the "gentlemen of the road") — Jemmy Twitcher, Crook-finger'd Jack, Matt of the Mint, and the others — consider themselves "practical philosophers ... of try'd courage and indefatigable industry" who are "for a just partition of the world," by which their fortunes would naturally increase.

Macheath's Ladies (the "ladies of the town") go by such descriptive names as Mrs. Coaxer, Dolly Trull, Mrs. Vixen, Betty Doxy, Suky Tawdry, and Molly Brazen. But his "dear sluts" turn into "decoy ducks" when they betray Macheath to Peachum for money.

Mr. Lockit, as head jailor of Newgate Prison, extorts fees from those of his prisoners — such as Macheath — who can afford to pay for special conveniences and privileges. Moreover, he is in partnership with Peachum — albeit a relationship characterized by mutual distrust — in the business of bribes and informing fees.

Lucy Lockit, daughter of the jailor, is Macheath's "other dear charmer." Despite her worldly experience in the life of a barmaid, she has suffered the "misfortune" of falling in love with the Captain — and, having yielded to him without the formality of marriage, finds herself inconveniently in the family way. When she suspects that Macheath's affections have extended to Polly, she resolves to have revenge.

Mrs. Diana Trapes drives a hard bargain in her business dealings with Mr. Peachum. She buys stolen clothing and jewelry from him, which she in turns resells, her clientele being the very same ladies who are favored by Captain Macheath.

Based in part on essays by Frank Kidson.

SECTION 1 — JOHN GAY

The Author of The Beggar's Opera

John Gay (1685-1732). Portrait engraving.

Stipple engraving, hand-colored. Engraved by W. Smith from a painting by Zinck. Published by T. Thame, December 1, 1775.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

John Gay (1685-1732). Monument, in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, London.

Engraving, printed as the frontispiece to Gay's Fables.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

An elegy to Gay written by Alexander Pope is inscribed on the monument:

Of Manners gentle of Affections mild,
In Wit a Man, Simplicity a Child;
With native Humour temp'ring virtuous rage;
Form'd to delight at once and lash the Age;
Above Temptation in a low Estate,
And uncorrupted ev'n among the Great;
A Safe Companion and an Easy Friend,
Unblam'd thro' Life lamented in thy End;
These are thy Honours, not that here thy Bust,
Is mix'd with Heroes or with Kings thy Dust;
But that the Worthy and the Good shall say,
Striking their pensive bosoms — Here lies GAY.

Gay himself, in his last letter to Pope, wrote:

I begin to look upon myself as one already dead, and desire, my dear Pope, whom I love as my own soul, if you survive me, as you certainly will, if a stone should mark the place of my grave, see these words put upon it: "Life is a jest, and all things show it, I thought so once, but now I know it."

This inscription also appears on Gay's monument.

John Gay's Patroness

Catherine Douglas (1700–1777), Duchess of Queensbury.

"Catharine Hyde, Duchess of Queensberry." Engraved portrait engraved by Joseph Brown after an oil painting by Mary Granville.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

In 1720, Catherine Hyde, daughter of the Earl of Clarendon, married Charles Douglas, 3rd Duke of Queensbury. Often described as "eccentric," she was a friend of members of the literary circle that included Alexander Pope, John Gay, William Congreve, and John Swift. She was a financial supporter of John Gay, and encouraged him materially. Since it was she who persuaded John Rich to produce *The Beggar's Opera*, through offering a financial guarantee, it is assumed that she would have been present at the first performance.

Alexander Pope

Alexander Pope (1688–1744). Portrait engraving.

Mr. Pope. Engraving by G. White after a painting by Geoffrey Kneller, 1722. Published by S. Sympson, [London].

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

The great satirical poet Pope, author of *An Essay on Criticism* (1711), *The Rape of the Lock* (1712–1714), *The Dunciad* (1728) and *An Essay on Man* (1733–1734) was John Gay's closest friend. Gay had great affection and admiration for Pope, who had grown rich from his writing, and who wielded a great and beneficial influence over Gay.

Gay's Assignment of Publication Rights

John Gay (1685–1732). *The Beggar's Opera* and *Fables*. Copyright Assignment.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

On February 6, 1727/28, John Gay signed this agreement selling the copyright for his *Fifty Fables* and *The Beggar's Opera* to Jacob Tonson and John Watts. The document bears Gay's signature and seal.

The beautifully bound manuscript agreement bears Gay's signature

and seal. Gay realized about £94 for the sale of the copyright to Watts and Tonson, just a week after the first performance of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Pills to Purge Melancholy

Thomas D'Urfey (1653-1723). *Wit and Mirth: or, Pills to Purge Melancholy*. London, 1719-1720.

Second (extended) edition, 6 volumes. London, 1719-1720.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Thomas D'Urfey published a song collection called *Wit and Mirth*, better known by its subtitle, *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, that extended to six volumes and several hundred songs. Many of these songs were bawdy or satirical, and they were surely popular in the taverns and other places where gentlemen gathered for convivial amusement. D'Urfey was a popular playwright, but his enduring legacy is this rich anthology of songs of the period; our understanding of the popular music of Gay's time would be much poorer were it not for D'Urfey's *Wit and Mirth*.

D'Urfey's anthology was perhaps the single source most useful to John Gay in selecting the songs for *The Beggar's Opera*. Volume 1 (from a complete set) is opened to show the song *Greenwich Park* ("Come sweet lass, this bonny weather ..."), which was the source for the duet for Lucy Lockit and Polly Peachum, *Come, Sweet Lass*.

Modeled After Nature

James Maclean (1724-1750). "Newgates Lamentation or the Ladys Last Farewell of Maclean."

Engraving, not signed.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

It would be pardonable if the scene depicted in this engraving, the devoted ladies taking their last leave of the condemned criminal, were mistaken for Macheath's final scene in *The Beggar's Opera*, because the circumstances of the notorious highwayman James Maclean paralleled those of Gay's charming ne'er-do-well. Maclean was only three years old when *The Beggar's Opera* was first produced; but in fact there were

two real-life criminals whose exploits had suggested the story of *The Beggar's Opera* to Gay. These were Jack Sheppard, a scoundrel and idler with a talent for escape, and Jonathan Wilde, a seller of stolen goods and employer of thieves who, like Mr. Peachum, also traded in informing on his associates.

SECTION 2 – THE ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre

"South View of the Theatre Royal in Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

Engraving. Shepherd, del., Wise, sc. Published by R. Wilkinson on October 7, 1811.

A nineteenth-century view of the theatre where *The Beggar's Opera* was produced.

John Rich took over the management of Lincoln's Inn Fields when his father died before realizing his plans for restoring the old theatre.

John Rich

William Hogarth (1697-1764). "Rich's Triumphant Entry."

Engraving.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

This comic engraving by William Hogarth shows a procession and a cheering crowd, welcoming the triumphant producer John Rich and author John Gay into Covent Garden.

After some initial uncertainty about the merits of *The Beggar's Opera*, a matter about which Gay's friends were distinctly unhelpful, Gay first offered the piece to Colley Cibber, the manager of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. Cibber rejected it, and it was only then that Gay approached John Rich, manager of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre. Rich was initially dubious about its prospects, and it took the persuasion of Gay's friend, the Duchess of Queensberry, to overcome Rich's reservations. She reportedly offered a financial guarantee.

Within the image of the engraving are banners that read, "Rich for ever" and (inside the theater portico) "Gay for ever." Even as early as February 3, 1728, it was remarked about *The Beggar's Opera* in *The Craftsman* that "Wags say it has made Rich very Gay, and probably will make Gay very Rich."

The Lincoln Inn Fields Theatre Account Book

Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, London. Manuscript receipts book, 1726-1728.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection.

This important manuscript of receipts at the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre, including the financial records for the first season of *The Beggar's Opera*, offers a unique insight into the attendance at John Rich's theatre.

On the night when Gay's new piece was first performed, there were about 1,263 people in the theatre. Working from data contained in this volume, scholars have estimated that the probable capacity of the Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre was about 1,400. Rich's gamble on the play, which had been rejected by his rival manager, Colley Cibber, was amply rewarded.

This is a bound facsimile of the original manuscript in the Harvard Theatre Collection, which was given extensive conservation treatment and disbound for safe handling and preservation.

Sir Robert Walpole

Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745, Prime Minister 1721-1742).

Sr. Robt. Walpole. Engraving by Cooper.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

It was widely observed that *The Beggar's Opera* was a satire on the Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, and his corrupt government. But like the popular assumption that W. S. Gilbert's characterization of Sir Joseph Porter in *H.M.S. Pinafore* was meant to satirize W. H. Smith, the First Lord of the Admiralty a century and a half later, this was probably not meant as a direct reference to Walpole, but only to the corruption and hypocrisy that infected the government at all levels.

Thomas Walker as Macheath

Thomas Walker as Captain Macheath.

"Mr. Walker in the Character of Capn. Macheath." Mezzotint engraving by J. Faber after a painting by J. Ellys. Printed for John Bowles, ca. 1728.

Thomas Walker is said to have been given the rôle of Macheath in the first production of *The Beggar's Opera* because his singing voice was superior to that of the more prominent James Quin, who was originally to have played the part.

Walker continued to play the role of Macheath for many years and was a favorite drinking companion of the fashionable men about town.

Satire on a Satire

"The Stage Medley. Representing the Polite Tast[e] of the Town & the matchless merits of Poet G— [Gay].

"Polly Peachum & Captn. Macheath." Engraving, 1728.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

An engraved caricature both reporting and satirizing the public admiration for *The Beggar's Opera* and ridiculing the public taste.

The engraving is a virtuosic display of *Deceptio Visus*, a single engraving comprising an apparent composite collage of broadsides and engravings. Some of these images are actual engravings of the day, and some of the verses were collected from the contemporary press. One of these reads as follows:

To Polly Peachum

All mankind agree to own,
That when they praise ye most,
They know not whence ye rapture flows,
Or, why thy name's their Toast.
So Coarse a Voice, so Stiff a mien,
A Face so poor in Charms:
Can ne'er demand a just applause,
Or lure us to thy Arms.

Lavinia Fenton's Biography

The Life of Lavinia Beswick, alias Fenton, Alias Polly Peachum.

Griswold Bequest, 1922.

A largely fictional account produced during the height of the first

Polly's popularity. It pre-dates her liaison with the Duke of Bolton.

The first Polly Peachum enjoyed an enormous popularity, but left the stage at the end of the first season to live under the protection of the Duke of Bolton, who later married her.

Lavinia Fenton, the first Polly, left the stage at the end of the first season to live under the protection of the Duke of Bolton, later her husband. Among other popular Pollys who also married in to the nobility are Hanna Norsa (d. 1785), who married Lord Orford; Mary Bolton (1790-1830), who married Lord Thurlow; Catherine Stephens (1794-1830) became the Countess of Essex; and Mary Ann Paton (1802-1864), who left Lord Lennox to whom she was married in favor of Joseph Wood.

Beggar's Opera Playing Cards.

A set of playing cards which were apparently printed for Carrington Bowles during the original run of the play. Each card has a different song from the play, with both words and music. The title of the air and the name of the character who sang it are given, followed by the music (vocal score) and the words, printed as a verse stanza. There are some flute arrangements, too, at the bottom, after the lyrics. The actual playing card symbols are in small squares in the upper-left-hand corners.

[Schultz, p. 19. Footnote: Gay possessed the only complete set of the playing cards he had ever seen. There are now four cards missing.]

Harvard Theatre Collection, 15459.625*

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

One of the most interesting offshoots of this phenomenon shown here is a set of *Beggar's Opera* playing cards, probably printed for Carrington Bowles during the first season of the play. Each card has a different song with the title of the air and the name of the character who sang it, followed by the music and the words, printed as a verse stanza. The playing card symbols are in small squares in the upper-left-hand corners.

SECTION 3 – EIGHTEENTH CENTURY REVIVALS

Benefit Ticket by Hogarth

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. Engraved ticket, "For the Benefit of Mr. Walker."

A significant portion of an actor or theater manager's personal remuneration came from benefit performances, in which some portion (or sometimes all) of the evening's proceeds were handed over to the beneficiary. Typically, a leading actor's contract stipulated that he or she would receive one or more benefit performances in a season.

The scene pictured on the ticket (attributed to William Hogarth, though not signed) is the famous episode in the last act in which Polly and Lucy both entreat their fathers to have mercy on the condemned Macheath (standing in the center, in irons). It is based on Hogarth's well-known painting of the scene.

The Beggar's Opera was first produced at Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre in 1727, and was transferred to Covent Garden in 1732, where it was in fact the first opera performed there. Thomas Walker was the original Captain Macheath.

The Beggar's Opera Compressed

Theatre Royal, Dublin. *Rob Roy MacGregor and The Beggar's Opera*. Playbill, 1832.

Printed playbill, dated June 14, 1832. Last Week but One ... Mrs. Wood and Mr. Wood ... The Entertainments will conclude with the Beggar's Opera Curtailed and Compressed into Two Acts.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

By the early nineteenth century, as *The Beggar's Opera* became an old war-horse as a stage attraction, it was not always thought advantageous to place it at the head of the evening's bill, but rather as a second piece, which was generally shorter and lighter.

In this position it was usually thought necessary to shorten the piece, as in this production. Since the main attraction was the appearance of Mrs. Wood, the playbill makes it clear that her songs were not among those "curtailed."

Captain Macheath as a Travesty Role

Theatre Royal, Dublin. *The Beggar's Opera*. Playbill, 1831.

By Desire and Under the Patronage of His Excellency the Lord Lieutenant. Most Positively the Last Appearance but Two of Madame Vestris. Playbill, June 23, 1831.

Madame Vestris (1797-1856) as Captain Macheath.

"Madame Vestris as Captain Macheath." Engraving published by W. Harrison James, n.d.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

The rôle of the dashing Captain Macheath has often been played by women, *en travesti*, from almost the earliest years. The first woman to appear in London in the part was a Mrs. Roberts, who played the part at Goodman's Fields on May 3, 1732. Other women who portrayed Macheath were Peg Woffington (who played at least three parts — Macheath, Mrs. Peachum, and Diana Trapes — in her London debut at the Haymarket Theatre in 1732), Ann Catley (also well known as a Polly and Lucy), Margaret Farrell (at Covent Garden in 1777), Mrs. Cargill, and Colley Cibber's eccentric daughter, Charlotte Charke.

But the most famous actress who played Macheath as a "trousers" rôle was Madame Vestris (*née* Lucia Elizabeth Bartolozzi). Her success as Macheath led to a brilliant career of male impersonations, although she eventually abandoned Macheath in favor of Lucy. The charming Madame Vestris also became the first woman to manage a theater in London.

The 1777 Covent Garden Version

The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser, London, Wednesday, October 22, 1777.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

In October 1777, *The Beggar's Opera* was revived at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. On this occasion, David Garrick requested Richard Brinsley Sheridan to alter the ending of the opera in order to provide a morally uplifting, happy ending.

This issue of *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser*, published on

October 22, 1777, the day of the third performance of this new production, contains (in the right column) a letter, signed "Candour," that is strongly critical of the alteration of the opera.

The same page also contains (in the left column) bills of that evening's performances at the two Theatres Royal. (The role of Captain Macheath was taken by Mrs. Farrell.) The alteration in *The Beggar's Opera* is signalled by the line, "To conclude with a new scene."

Sheridan's manuscript, containing these alterations, is shown below.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's Manuscript

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816). *The Beggar's Opera*. Manuscript of his version of the Beggar's scenes.

Autograph manuscript, 12 pages, ca. 1777.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

At the suggestion of David Garrick, the scenes between the Beggar and the Player were altered by Sheridan in order to "improve" the general moral tone of the play. The substantial change is that Macheath is to be reformed rather than hung. Part of this manuscript is in Sheridan's writing, and the remainder is in the hand of William Hopkins, the Drury Lane prompter.

The manuscript includes the opera's two "framing" scenes for the Beggar and the Player, at the beginning of the first act and near the end of the last. It consists of a draft copy of the scenes and the separate parts, or "sides," for the Beggar and the Player.

The manuscript is accompanied (above) by a contemporary newspaper editorial criticizing the distortion of a dramatic work for a dubious moral purpose.

Mismatched Casting

Mrs. Webb as Lucy Lockit and Mrs. Edwards as Captain Macheath.

"Performed at a Little Theatre with Great Applause." Engraving.
Published by Thos. Cornell, July 16, 1786.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Mrs. Edwards first performed the rôle of Captain Macheath on July 7,

1786, her stage debut. On July 10, Mrs. Webb took over the part of Lucy. (Mrs. Webb had played the part of Mr. Lockit in William Colman's 1780 travesty production, which featured men in the women's rôles and vice versa.)

Mrs. Webb was reportedly an enormous woman ("one of the most bulky I ever saw," one observer wrote), who had played Falstaff with great success. The subject of the engraving is the mismatch of Lucy towering over the stout highwayman, as well as the ludicrous cross-gender casting of the opera.

The tombstone lying at their feet is inscribed, "Here lies Gay," suggesting, at least, that the production left something to be desired.

SECTION 4 – NINETEENTH CENTURY REVIVALS

Philadelphia.

Chestnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia. *The Beggar's Opera*.
Playbill, 1808.

"Not acted here these ten years." March 18, 1808.

SECTION 7 – TWENTIETH CENTURY REVIVALS

The Amateurs at Jordan Hall.

Playbill.

Before Nigel Playfair's revival was seen in America, a group called The Amateurs of Boston had presented private performances of *The Beggar's Opera* at Whitney Hall in Brookline. These were well received, and three months later they appeared at Jordan Hall for the benefit of the Copley Society Building Fund. At right, a scene from this performance, March 1921.

Nigel Playfair's 1920 Revival at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith

Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London. *The Beggar's Opera*,
Produced by Nigel Playfair.

Color lithograph poster, illustrated by C. Lovat Fraser. Revised version,
January 1922.

Nigel Playfair's production of *The Beggar's Opera*, which opened on June 5, 1920, at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, was as unexpectedly successful as the original production had been. Originally conceived as an inexpensive stop-gap, the production ran for more than three years.

Nigel Playfair's spectacularly successful revival of *The Beggar's Opera* opened on June 5, 1920 at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. It was original intended as a "stop-gap" in the repertory of the small theatre, but it was so popular that it ran for over three years. The sets and costumes were by Claud Lovat Fraser in the year of the artist's premature death.

The music was re-arranged by Frederic Austin, who took the role of Mr. Peachum, and this version has been the one most often used ever since that time.

An array of souvenirs produced in connection with this famous revival is displayed below and to the right.

Program of the Nigel Playfair Production

Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith. *The Beggar's Opera*, produced by Nigel Playfair.

Printed program for September 24, 1923. 8 pages with block-printed wrappers.

The program design bears many characteristics of the Arts and Crafts Movement, to whose ideals Playfair subscribed.

Costume Caricature by Lovat Fraser

Claud Lovat Fraser (1890–1921). Caricature Drawing of the Costume for Captain Macheath in the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith Production.

Costume design for Macheath by C. Lovat Fraser. January 6, 1921. "Dedicated in all admiration to Willy Clarkson — the only man in the world who could tackle this wig." From an album presented to Clarkson by the members of the Jabberwock Club.

Frank E. Chase Fund, purchased in 1945.

This witty drawing, exaggerating the already extravagant wig worn by Captain Macheath and transforming the Macheath's red coat to a brilliant magenta, was drawn for an album assembled in honor of the London wig-maker Willy Clarkson. In the two-volume tribute are contributions by most of the prominent graphic artists and theatrical designers of the time.

Lovat Fraser, one of the most talented designers of the early twentieth century, was barely thirty when he designed Nigel Playfair's production of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1920. He died the next year. *The Beggar's Opera* remains a production with which his name is still very closely connected.

Lyric Hammersmith Production Souvenirs

The tremendous success of Nigel Playfair's production of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1920 led to the production of a wide array of commercial souvenirs, many of which were sold at the theater itself. The marketing of these souvenirs as well as the publication of prints and editions of the words and music represented perhaps the most aggressive and wide-ranging campaign up to that time of production-related goods. Among the many souvenirs produced in connection with this production, the

following are shown here:

Enamelled match box

Cardboard figure calendar

Paper cutout doll figures

Royal Doulton figurine of Polly Peachum

Glazed porcelain, ca. 1922, the figures dressed as in the Lovat Fraser costume.

Porcelain figurines of Polly Peachum and Captain Macheath

Unglazed porcelain, painted, matte finish, ca. 1922, the figures dressed as in the Lovat Fraser costumes.

Glass-mounted print of design by C. Lovat Fraser

With a printed label showing that it was produced for sale.

*Nigel Playfair's Production
The Beggar's Opera, 1920 Revival.*

Caricatures of the principal performers in Nigel Playfair's 1920 revival of *The Beggar's Opera*, by Powys Evans.

Heinemann published an edition of the play with illustrations by the designer of the production, Claud[?] Lovat Fraser. Powys Evans published a volume of caricatures of all [of] the players and the management as well.

John Gielgud's Regency Production

Linda Gray as Lucy Lockit and Audrey Mildmay as Polly Peachum, Act 3.

Joseph Farrington as Mr. Lockit and Roy Henderson as Mr. Peachum, Act 2.

Photographs by Angus McBean, 1940. Contact prints made by the photographer from the original glass negatives.

Angus McBean Archive, purchased in 1970.

In 1940, John Gielgud directed a production set in the Regency period.

It was first presented at Glyndebourne and later moved to the Haymarket Theatre. Michael Redgrave appeared as Captain Macheath and Audrey Mildmay portrayed Polly Peachum.

The Benjamin Britten Version

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976). *The Beggar's Opera*.

Piano-vocal score published by Boosey and Hawkes, London. First edition, 1948. Copy inscribed by Benjamin Britten.

William Morris Hunt Fund, purchased in 1999.

The new musical setting by Benjamin Britten was, as might be expected, musically complex. Like many of his operatic works, it was written with Peter Pears in mind for the leading tenor role. Whereas Gay's original version has few ensembles or choruses, Britten's realization, as can be seen from the pages shown, enriched the texture to provide many ensemble numbers.

The Benjamin Britten Version

George James as Mr. Peachum, Nancy Evans as Polly Peachum, and Flora Nielsen as Mrs. Peachum, Act 1.

Nancy Evans as Polly Peachum and Peter Pears as Captain Macheath, Act 2.

Photographs by Angus McBean, 1948. Contact prints made by the photographer from the original glass negatives.

Angus McBean Archive, purchased in 1970.

In 1948, Benjamin Britten and Tyrone Guthrie conceived a new version of *The Beggar's Opera*, for performance by the English Opera Group. The production was first presented in Cambridge on May 24, and it appeared in London at Sadler's Wells.

A copy of the vocal score of Benjamin Britten's version is shown below to the left.

The Cambridge Drama Festival Production

Cambridge Drama Festival. *The Beggar's Opera*. Window card.

Printed poster. Sanders Theatre, Harvard University, July 1956.

Gift of William Morris Hunt, 1980.

Jack Cassidy as Captain Macheath and Shirley Jones as Polly Peachum.

Photograph by Will Rapport. Cambridge Drama Festival, Sanders Theatre, July 1956.

Boston Globe Drama Desk Photograph Archive.

The Cambridge Drama Festival presented a number of original productions, bringing well-known performers to the Boston and Cambridge area. This production of *The Beggar's Opera* was given at Sanders Theatre at Harvard University in July 1956.

The press made much of the fact that during this production Shirley Jones and Jack Cassidy were married between the matinee and evening performances.

It was just after this production, on September 6, 1956, when the tower of Memorial Hall caught fire and was destroyed.

Student Productions

Yale University. *The Beggar's Opera*, 1912.

Program.

The production at Yale University, in which all of the roles were taken by male undergraduates, apparently pre-dates any Harvard production by more than thirty years.

Boston University School of the Arts. *The Threepenny Opera*.
Boston University Theatre, December 2001.

Program.

Boston University School of the Arts presented a student production of *The Threepenny Opera*, using the 1994 Donmar Warehouse version, with lyrics by Jeremy Sams, which shocked the audience of parents and faculty with a raw production incorporating simulated sexual acts and remarkably vivid language.

Other university productions illustrated in this exhibition were produced at Columbia University and Dartmouth College.

Columbia Theatre Associates

Herbert Senn. Scene design for *The Beggar's Opera*. Brander Matthews Hall, Columbia University, New York, April 1954.

Lent by Herbert Senn.

On the occasion of Columbia University's bicentennial in 1954, the Columbia Theatre Associates presented four plays that had been given in New York City in the year of the college's founding. Among the attractions of 1754 had been a production of *The Beggar's Opera* at the Nassau Street Theatre, and a commemorative production was therefore mounted at Columbia directed by Felix Brentano, conducted by Willard Rhodes, and designed by Herbert Senn.

The musical version used for this production was prepared by Manfred Bukofzer, a musicologist on the faculty of the University of California. The intention of the musical setting was to return to an eighteenth-century sensibility and directness, and to instill a sense of period style and authenticity to the songs and their accompaniments. It was intended to be an antidote to the Frederic Austin arrangement used by Nigel Playfair in 1920.

The sets by Herbert Senn were singled out for special praise in the press notices for the production. The design shown is the main "roll" curtain, as it would have been seen before the play began and during the intervals.

Two photographs of sets for this production, Polly's Bedroom and a Tavern, are shown below.

Boston Academy of Music

Boston Academy of Music. *The Beggar's Opera*. Emerson Majestic Theatre, Boston, September 1998.

Color photograph. Scene from Act 3.

Lent by Richard Conrad.

A recent production in Boston, with Bill Thorpe as Mr. Lockit, Anna Maria Silvestri as Mrs. Trapes, and Richard Conrad as Mr. Peachum.

Harvard University Productions

Programs for two of the student productions at Harvard University.

The Beggar's Opera. Adams House, 1965.

Adams House Drama Society, directed by John Lithgow, Class of 1967, who also played the Beggar, and conducted by Isaiah Jackson, Class of 1966. First seen in Adams House, the production was revived at the end of the season on the Mainstage at Loeb Drama Center. Among the cast was Stockard (Susan) Channing, Class of 1965. Program for the revival at the Loeb Drama Center.

The Beggar's Opera. Lowell House, 2000.

Lowell House Opera, March 2000, the Benjamin Britten version, directed by Fredric Woodbridge Wilson. Program, accompanied by photographs of the production.

The Beggar's Opera and *The Threepenny Opera* have been produced at Harvard University on a number of occasions. The earliest was apparently a one-time performance at the annual Lowell House dinner in December 1935.

Dartmouth College

Dartmouth College. *The Beggar's Opera*, May 1970. Costume design for Mrs. Peachum.

Original costume design for Linda Strohmer as Mrs. Peachum. Ink, pencil, and watercolor. Signed "HBW 69."

Gift of the artist, in honor of Helen D. Willard, 1972.

A design by Henry B. Williams for a production at the Hopkins Center for the Arts, at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. This is one of four designs for this production given by the artist.

SECTION 8 – CRITICISMS AND REACTIONS

A Hogarth Burlesque

William Hogarth (1697–1764). *The Beggar's Opera*.

The Beggar's Opera. Engraved by T. Cook & Son, London, after a painting by Hogarth. Printed for John Bowles, London, n.d.

The gallows are shown in the background in this odd scene in which an animal cast sings on an open-air platform but before what appears to be a theater audience, to the accompaniment of musicians in courtly dress but playing oddly assorted instruments. Ballad sheets are posted on the wall, and another performance in the background seems to have captured the attention of the respectable audience. Above, the figure of Harmony is fleeing the scene.

Beneath the engraving is added the following verse:

Brittons attend – view this harmonious Stage,
And listen to those notes which charm the age.
Thus shall your tastes in *Sounds & Sense* be shown,
And *Beggar's Op'ras* ever be your own.

The Theatre Collection has a number of copies of this engraving, some reversed left-to-right, and some drawn more crudely, suggesting that they came from forged editions.

A Hogarth Satire

William Hogarth (1697–1764). "The Enraged Musician."

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

A satirical engraving by William Hogarth, showing an old man assaulted by all manner of commotion from the street, including street musicians, as well children behaving badly. A bill of *The Beggar's Opera* is posted on the wall to the left of his window.

Attacks on The Beggar's Opera

Thievery A-la-mode: or the Fatal Encouragement. London:
MDCCXXVIII.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, themes, scenes, and songs from *The Beggar's Opera* were used for political satire. This pamphlet is one of the early protests against *The Beggar's Opera* as an incitement to immorality.

Fictitious Letters to Lavinia Fenton

Letters in Prose and Verse, to the Celebrated Polly Peachum: From the Most Eminent of Her Admirers and Rivals ... London, 1728.

London: Printed for A. Millar at Buchanan's Head over-against St. Clement's Church without Temple-Bar, MDCCXXVIII. 24 pages.

*Harvard Theatre Collection, transferred to
Houghton Library, *EC7 A100 72812*

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

A collection of mock letters and poems containing humorous thrusts at Polly's (and Miss Fenton's) sensational popularity.

"Polly Peachum on Fire"

Polly Peachum on Fire, The Beggars Opera Blown Up, and Capt. Mackheath Entangled in his Bazzle-strings. London: Printed for A. Moore, near St. Paul's; and Sold by the Booksellers of London and Westminster. 1728. Engraving.

*Frank E. Chase Fund,
also Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.*

The popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* and its performers produced an apparently unprecedented spate of "occasional" literature and prints, many of which are on display. Some are satirical thrusts at the popularity of Gay's piece, some attack its immorality, and some simply are attempts to cash in on the popularity of the favorite characters.

Captain Macheath's Fictional Memoirs

Memoirs Concerning the Life and Manners of Captain Mackheath. London, 1728.

London, Printed for A. More, MDCCXXVIII [1728].

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

This pamphlet arose from the early popular enthusiasm for *The Beggar's Opera*. A fictitious account of the life history of the fictional Captain Macheath, an early example of a "back-story."

Political Satires

An Epistle from Matt of the Mint ... London: A. Moore, 1729.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

A humorous poem warning Macheath to mend his ways.

Throughout the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, themes, scenes, and songs from *The Beggar's Opera* were used for political satire.

Parody on a Parody

A New Ballad Inscrib'd to Polly Peachum, to the tune of Pretty Parrot Say. By the author of Leheup's Ballad. Dublin, 1728.

Dublin: Printed for Richard Norris, at the Corner of Crane-lane, Essex-street, 1728.

Theatre Collection 15461.415.80, transferred to
Houghton Library, *fEC7 G2523 Z732g v.5 (1)*

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Dublin's original Polly, Mrs. Sterling, seems to have stirred the same interest that Miss Fenton did in London.

Polly Peachum's Jests. London, 1729.

Polly Peachum's Jests [In which are comprised most of the Witty Apothegms, diverting Tales, and smart Repartees that have been used for many Years last past, either at St. James's or St. Giles's: Suited alike to the Capacities of the Peer, and the Porter.] London: [Printed for J. Roberts, at the Oxford Arms, in Warwick-Lane.] M, DCC, XXVIII.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

This small volume contains only one anecdote related to *The Beggar's Opera* and seems to be a mere excuse for a piece of topical literature.

Ernest Lewis Gay notes that this was published on April 9, 1728 according to a notice in the Monthly Chronicle for 1728: [1729], p. 106, no. 22.

Houghton *EC7.G2523.Z732g v. 16(1).

The Immorality of The Beggar's Opera

A Satyrical Poem: or, The Beggar's Opera Dissected. London, 1729.

London: Printed by E. Berington, for J. Wilford near Stationer's Hall.
[1729.]

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.
and Houghton Library 15461.410.85 F*

The poem contains a strong protest against the immorality of *The Beggar's Opera*, an argument that was to continue sporadically throughout the century. It also attests to the continued vogue of the piece and calls Britons to:

Rouse at Shakspear's Call,
His Hamlet suffers, by this spurious Droll.
A Beggar Poet, now has found an Art,
Of pleasing Thousands, with a Tyburn Cart.

The Fool's Opera

Anthony Aston (ca. 1682–ca. 1753). *The Fool's Opera*. Written by Mat Medley [i.e., Aston] and performed by his company in Oxford ... to which is prefix'd, A sketch of the author's life, written by himself. London, Printed for T. Payne, n.d. [1731?] 22 pages.

The Fool's Opera; or, the taste of the age. Written by Mat. Medley [and performed by his company in Oxford. To which is prefix'd, A sketch of the author's life, written by himself.] ...

Medley was the pseudonym of Ant[h]ony Aston, a noted strolling player. The frontispiece to this work provides the only pictures known of Aston, shown in the fool's cap and in the oval inset. The work itself satirizes the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Evert Jansen Wendell Bequest, 1918.

Harvard Theatre Collection, Thr 471.8*,
transferred to Houghton Library, *EC7.As867.731f

The first season of *The Beggar's Opera* and the resulting uproar produced

an unprecedented spate of "occasional" literature and prints. Some are satirical thrusts at the popularity of Gay's piece, some attack its immorality, and some are simply attempts to cash in on the popularity of the favorite characters. Most of the items on display date from the first season, although the play and its characters continued to be favorite topics for pamphleteers for many years.

The Rake's Progress

William Hogarth. Two engravings from *The Rake's Progress*.

"Confined in Prison He Reflects on His Ill Conduct and Misfortunes."

"He Revels with Common Whores at a Tavern in Drury Lane."

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

William Hogarth's suite of nine engravings, *The Rake's Progress*, illustrating the decline and dissolution of Tom Rakewell, followed a suite of six engravings called *The Harlot's Progress*. The two sets of engravings, issued in 1732 and 1735, were among Hogarth's most famous and best-selling works. Both projects were clearly influenced by Gay's *Beggar's Opera*.

The two engravings that are shown here, showing Tom Rakewell consorting with prostitutes (No. 3) and in prison (No. 8), closely resemble scenes in Gay's opera.

"Casey in the Character of Macheath."

Engraving by R. Rylet, based on a painting by D. Craig.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

The scene depicted here is the awkward encounter in Act II between Macheath and his two "wives," Polly and Lucy, when he sings "How happy could I be with either."

As depicted in this engraving, Macheath is cross-eyed and ill-favored, and his two "wives" are middle-aged women, presumably prostitutes. The scene appears to be a prison cell, but in this case, unlike the scene in the opera, all three have mallets that identify them all as inmates.

The Contending Colombines – The Cibber-Clive Controversy

Henry Woodward (attrib.). *The Beggar's Pantomime; or, The Contending Colombines*. London, 1736.

"The Beggar's Pantomime; or, The Contending Colombines. With new songs, and several alterations and additions; Particularly, a sequel to the Contention, call'd Pistol in Mourning. As they are perform'd at the Theatre-Royal in Lincolns-Inn-Fields Dedicated to Mrs. Clive and Mrs. Cibber. ... By Mr. Lun, junior." Third edition. London, C. Corbett and W. Warner, 1736. 24 pages. Thr 417.36.5*

Evert Jansen Wendell Collection, Bequest, 1918.

Catherine Clive (1711–1785), who had played the rôle of Polly Peachum since 1732, raised strong objections when Theophilus Cibber attempted to secure the prized role for his wife, Susannah Cibber (1714–1766). A paper-war ensued, and to further fuel the controversy, *The Beggar's Pantomime* was performed at Lincoln's Inn Fields as a satire on the dispute. In the end, Mrs. Clive retained the part, and Mrs. Cibber was not to play the rôle of Polly Peachum until 1745.

The authorship is attributed to Henry Woodward by Robert W. Lowe; this attribution is in doubt, however, Woodward having been only nineteen at the time.

The Corrupting Influence of The Beggar's Opera

William Augustus Miles (1753–1857). *A Letter to Sir John Fielding, Knt. Occasioned by his extraordinary Request to Mr. Garrick for the Suppression of the Beggar's Opera. To which is added a Postscript to D. Garrick, Esq.* London, 1773.

By William Augustus Miles. London, Printed for J. Bell, 1773.

Evert Jansen Wendell Bequest, 1918.

Sir John Fielding, the half-brother of Henry Fielding, was a London magistrate, credited with having originated a professional police force in London, first known as the Bow Street Runners.

In the most notable case of opposition to the play since 1728, John Fielding is reported to have said that *The Beggar's Opera* "never was represented on the stage without creating an additional number of real

thieves."

Fielding had asked the managers of both theaters, David Garrick and George Colman, to refrain from offering the piece. Colman refused to consider Fielding's request, and, although Garrick was was politely conciliatory, the piece continued to be presented.

Miles's pamphlet is an exaggerated defense of Gay and an attack on Fielding.

SECTION 9 – SEQUELS, PARODIES, AND ADAPTATIONS

A Rebus and a Parody

“The Peace-Botchers.”

“The Peace-Botchers. A New, Satyirical, Political Medley, Being a Parody on the Celebrated One of Macheath’s in the Beggar’s Opera. ... By a disconsolate Englishman.” Letterpress, printed in two colors.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

This is an interesting example of a parody that takes the exact form of the original, which was a medley sung by Macheath, in prison, as he contemplates his impending execution. Macheath’s soliloquy consists of a half-dozen snatches of songs, parodies themselves, like all of the musical numbers in *The Beggar’s Opera*. The parody is a political satire, nothing to do with Gay or his opera.

Above the parody song is a Rebus, headed

A Rum Letter to a Rum Duke on a Rum Occasion by a Rum Fogerum.

Manuscript Score of Polly

Samuel Arnold (1740–1802). *Polly*. Manuscript musical score, 1777.

Manuscript score, in the hand of a copyist, of the Cembalo part, including the tunes, words, and accompaniments of the songs. From a complete set of manuscript instrumental parts.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Samuel Arnold was engaged in 1777 by George Colman as musical director at the Haymarket Theatre, and this set of parts, bearing signs of revision and use, no doubt was produced for and used during Colman’s revival of *Polly*.

Polly: The Sequel

John Gay. *Polly: An Opera. Being the second part of the Beggar’s Opera*.

Written by Mr. Gay. ... London: Printed for the Author.

Gift of the Friends of the Harvard College Library, 1971.

Polly. Manuscript musical score, 1777.

The cembalo part, including the tunes and words of the singer's parts.
Manuscript, not signed.

Well forgotten, *Polly* received a new lease on life in 1922. While Nigel Playfair's wildly popular production of *The Beggar's Opera* was still running at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, the Kingsway Theatre presented a revival of *Polly*. The book had been much revised by Clifford Bax and the music revised and arranged by Frederic Austin. The production was a popular success if not a critical one, and Lilian Davies and Pitt Chatham were received with nearly as much enthusiasm as their counterparts at the Lyric.

"Polly": The Sequel

COLMAN'S PROMPT BOOK FOR POLLY

See TS 2526.201, George Colman the younger's prompt copy made on the 1777 edition.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Gay's "second part of *The Beggar's Opera*" was first published in 1729. Written during the summer of 1728 while the poet was at Bath, the play was to have begun rehearsals in mid-December of that year. The play was returned from the Lord Chamberlain's office on December 12, 1728 -- Rich was officially forbidden to rehearse or perform the piece. It was actually the politics involved with *The Beggar's Opera* which kept *Polly* from the stage. The satire in *Polly* is so general that it leads one to suspect that many of those who agitated for its suppression had not read the play itself. As it happened, Gay capitalized on the attention the piece received as a result of the prohibition, and when he published it made a profit of nearly £3,000.

When it was finally brought to the stage in 1777, George Colman, the elder, had made many alterations in it. His prompt book, made from the original edition, shows the extent of these changes. The production seems scarcely to have been worth waiting for, and was dubbed by one contemporary critic, "a very contemptible production indeed."

polly: the sequel

Polly: an opera. Being the second part of the beggar's opera. Written by Mr.

Gay ... London: Printed for the author. MDCXXIX. The sequel to *The Beggar's Opera* probably realized more money for Gay as a result of being suppressed than it would have had it been presented on the stage. Polly, which had none of the strengths of its predecessor, was suppressed as a result of politics more related to *The Beggar's Opera* than to itself. It did not appear on stage until 1777. George Colman the elder used a copy of the first edition (1729) to prepare his stage version. Despite the extensive alterations shown in this prompt book, the production was not a success — one critic called it "a very contemptible production indeed."

Gift of the Friends of the Harvard College Library, 1971 [1972].

Theatre De Lys Production

The Threepenny Opera. Scene Design by William Pitkin. "The Bordello — Wapping."

Original scene design, ink and watercolor. Theatre De Lys, New York, 1954. Signed "Wm. Pitkin 54." Inscribed "To Katharine With Love."

*Katharine Sergava Papers,
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Bernard Sznycer, 1970.*

The Threepenny Opera. Theatre De Lys Production, National Tour. Poster.

Gypsy Rose Lee as Jenny Diver. Stock window card poster for the national tour, before overprinting, Artcraft Printing Co.

Artcraft Printing Co. Archive, gift of Irene Dash.

Die Dreigroschenoper, Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's adaptation of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, opened in Berlin in 1928. It was first seen in New York at the Empire Theatre in 1933, translated by Marc Blitzstein with the title *The Threepenny Opera*. In 1954, the Blitzstein adaptation was revived at the Theatre De Lys.

Katharine Sergava, a dancer to whom this design was inscribed, was a replacement for Lotte Lenya in the rôle of Jenny Diver.

A national tour followed the New York production. A succession of familiar performers served as the main attraction, in the case of the poster shown, the unlikely choice of Gypsy Rose Lee.

The Threepenny Opera.

Katherine Sergava. *The Threepenny Opera*. Theatre De Lys, New York, revival, 1954.

Photograph by

Gift of Katharine Sergava Sznycer, 1970.

Programs from other productions of *Threepenny Opera* include: Empire Theatre, New York, 1933; Old Tote Theatre Company, Sydney Opera House, 1973; and New York Shakespeare Festival at Vivian Beaumont Theatre, New York, 1977.

The advertisement for *Threepenny Opera*, Prince of Wales Theatre, London, is loaned [sic] by Richard C. Norton, Jr. (Harvard Class of 1974).

The Threepenny Opera in London

The Prince of Wales's Theatre. *The Threepenny Opera*. Costume design by Rosemary Veriol, 1972. Annie Ross as Jenny Diver.

Mary and Donald Oenslager Fund, purchased in 2002.

Annie Ross (b. 1930) is well known as a jazz singer who made records with Dizzy Gillespie and Count Basie, among many other jazz greats.

The Prince of Wales's Theatre production of *The Threepenny Opera* was directed by Tony Richardson (1928-1991). His cast of stars included his wife Vanessa Redgrave as Polly Peachum, Barbara Winsor as Lucy, and Hermione Baddeley as Mrs. Peachum.

The Threepenny Opera at Harvard

Agassiz Theatre, Radcliffe College. *The Threepenny Opera*. The Harvard Gilbert and Sullivan Players, 1965.

Printed window card. Agassiz Theatre, Radcliffe College, April 22-May 1, 1965.

Harvardiana Collection.

Arthur Friedman as Mr. Peachum and Johanna Madden as Mrs. Peachum.

SECTION 10 — A GALLERY OF PERFORMERS

Lavinia Fenton The Original Polly Peachum

Lavinia Fenton (1708–1760). Engraved portrait.

Portrait of Lavinia Fenton. I. Ellys, pinx., I. Tinney, fec., n.d.

The first Polly Peachum enjoyed an enormous popularity, but left the stage at the end of the first season to live under the protection of the Duke of Bolton, who later married her.

Among other popular Pollies who also married in to the nobility are Hanna Norsa (d. 1785), who married Lord Orford; Mary Bolton (1790–1830), who married Lord Thurlow; Catherine Stephens (1794–1830) became the Countess of Essex; and Mary Ann Paton (1802–1864), who left Lord Lennox, to whom she was married, in favor of Joseph Wood. From this succession of “professional” advancements among the ranks of the theatrical profession there arose the term, “The Polly Peerage.”

The “Polly Peerage”

Lavinia Fenton, the first actress to play Polly, left the stage at the end of the first season of the play to live under the “protection” of the Duke of Bolton. In 1751, when his wife died, he surprised the world and married Miss Fenton. While she was the first, she was by no means the last of the “Polly peerage.” Other notable exponents of the part who married into the nobility are shown here. Miss Stephens married the Earl of Essex, Miss Norsa Lord Orford, Miss Bolton Lord Thurlow, and Miss Paton married Lord Lennox.

Miss Hanna Norsa (d. 1785), who married Lord Orford.

S. Harding, [B. Lens], del., R. Clamp, sc. 1802.

Miss Mary Bolton (1790–1830), who married Lord Thurlow.

J. C. Armytage, sc., 1844.

Miss Catherine Stephens (1794–1882), who became the Countess of Essex.

[G. H. Harlow, del.], R. Cooper, sc., 1818.

Miss Mary Ann Paton (1802-1864), who left Lord Lennox, to whom she was married, in favor of Joseph Wood.

Pl. to La Belle Assemblée. 1823.

Mrs. Cantrell

Portrait engraving.

Benefit ticket.

Mrs. Cantrell (fl. 1716-1737) played the role of Polly for the first time on her benefit night, May 4, 1730, at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Her rare benefit night ticket shown here is among the earliest known.

Robert Gould Shaw Collection, given in 1915.

Ann Catley

Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, London. *The Beggar's Opera*.
Playbill, 1781.

The Last Night of Miss Catley's Engagement (By Particular Desire).
Tuesday, February 27, 1781.

Ann Catley (1745-1789). Portrait.

Engraving by J. Jones after a painting by J. Roberts. Published by W. Humphrey, London, 1777.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Ann Catley was a popular performer both as Polly and as Macheath, in Dublin and in London. In the production represented by the playbill shown, she was cast in the rôle of Lucy Lockit.

Death by Travesty

Charles Bannister (1738-1804) as Polly Peachum.

"Mr. Bannister in the Character of Miss Polly Peachum." Engraving by J. R. Smith, after a drawing by J. Sayer, 1781.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection.

At the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane in 1781, George Colman (the elder,

1732-1794) reversed all of the parts in the opera — men taking the female roles, women in the male roles — for comic effect. Charles Bannister, a popular Macheath, a man of considerable physical size and strong voice, was cast as Polly. The *Morning Chronicle* of August 9, 1781 explained the success of his portrayal:

Bannister with great good sense chastely, and suffered the burlesque to arise out of his serious performance of Polly.

At Bannister's benefit on the April 17 following, this comical appearance had an unfortunate effect, however, on at least one member of the audience, as this contemporary account describes:

On April 19, 1782, died Mrs. Fitzherbert, relict of the late Rev. Mr. Fitzherbert of Northamptonshire. On the Wednesday evening before her death, this lady went to Drury-lane Theatre in company with some friends, to see the *Beggar's Opera*. On Mr. Bannister's making his appearance in the character of Polly, the whole audience were thrown into an uproar of laughter; unfortunately the actor's whimsical appearance had a fatal effect on Mrs. Fitzherbert. She could not suppress the laugh that seized her on the first view of this enormous representation; and before the second act was over, she was obliged to leave the theatre. Mrs Fitzherbert not being able to banish the figure from her memory, was thrown into hysterics, which continued without intermission until Friday morning, when she expired.

Catherine Stephens

Catherine Stephens (1794-1882). "The Songstress."

Engraving by G. Stodart after a painting by John Jackson.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

A later member of the "Polly Peerage" sorority, Catherine Stephens became the Countess of Essex after a career as an actress and singer that included the role of Polly Peachum at Covent Garden. She retired from the stage in 1835, and married the octagenarian 5th Earl of Essex three years later.

The painting by John Jackson (1778-1831) upon which this engraving is based is in the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Mrs. Webb and Mrs. Edwards as Lucy Lockit and Captain

Macheath.

"Performed at a little Theatre with great Applause." Engraving, 1786.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Mrs. Webb (left) as Lucy Lockit and Mrs. Edwards (right) as Captain Macheath. Not all of the ladies who attempted the part of Macheath met with unqualified success, as this satirical print indicates. A short, plump Mrs. Edwards dressed in the Captain's breeches is shown in absurd contrast to the enormous Mrs. Webb as Lucy Lockit, who towers over her.

The toppled gravestone, inscribed "The Beggar's Opera," suggests the ludicrous effect of the production.

Henry Liverseege Engravings

Henry Liverseege (1803-1832). Captain Macheath and Polly Peachum.

Mezzotint engravings by William Ward from paintings by Henry Liverseege. Published August 1832 by Moon, Boys & Graves, London and Manchester.

Ernest Lewis Gay Collection, Bequest, 1927.

Liverseege's skill as an artist, and Ward's as an engraver, is nowhere better shown than in the volume of mezzotint engravings published in the year of the artist's premature death by Moon, Boys & Graves. Liverseege, sickly from childhood, slight, and deformed, was born in Manchester. After achieving some success there, he moved to London in 1828, where he met with little success and failed to gain admission to the Royal Academy.

Whether specific actors posed for these pictures is not known, but other engravings in the series do identify the subjects by name. It is possible that the paintings were commissioned by the art collector Benjamin Hick, the founder of the iron foundry of Hick, Hargreaves & Co. in Bolton, since the engraving of Macheath states that the painting was in his collection.

SECTION 11 – THE BEGGAR’S OPERA IN PRINT

John Watts was the first printer of *The Beggar’s Opera*, and also of the numerous ballad operas that followed it. His press was in Wild Court, Lincoln’s Inn fields, and it was with him that Benjamin Franklin worked as a journeyman, before Watts printed the opera.

First edition: *The Beggar’s Opera*, as it is acted at The Theatre Royal in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, written by Mr. Gay, to which is added the musick engraved on copper plates; London, printed for John Watts 1728, price 1s. 6d. Octavo. The music is engraved on sixteen pages at the end of the book; there is no overture.

Second edition: with the overture, printed by Watts, music cut in wood blocks and inserted into the text. Also 1728.

Third edition: Quarto, “in a manner much superior to the earlier ones” [Frank Kidson]; 1729. Music beautifully engraved, the airs with the basses, 46 pages of music.

Further editions: 1765, octavo. Engraved frontispiece after F. Hayman. Reprint of second edition, with wood blocks inserted in the text. Some of the blocks are carelessly placed upside down. Overture cut in wood. Frontispiece illustration engraved by C. Grignion after Francis Hayman’s painting.

W. Strahan, successor to Watts and Tonson copyright, published editions with music, dated 1771 and 1777.

Publication History

John Watts was the first printer of TBO, and also of the numerous ballad operas that followed it. His press was in Wild Court, Lincoln’s Inn fields, and it was with him that Benjamin Franklin worked as a journeyman, before Watts printed the opera.

First edition: *The Beggar’s Opera*, as it is acted at The Theatre Royal in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, written by Mr. Gay, to which is added the musick engraved on copper plates; London, printed for John Watts 1728, price 1s. 6d. Octavo. The music is engraved on sixteen pages at the end of the book; there is no overture.

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Another edition: 1765, octavo. Engraved frontispiece after F. Hayman. Reprint of second edition, with wood blocks inserted in the text. Some of the blocks are carelessly placed upside down. Overture cut in wood. Frontispiece illustration engraved by C. Grignion after Francis Hayman's painting.

W. Strahan, successor to Watts and Tonson copyright, published editions with music, dated 1771 and 1777.

The First Edition of the Libretto

The Beggar's Opera. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. Written by Mr. Gay. London, 1728.

The Beggar's Opera. As it is acted at the Theatre-Royal in Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. Written by Mr. Gay. London: Printed for John Watts ... MDCCXXVIII.

Gift of Harold Murdock, 1935.

The first edition was issued on the day of the fourteenth performance.

The second editions, also on display, prefixed the music to each song, and one issue included the cast of the "Lilliputian" company which performed in January 1729.

First Edition of the Libretto 1728

- [1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR'S | OPERA. | As it is A(ct)ed at the | THEATRE-ROYAL | IN | LINCOLNS-INN-FIELDS. | [Rule] | Written by Mr. GAY. | [Rule] | – Nos hæc novimus e(ss)e nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | The SECOND EDITION: | To which is Added | The OUVERTURE in SCORE; | And the MUSICK prefix'd to each SONG. | [Double rule.] LONDON: | Printed for JOHN WATTS, at the Printing-O{ffi}ce | in Wild-Court, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. | MDCCXXVIII. | [Price 1s. 6d.]"
- [2] Advertisements: March 27, 1728. [Second edition of Gay's Fables in verse.] May 24, 1728. "This day is Publish'd, The TUNES to the SONGS in the BEGGAR'S OPERA Transpos'd for the FLUTE. Containing Sixty-Nine Airs. Printed for John Watts, at the Printing-Office in Wild-Court, near Lincoln's Inn-Fields."

[3] A TABLE of the SONGS.

[4-5] Dramatis Personæ. [Including "The Names of the Lilliputians."]

Note: On flyleaf, ownership signature and date, "Ernest L Gay | Dec. 5, 1904" followed by a note: "A copy of the latest of the 4 issues of the 2nd ed. It contains on the verso of the title-page two advertisements, dated "March 27, 1728" & "May 24, 1728" respectively. Another distinguishing feature of this issue is that it contains the "ouverture in score. ¶ The 1st & 2nd issues of this ed. contain only the advertisement dated, "March 27, 1728." ¶ Contains "The names of the Lilliputians" who acted in the "Beggar's Opera," p. [4]." ¶ This issue is later than the issue which contains both the "March" & the "May" ads., but not "The names of the Lilliputians."

Peg Woffington and the Lilliputian Companies
Second Edition of the Libretto

The Second Edition.

The second edition of *The Beggar's Opera*, published later in 1728, had the music "prefix'd to each song." The earlier issues had printed the music separately at the end of the volume.

Griswold Bequest, 1922.

Second Edition of the Libretto
1728

Collation:

[1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | As it is A{ct}ed at the | THEATRE-ROYAL | IN | LINCOLNS-INN-FIELDS | [Rule] | Written by Mr. GAY. | [Double rule] | – Nos hæc novimus e{ss}e nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | THE THIRD EDITION. | [Double rule] | LONDON: | Printed for JOHN WATTS, at the Printing O{ffi}ce in | Wild Court, near Lincoln's-Inn-Fields. MDCCXXVIII."

[2] Dramatis Personæ: "Drammatis Per{s}onæ. [sic] |" [The 1727 cast.]

[3] First page of text: "[Ornamental rule] | INTRODUCTION | BEGGAR. PLAYER. | ... | A 2 [Catchword:] as"

72 Last page of text: [Running title:] "72 The BEGGAR's OPERA. Act III | | [Catchword:] A"

73 [Ornamental rule] | A | SONG | ON | Polly Peachum. | To the Tune of, Sally in our Alley. | ... | [Catchword:] The"

Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of Ernest Lewis Gay, 1927.

Front free endpaper: [Handwritten note:] "Contains pp. 73-74. "A song on Polly Peachum."

Call number: *EC7.G2F23B.1728e, formerly 15459.628.75*

The Beggar's Opera was performed by a company of children billed as "Lilliputians" at Lincoln's Inn Fields in January of 1729. They gave fifteen performances and their names were added to the dramatis personae of the second edition of the play, shown here. Miss Elizabeth Binks holds the distinction of being the first female to play Macheath in London. The part of Peachum was also played by a girl. In Dublin, audiences were treated to a production of *The Beggar's Opera* presented by Madame Violante and her company of children before they had seen a professional company.

It was in this production that Peg Woffington made her first appearance on any stage in the role of Polly.

She made her London debut in 1732, again in *The Beggar's Opera*, but now playing three roles — Macheath, Mrs. Peachum and Diana Trapes. She is shown here in the role of Sir Harry Wildair.

(Margaret Woffington), 1714?-1760, English actress, b. Dublin. Her charm and beauty as a child attracted attention, and at the age of 10 she acted in the role of Polly Peachum in a Lilliputian production of *The Beggar's Opera*. She made her first important appearance in Dublin in 1737 as Ophelia and followed it with her greatest role, the breeches part (male role) of Sir Harry Windair in Farquhar's *Constant Couple*, which in 1740 led to her engagement by John Rich for Covent Garden. She was Garrick's leading lady in London and Dublin from 1742-48. Her attachment to Garrick was the most publicized of her numerous affairs. Ill health compelled her to retire in 1757. She was best suited for comedy, although her grace and vivacity helped to overcome the harshness of her voice in tragic roles. Charles Reade's play *Masks and Faces* and his novel *Peg Woffington* are based on her life.

Third Edition of the Libretto 1733

- [1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | As it is A{ct}ed at the | THEATRE-ROYAL | IN | LINCOLNS-INN-FIELDS. | [Rule] | Written by Mr. GAY. | [Rule] | — Nos hæc novimus e{ss}e nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | The THIRD EDITION: | To which is Added | The OUVERTURE in SCORE; | And the MUSICK prefix'd to each SONG. | [Double rule] | LONDON: | Printed for

JOHN WATTS at the Printing-Office | in Wild-Court near Lincoln's-Inn
Fields. MDCCXXXIII. | [Price 1s. 6d.]"

[2] Advertisements, similar to the second edition but lacking dates.

[3] "[Ornamental rule] | A | TABLE of the SONGS. | ... | [Signature:] A 2
[Catchword:] AIR 26"

Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of Ernest Lewis Gay, 1927.

Front free endpaper: [Ownership note:] "Ernest L Gay | from F.L.G."

Call number: *EC7.G2523B.1729ac, formerly 15459.633*

The Third Edition of the Libretto

1733

[1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | As it is Acted at the | THEATRE-
ROYAL | IN | LINCOLNS-INN-FIELDS. | [Rule] | Written by Mr. GAY. |
[Rule] | – Nos hæc novimus esse nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | The THIRD
EDITION: | To which is Added | The OUVERTURE in SCORE; | And the
MUSICK prefix'd to each SONG. | [Double rule] | LONDON: | Printed for
JOHN WATTS at the Printing-Office | in Wild-Court near Lincoln's-Inn
Fields. MDCCXXXIII. | [Price 1s. 6d.]"

[2] Advertisements, similar to the second edition but lacking dates.

[3] "[Ornamental rule] | A | TABLE of the SONGS. | ... | [Signature:] A 2
[Catchword:] AIR 26"

Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of Ernest Lewis Gay, 1927.

Front free endpaper: [Ownership note:] "Ernest L Gay | from F.L.G."

Harvard Theatre Collection, formerly 15459.633*, transferred to
Houghton Library, *EC7.G2523B.1729ac

Seventh Edition of the Libretto

1737

[1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | Written by Mr. GAY. | [Rule] | –
Nos hæc novimus esse nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | THE SEVENTH EDITION. |
[Rule] | [Ornament] | [Double rule] | LONDON: | Printed for the
Proprietors, and sold by the | Book{sell}ers in Town and Country. | [Rule
above numerals:] M.DCC.XXXVII"

[2] Blank.

[3] Dramatis Personæ: "[Ornamental rule] | Dramatis Personæ. | ... |
[Catchword:] INTRO-" [Not the 1727 cast.]

Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of The Bequest of Evert Jansen
Wendell, 1918.

Harvard Theatre Collection, 15459.637.15*

Fifth Edition of the Libretto
1742

- [1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | Written by Mr. GAY. | [Rule] | – Nos hæc novimus e[ss]e nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | THE FIFTH EDITION. | To which is Prefix'd the | OUVERTURE in SCORE: | And the MUSICK to each SONG. | [Rule] | [Ornament] | [Double rule.] LONDON: | Printed for JOHN WATTS at the Printing-Office in | Wild-Court near Lincoln's-Inn Fields. | [Rule] | M DCC XLII. Price 1s. 6d."
- [2] Advertisements. [Full page.]
- [3] Dramatis Personae: "DRAMATIS PERSONÆ. | ... | [Catch-word:] INTRO-" [Not the 1727 cast.]
- Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of Ernest Lewis Gay, 1927.
- Front free endpaper: "Replaces an inferior copy. 3 July 05 Anderson"
- Harvard Theatre Collection, 15459.642*

Seventh Edition of the Libretto
1746

- [1] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | [Red letters:] WRITTEN by Mr. GAY. | [Rule] | – Nos hæc novimus e[ss]e nihil. Mart. | [Rule] | [Red letters:] THE SEVENTH EDITION. | [Rule] | [Ornament] | [Double rule] | [Red letters:] LONDON: | Printed for the PROPRIETOR, and {s}old by the | Book {s}ellers in Town and Country. | [Rule] | [Red letters:] MDCCXLVI"
- [2] Dramatis Personae: "[Ornamental rule] | Dramatis Personæ. | ... | [Catch-word:] INTRO-" [Not the 1727 cast.]
- [3] First page of text: "INTRODUCTION. | BEGGAR, PLAYER. | ... | [Signature:] A 2"
- [? - ?] "TABLE of the SONGS. | ..."
- Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of Ernest Lewis Gay, 1927.
- Harvard Theatre Collection, 15459.646*.

1765 Edition of the Libretto
1765

- [2] Frontispiece: Engraved portrait Polly Peachum kneeling to her father, by Hayman.
- [3] Title: "THE | BEGGAR's | OPERA. | Written by Mr. GAY. | To which is Prefixed the | OVERTURE in SCORE: | And the MUSICK to each SONG. | [Engraved portrait of Gay, with the motto from Martial.] | LONDON: | Printed for J. and R. Tonson. | [Rule] | MDCCLXV. Price 1s. 6d."

[4] Blank.

[5] A | TABLE of the SONGS. | ... | A 3

[6] DRAMATIS PERSONÆ. | ... [The 1727 cast.]

[7] INTRODUCTION. | BEGGAR, PLAYER. | ...

Front pastedown endpaper: bookplate of Ernest Lewis Gay, 1927.

Front free endpaper: Ownership signature, "Ernest L Gay | Jan 5, 1904 |
Substituted for an inferior copy."

Harvard Theatre Collection, 15459.665*

1802 Edition of the Libretto

[1] THE SONGS | IN | THE BEGGAR'S OPERA. | AS PERFORMING | AT
THE | THEATRES ROYAL, | [Black letter] Drury Lane and Covent
Garden. | [Rule] | Corre[ct]ed from the Prompt Books of both Theatres. |
[Double rule] | LONDON: | Printed for J. RIDGWAY, York Street, St.
James's Square. | 1802. | [Double rule] | [Price Tenpence.]

[?] Dramatis Personae. [Listing both Drury Lane and Covent Garden casts.]
Imprint at bottom: "[Rule] | S. GOSNELL, Printer, | Little Queen Street,
Holborn,"

[a2] THE SONGS | IN THE | BEGGAR'S OPERA | [Rule] | ...

(24) | THE END. | ...

The Oxberry "Correct" Edition

Oxberry Edition. *The Beggar's Opera*, by John Gay. London, 1818.

Published for the Proprietors, by W. Simpkin and R. Marshall,
Stationer's Court, Ludgate-Street, etc. 1818. Printed by William Oxberry
and Co., Printers, London.

On the title page, the claim is made that this is "The only edition
existing which is faithfully marked with the stage business and stage
directions, as it is performed at the Theatres Royal."

If this is true it is a shame, since it can be seen from the pages shown
that the entire point of the ending of the opera has been lost through the
excision of the scene in which the Beggar and Player return to dispute
the Beggar's original ending, in which Macheath was to be justly
executed. Instead, the Mob simply cry "A reprieve!" and the opera ends
with a song.

AUDIO PROGRAM

FIRST PROGRAM

1979 Recording

Denis Stevens Version

Denis Stevens, Conductor

Accademia Monteverdiana Chorus and Orchestra

Singers: Edgar Fleet, Mr. Peachum; Margaret Cable, Mrs. Peachum; Angela Jenkins, Polly Peachum; Vernon Midgley, Filch; Nigel Rogers, Captain Macheath; John Noble, Mr. Lockit; Shirley Minty, Lucy Lockit.

Our Polly is a sad slut (Mr. & Mrs. Peachum)
I, like a ship, in storms (Polly)
O ponder well, be not severe (Polly)
Pretty Polly, say (Macheath & Polly)
O what pain it is to part (Polly)
Fill every glass, for wine inspires us (Gentlemen)
Youth's the season made for joys (Ladies)
When you censure the age (Lockit)
Cease your funning (Polly)
Why, how now, Madame Flirt? (Lucy & Polly)
My love is all madness and folly (Lucy)
What gudgeons are we men (Lockit & Peachum)
A curse attend that woman's love (Polly & Lucy)
Here I stand like the Turk (Finale) (Macheath & Company)

1955 Recording

Frederic Austin Version

Malcolm Sargent, Conductor

Glyndebourne Festival Chorus and Orchestra

Singers: Owen Brannigan, Mr. Peachum; Alexander Young, Filch; Constance Shacklock, Mrs. Peachum; Elsie Morison, Polly Peachum; John Cameron, Captain Macheath; Ian Wallace, Mr. Lockit; Monica Sinclair, Lucy Lockit.

Through all the employments of life (Peachum)
'Tis women that seduces all mankind (Filch)
Our Polly is a sad slut (Peachum & Mrs. Peachum)
Can love be controlled by advice? (Polly)
A fox may steal your hens, sir (Peachum & Mrs. Peachum)
My heart was so free (Macheath)
Let us take the road (Gentlemen)
If the heart of a man (Macheath)
When you censure the age (Lockit & Peachum)
Cease your funning (Polly)
O cruel, cruel fate (Macheath's soliloquy)
Thus I stand like the Turk (Finale) (Macheath & Company)

ca. 1985 Recording

Music in England at the Time of Hogarth
Jeremy Barlow, Conductor
The Broadside Band

Singers: Patrizia Kwella, soprano; Paul Elliott, tenor.

If the heart of a man (Macheath), preceded by *Would you have a young virgin of fifteen years*, from Thomas D'Urfey's *Pills to Purge Melancholy*, Gay's source for this tune

1954 Recording

The Threepenny Opera
by Kurt Weill and Bertold Brecht
Marc Blitzstein Adaptation
Theatre De Lys, New York
Original Cast Album

Singers: Gerald Price, Street Singer; Martin Wolfson, Mr. Peachum; Charlotte Rae, Mrs. Peachum; Jo Sullivan, Polly Peachum; Scott Merrill, Mack the Knife; Beatrice Arthur, Lucy Brown; Lotte Lenya, Jenny Diver.

Moritat (The Ballad of Mack the Knife) (Street Singer)
Morning Anthem (Peachum)

Pirate Jenny (Jenny)
The Useless Song (Peachum)

SECOND PROGRAM

1992 Recording

Benjamin Britten Version
Steuart Bedford, Conductor

Singers: Robert Lloyd, Mr. Peachum; Christopher Gillett, Filch; Anne Collins, Mrs. Peachum; Ann Murray, Polly Peachum; Philip Langridge, Captain Macheath; John Rawnsley, Mr. Lockit; Yvonne Kenny, Lucy Lockit.

'Tis Woman that seduces all mankind (Filch)
If love the virgin's heart invade (Mrs. Peachum)
Our Polly is a sad slut (Mrs. Peachum & Company)
O Polly, you might have toyed and kissed (Mrs. Peachum, Polly & Company)
The turtle thus with plaintive crying (Polly)
My heart was so free (Macheath)
Were I laid on Greenland's coast (Macheath & Polly)
Let us take the road (Gentlemen)
If the heart of a man is depressed with cares (Macheath)
The first time at the looking-glass (Macheath)
Cease your funning, force or cunning (Polly & Company)
Why how now, Madame Flirt? (Lucy & Polly)
The modes of the court (Macheath & Company)
What gudgeons are we men (Lockit & Peachum)
A curse attends a woman's love (Polly & Lucy)
The charge is prepared (Company)
Thus I stand like the Turk (Finale) (Macheath & Company)

1940 Recording

John Gielgud Production
Michael Mudie, Conductor
Glyndebourne Festival Chorus and Orchestra

Haymarket Theatre, London, transferred from the Glyndebourne
Festival

Singers: Roy Henderson, Mr. Peachum; Constance Willis, Mrs. Peachum; Audrey Mildmay, Polly Peachum; Michael Redgrave, Captain Macheath; Joseph Farrington, Mr. Lockit; Linda Gray, Lucy Lockit.

Our Polly is a sad slut (Mrs. Peachum)
O Polly, you might have toyed and kissed (Mrs. Peachum,
Polly, Peachum)
My heart was so free (Macheath)
Youth's the season (Ladies)
Which way shall I turn me? (Macheath)
Dance of the Prisoners in Chains (Hornpipe)

1968 Recording

Benjamin Pearce-Higgins Version
Toby Robertson Production
Neil Rhoden, Conductor
Apollo Theatre, London
Original Cast Album

Singers: Richard Durden, Beggar; James Cossins, Mr. Peachum; Hy Hazell, Mrs. Peachum; Jan Waters, Polly Peachum; Peter Gilmore, Captain Macheath; Frances Cuka, Lucy Lockit.

Introduction (Beggar, Peachum)
Through all the employments of life (Peachum & Company)
If the heart (Macheath)
In pimps and politicians (Peachum & Company)
Come, sweet lass (Lucy & Polly)
All you who behold This terrible sight (Macheath & Company)

ca. 1978 Recording

Kurt Weill
Songs from The Threepenny Opera (excerpts)

Bernard Herrmann, Conductor
London Festival Recording Ensemble

