

‘And Fashion Makes me Sing’:
Song, Celebrities and
The Beggar’s Opera

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THE BEGGAR'S OPERA: A THEATRICAL REVOLUTION

The Beggar's Opera.
Act III, scene 9, air 55.
William Hogarth. Oil
on canvas.
1731. Tate Gallery,
London



John Ralph, *The Fashionable Lady* (1730), p.94

‘I am really ashamed to see a *British* Audience shout to insipid Farces that have mistaken their Climate, and intruded on the Theatre Royal, instead of Bartholomew-Fair or the Borough. – For every little Creature now, who has ever scribbled a Popular Ballad, or an amorous Song, thinks himself capable of writing an *English Opera*, and charming the politest Audience’



Rule of Popular Taste
in Entertainment
(‘Pop’ singers,
Musicals)

ADELE



Monetization of
Celebrity Culture
in Politics and
Entertainment



Challenge to
Authority
through Live
Comedy



*Three-Penny
Opera*: Bertoldt
Brecht ‘Theatre
of Alienation’

conditions



complaints



satire's
language



Changing Conditions

Revolution: Information-sharing technology

Globalization of trade

Extreme partisanship in politics

Common Complaints

Limited voting rights

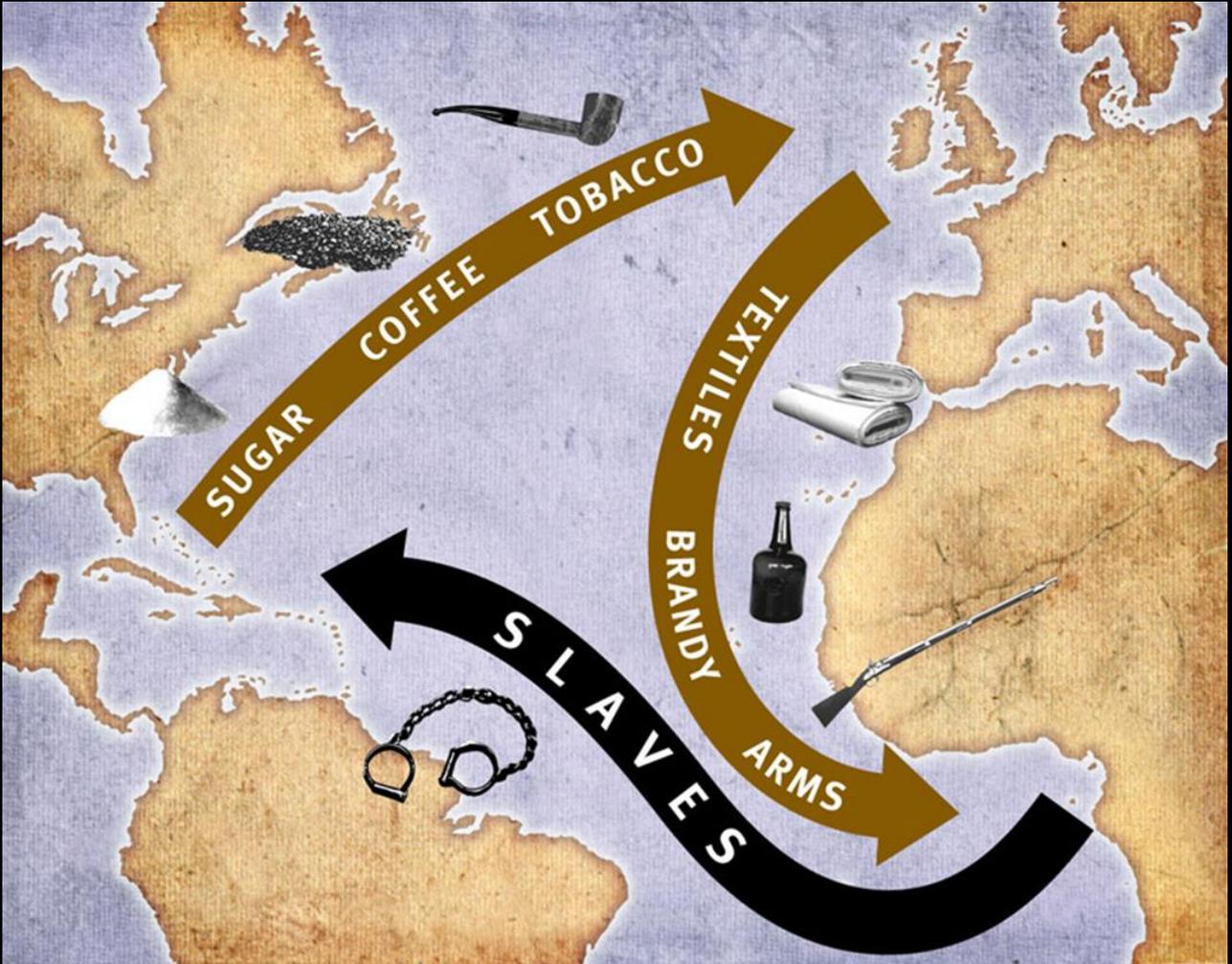
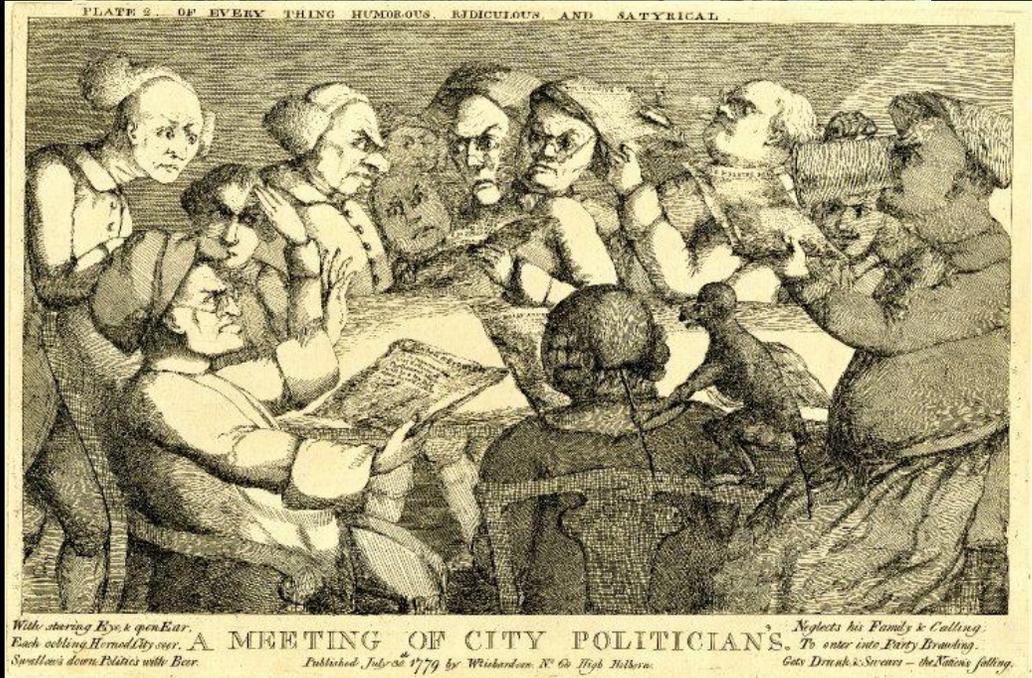
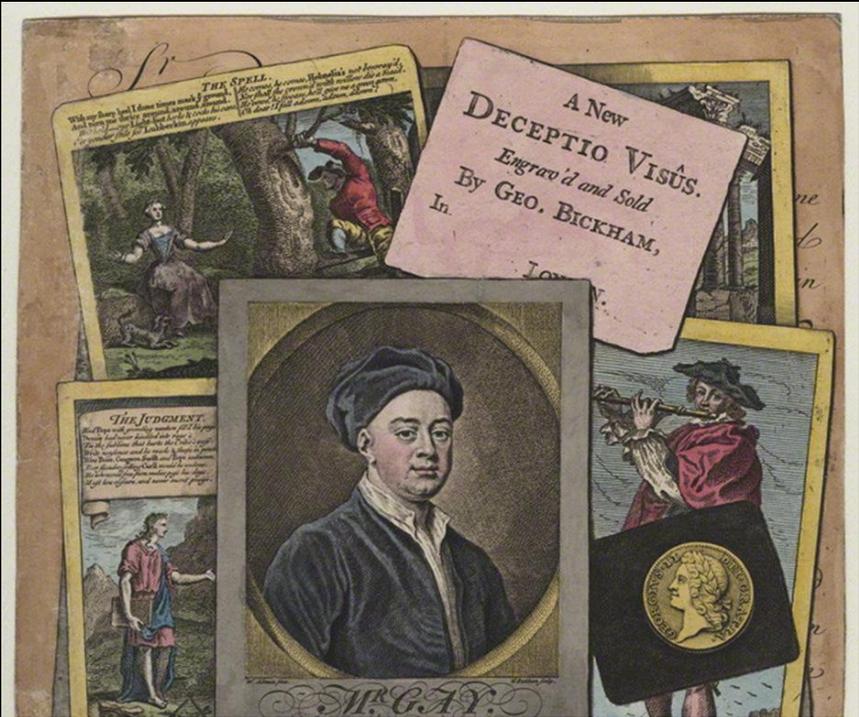
Manipulation of elected seats

Imposed government leader

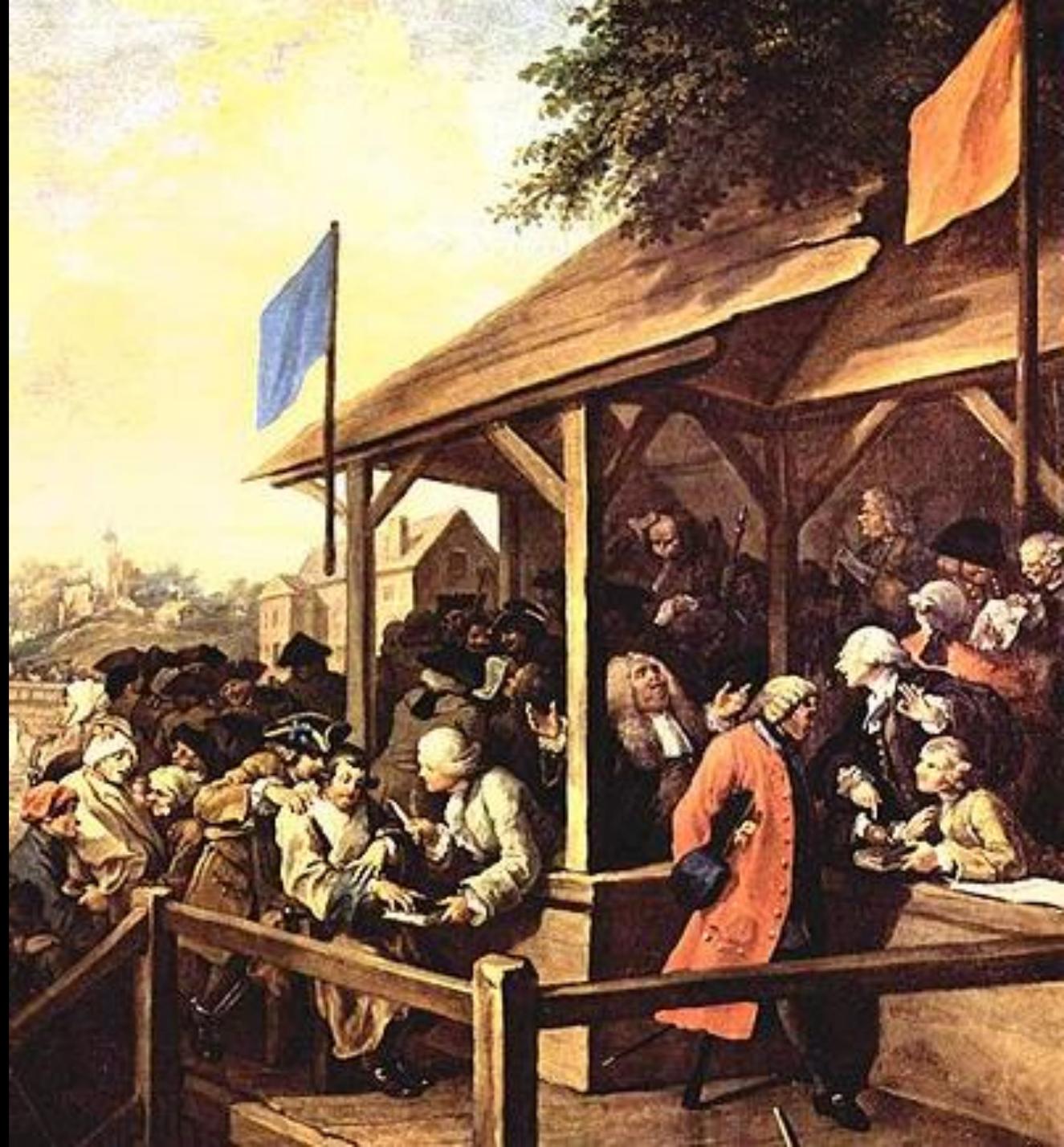
Market crash

Anxiety over female empowerment

18th-Century Britain: Changing Conditions



18th-Century Britain: Common Complaints



Queen Caroline and Sir Robert Walpole



George II was 'guided' by his wife, who had been 'engross'd & Monopolis'd' by Walpole 'to a degree of shutting every body out & making her deaf to every thing [that] did not come from him'

Lady Cowper ('Diary', c 1720 fols. 104v, 75r)

Satire's Language: Butts as in *The Golden Rump*

"a Golden Tube... with a large Bladder at the End, resembling a common Clyster-Pipe" into the Pagod's Rump, "to comfort his Bowels, and to appease the Idol, when he lifted up his cloven Foot to correct his Domesticks."



Designed by the Author of Common Sense.

Published according to Act of Parliament 1737.

Price 1.



JOHN GAY (1685–1732) AND HIS CIRCLE

- Impoverished family, had been leading civilians of Barnstaple, forced into being London draper's apprentice c. 1705
- 1711: becomes an 'élève' of the (3-year younger) poet and satirist Alexander Pope
- 1714: member of 'Scriblerus Club', an informal group of literary men with Tory sympathies– Pope, Jonathan Swift, John Arbuthnot among them – who aim to satirize the abuses of learning
- 1715: *The What d'Ye Call* first stage hit and first stage parody, but next play (1717) damned, because Alexander Pope thought to be its author
- 1715-1720: profits from subscriptions to publications, but no permanent post or court preferment; nomadic visitor-household member to nobility, accompanying Sir William Pulteney to France
- 1727: turns down a humiliatingly low post at court

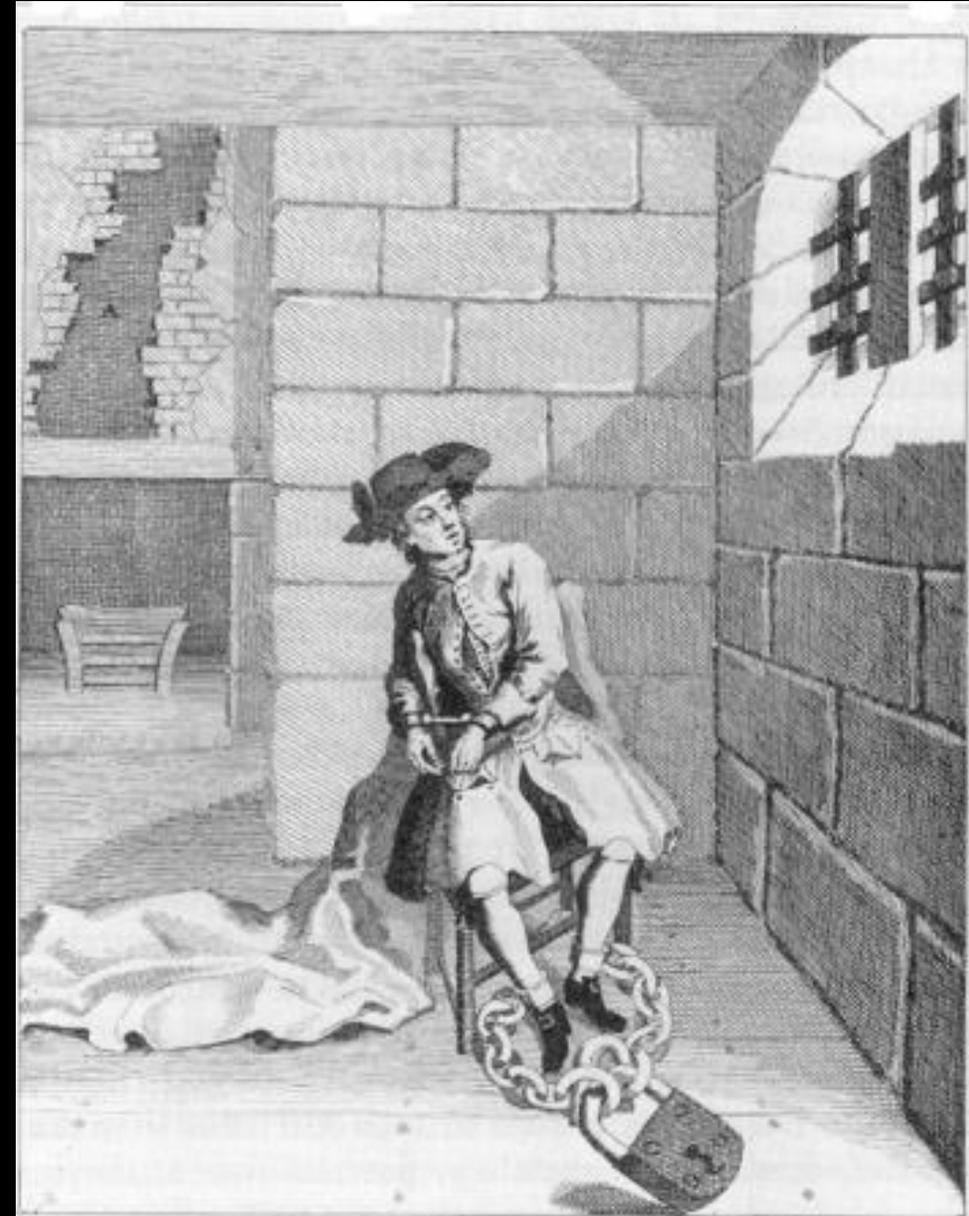
John Gay to Alexander Pope 1727: 'now all my expectations are vanished; and I have no prospect, but in depending wholly upon myself'

*THE
BEGGAR'S
OPERA:
The Action*



The Thrill of Reality

- Story source: famous thief Jack Sheppard and the criminal underworld master and fence Jonathan Wild (fence = someone who sells stolen goods)
- Both famous: Sheppard, folk-hero escaped from Newgate prison; four times escaped prison; finally hung in 1724 at Tyburn – huge public spectacle crowds perhaps 200,000 (i.e. one-third of London) -> ballads, biographies (Daniel Defoe), stage pantomime: *Harlequin Sheppard* (Drury Lane, 1724)





Jack
Sheppard's
Escape



The Hanging of Jack Sheppard



Jack Sheppard being led to the gallows.



Execution of the famous Jack Sheppard.



'The Beggar' John Gay speaks in *The Beggar's Opera*

“You may observe such a similitude of Manners in high and low Life, that it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable Vices) the fine Gentleman imitate the Gentlemen of the Road, or the Gentleman of the Road, the fine Gentleman”

Moral: “ to have shown that the lower Sort of People have their Vices in a degree as well as the Rich: And that they are punished for them’



18th-century
Italian opera in
London:
“exotic and
irrational
entertainment”



*O how refin'd how elegant we're grown!
What noble Entertainments Charm the Town!
Whether to hear the Dragon's roar we go,
Or gaze surpris'd on Fawks's matchless Show,*

*Or to the Opera's, or to the Masques,
To eat up Ortelans, and empty Flasques
And rifle Pies from Shakespear's clinging Page
Good Gods, how great's the gusto of the Age.*

Price 1 shill. 1742.



In 1727,
Factions
for First
Sopranos:
Cuzzoni vs
Faustina



Fig. Faustina
in d. Gio: Euro
nel 1716
nell'Aridanza

Dramatis Personae

The Beggar's Opera

Mr Peach'um (Jonathan Wild) =

First Minister Robert Walpole

Mrs Peachum = Queen Caroline

Macheath = Jack Sheppard, Robert Walpole,
heroic lover

Polly Peach'um = Italian opera prima donna
Faustina, sentimental heroine

Lucy Lockit = Italian opera prima donna Cuzzoni
and tragic she-queen



Action: *The Beggar's Opera*

Act I: Discovery of Polly's marriage to Macheath, their declaration of fidelity, his flight

Act II: Macheath visits to his favourite brothel, and tells his gang he must quit London; betrayal by his ex-mistress leads to his arrest; Peach'um and Lockit agree to split Macheath's fortune; Macheath persuades Lucy Lockit to help him escape; Polly visits Macheath and provokes Lucy who determines to help her lover

Act III: Lockit rages at Lucy for having effected Macheath's escape; visiting Peach'um, Lockit finds out about Macheath's whereabouts; Lucy summons Polly to Newgate and tries unsuccessfully to poison her; having been re-captured, Macheath receives last visits in his cell; his rival wives quarrel, four more wives appear, Macheath asks for the hangman; the Beggar delivers a happy end.

Dramatis Personae

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Robert Walpole

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Macheath = Jack Sheppard, Robert Walpole,
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Ballad Tunes in *The Beggar's Opera*

- Street balladeer: related topical events, or cautionary tale, set to music familiar to listener 'broadside ballad'
- music made these messages memorable
- singers chose ballads whose traditional words *related to those of their new settings*.
- specific forms of address, often third-person narrator
- Gay uses mostly melodies known through playhouse entertainment, Playford's country dances, and celebrated print collection, Thomas D'urfey's



Music Example 1: Overture

- Send-up of French Overture used in London's Italian opera productions
- 'Learned' writing in second section is fugal
- Composer Johann Pepusch makes common ballad into fugue
- Same common tune becomes, under Gay's pen, a mock 'simile aria' in which the jailer's daughter Lucy Lockit laments her suffering in love (Act 3, Air 47) to the tune of 'One evening having lost my way' a song known as 'The Happy Clown' (original words by 17th-century playwright Henry Burkhead)

Ex. 1: Air 6 in John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* ...To which is added, the musick engrav'd on copper-plates
(London : printed for John Watts, 1728)

SCENE VII.

Peachum, Polly.

Polly. I know as well as any of the fine Ladies how to make the most of my self and of my Man too. A Woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a Court or at an Assembly. We have it in our Natures, Papa. If I allow Captain *Macheath* some trifling Liberties, I have this Watch and other visible Marks of his Favour to show for it. A Girl who cannot grant some Things, and refuse what is most material, will make but a poor hand of her Beauty, and soon be thrown upon the Common.

A I R VI. What shall I do to show how much I love her, &c.

*Virgins are like the fair Flower in its Lustre,
Which in the Garden enamels the Ground;
Near it the Bees in Play flutter and cluster,
And gaudy Butterflies frolick around.
But, when once pluck'd, 'tis no longer alluring,
To Covent-Garden 'tis sent, (as yet sweet,)
There fades, and shrinks, and grows past all enduring,
Rots, stinks, and dies, and is trod under feet.*



Original music: 'What shall I do to show how much I love her' by Henry Purcell, in *The Prophetess, or The History of Dioclesian* (1690), Act ; pubd in *The Vocal and Instrumental Musick of the Prophetess* (1691)]

Air 9 'Virgins are like the fair flower' in The Beggar's Opera (music by Henry Purcell)

**Virgins are like the fair flower in its luster,
Which in the garden enamels the ground:
Near it the bees in play flutter and cluster,
And gaudy butterflies frolick around.
But, when once pluck'd, 'tis no longer alluring,
To Covent Garden 'tis sent (as yet sweet),
There fades, and shrinks, and grows past all
enduring,
Rots, stinks, and dies, and is trod under feet.**

Henry Purcell, in *The Prophetess, or The History of Dioclesian* (1690)

**What shall I do to shew how much I love
her
How many Millions of Sighs can suffice?
That which wins other Hearts, never can
move her,
Those common methods of Love she'll
despise.
I will love her more than Man e'er loved
before me,
Gaze on her all the Day, melt all the Night;
Till for her own sake at last she'll implore
me,
To love her less to preserve our delight.**

Detail showing the ballad 'Two Nymphs the most renown'd Sir'.

That their Noses were so high a height,
 Full his Eyes were drawn'd dry, his grief
 Had wholly deprav'd him of Sight.



Parnassus,
 And Appo
 Poor Pegg
 And the M

From
 Trade
 See you
 Demo.

To the Tune of the Soldier and y' Sailor

Two Nymphs, the most Renown'd Sir,
 For Voice and Skill profound, Sir,
 Late fought with Rival Pain'd, Sir,
 And most melodious Strains, Sir,
 The foremost Seat of Fame,
 From Hellicon defending,
 Thought this the only time, Sir,
 To try the tast Sublime, Sir,
 Which Britons Courtiers claim.

(II)

The God, wrap'd in a Cloud, Sir,
 O'erlook'd the judging Crowd, Sir,
 Her Right each Warbler vantage,
 Their Accents so enchanting,
 The God, divided, charm'd,
 While each, Wise Academic,
 With Instruments Polemic,
 His Wand of Skill to smother,
 Dams one, to raise the other,
 As Caprice gives the Alarm.

(III)

And such to prove their Taste, Sir,
 Dispatch'd an Imp in haste, Sir,
 Who dress'd up mimik Folly,
 Calling the Phantom Polky
 And sets the mix to Sing

(IV)

The Wanton tun'd her Voice, Sir,
 Such vulgar Strains her choice, Sir,
 As erst blind Bards did labour,
 On Bagpipes, Fife and Tabor,
 At Country Fair or Wake,
 The Judges cease their Squall, Sir,
 Let Party Fury fall, Sir,
 Which each enamour'd Nymny,
 Declar'd with Puffs and Guinea
 She'd won the Rival Stake.

(V)

Enrag'd at such Abuses
 Disgracing all the muses
 The Rival Nymphs appeal'd, Sir,
 The God himself reveal'd, Sir,
 To judge th' affrighted P

Tragedian James Quin on *The Beggar's Opera*



“During the first night of its appearance it was long in a very dubious state ... there was disposition to damn it ... and it was saved by the song ‘O Ponder Well! Be not severe!’ the audience being much affected by the innocent looks of Polly, when she came to those two lines ... “For on the rope that hangs my dear / Depends poor Polly’s life”

Reported in James Boswell, *The Life of Dr Johnson* (1791)



‘Miss Fenton’
John Faber after
John Ellys, *Miss
Fenton*, 1728.
Mezzotint. British
Museum

The Appeal of Miss Fenton

- Earlier served in coffee-house; mistress of foreign gentlemen (with mother's help)
- Unknown bit-player ->overnight sensation
- Rags-to-riches fortune captured imagination
- Crowds of admirers, many eager to be lovers
- Much *Beggar's Opera* memorabilia dedicated to her: pamphlets, poems, songs, ballads, memoirs

THE WHOLE
L I F E
P O L L Y P E A C H U M ;

C O N T A I N I N G

An ACCOUNT of her Birth, Parentage and Education, Shewing how she jump't from an Orange Girl to an Actress on the Stage, and sm that to be a Lady of Fortune: To which is added, a List of her Admirers, also an Account of their several Amorous Intrigues &c.
Written by one of her Companions. Also, a merry Confession. Written by herself.

*Nullum crimen abest, facinusq; ibidinis, ex quo
 paupertas Roma a perit Juv Sat. VI*

THere are so many things Essentially necessary in the writing of History, that it is a very difficult Task for any Man, who has taken it upon him, to write the Memoirs of any Person, to escape the Censure of some one

Critique or other; and indeed too certain it is, that frequently *Hyperboles* are made use of, and that sometimes, thereby the deserving Merit, of a Man, is very much lessen'd; and no less frequently advanced, from a mean Capacity, to the Representating, of a *Seneca*, a *Cicero* or *Demosthenes*, such and so extraordinary odd are the Humours of Mankind, that they wou'd far rather please their own Inclinations, than do Justice to the World, by giving a candid and fair Relation, when either *like or dislike*, of the Person they are treating of, happen to come in the Way: But as I'm a Person intirely disintrested, and no ways injured or oppress'd by *Polly Peachum* it is to be hop'd, that even the censorious World will free me from any Imputation or Guilt of that Kind which may be laid to my Charge, in Expectation of which I venture to declare that,

Polly Peachum the Subject of my present Naration was born (about twenty two years since) of pretty good Parents; her Father being a Mercer, and a Livery Man of the City of London, where he Marrying a Woman of good Fortune, kept House and lived very respectably for many Years, but at last falling to decay, what thro' private Losses, and what thro' the unfortunate Scheme of the South-Sea, His Circumstances were reduced to the lowest Ebb, and poor *Polly* oblig'd to shift her Brocades for a Linsley-Wolsey Gown; Her fine Hollands and Cambricks for a Dowdy; her Laced Shoes for a Pair of Lead-



bestow'd their Favours on her: And One Day as she was hearing a Rehearsal she said I believe I cou'd make a Good Actress, upon which

How many Chair-men, and How many Footmen were attending her, and if I Mistake not they'd ha' made about three Regiments, and all Stout Men, in the Fields of *Venus*, fearing neither Fire nor Smoak, but yet, I perceive they did not love Gun Powder for they offer'd very largely to that Goddess that she might Vouchsafe to spare them their Lives.

The last time I went to see her I believe it might be about 11 in the Morning, when a certain Nobleman went to her to ask a Favour to which she reply'd Lord Sr! what makes you disturb me so Early, he answer'd readily, 'Tis your Beauty *Polly* that will not let me Rest when absent from you: Can I have a Favour? *Polly* takes out her Snuff-Box and with an Air reply'd, yes Sr. Pray Miss (says he) what is the Price? Says *Polly* 100 Guineas. Pray when can I be admitted, says the Nobleman? *Poll* then takes out her pocket Book and with a *Bone Grace* crys hum! hum! let's see 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. Right, the seven and thirtieth Night and not before. The same Person we hear went a way well satisfy'd and has bespoke a Coach for her, Upon which I sent *Squire D' Avers* a Letter and the Following Lines but he not inserting them, put me upon the writing this Life.

On *Polly Peachum's* Customers.
 Soft bending Willows girt the wat'ry Cell,
 Where fall'd pretenders fumbling *Mimeses* }
 (dwell,) }
 And Youth in Triumph buy their way to Hell.
 A hundred Guineas for a Night's Debauch,
 Out-does Don-John or Earl of Roch,
 With fruitless Crying the Beggar tends the Door,
 The Kitching's Ruff'd to support a W--re:
 Tradesmen unpaid, have dismal Cause to Rue;
 Ludgate's their Doom whilst Bethlem gapes for you.

“There is a mezzotinto print published today of Polly, the heroine of ‘The Beggar’s Opera,’ who was before unknown, and is now in so high vogue that I am in doubt whether her fame does not surpass that of the Opera itself” John Gay, Letter of 20 March 1728

A NEW
BALLAD,

INSCRIB'D TO

POLLY PEACHUM.

To the Tune of the Parrot say.

By the Author of LEHEUP'S Ballad.



LONDON:

Printed for A. MOORE, near St. Paul's, and Sold at the Pamphlet-Shops in London and Westminster. Price 6d.

A N
A N S W E R
T O
Polly Peachum's
BALLAD.

The following Lines being sent to the Author, as an Answer to the foregoing BALLAD, he to shew what he Publish'd was not out of Malice to POLLY PEACHUM: has annexed them to this Edition, having so much Value for the Female Sex, as to give them Fair Play to a Fair Woman.

I
Pray, Sir, who are you,
That thus dares to shew,
Polly's Pranks to open View,
And so loudly expose her,
Cruel Bard,
This is hard,
No Regard
To Poll, nor those that know her,
For you o' Lampoon 'em all,
For you do Lampoon 'em all,
As well as pretty Poll.

II
Are you Pimp or Spy,
That does thus defray,
Poll's Gallants, and where they lie,
L--s and G--'d Cullies:
Can't your Muse,
Something choofe,
From the Stews
Of Common Whores and Bullies,
But maliciously you fall,
But maliciously you fall,
On pretty, pretty Poll.

LONDON: Printed for M. Robinson on Saffron Hill.

III
Poll performs her Parts,
With such Grace and Arts,
That each Night she conquers Hearts,
Both in Pit and Boxes,
Then refrain,
Be'nt so plain,
Do not stain
Poll with common Doxies,
For she does Charm us all,
For she does Charm us all,
O pretty, pretty Poll.

IV
Since Poll has gain'd Applause,
All vindicate her Cause,
And prodigious Crowds she draws,
All conspire to Clap her,
The House Rings,
When she Sings,
Must such Things
Vanish in a Vapour,
No, she out-shines them all,
No, she out-shines them all,
O pretty, pretty Poll.

LETTERS

IN
PROSE and VERSE,

To the Celebrated
POLLY PEACHUM:

FROM
The most Eminent of her ADMIRERS
and RIVALS.

Heav'n first taught Letters for some Wretch's Aid,
Some banish'd Lover, or some captive Maid;
They live, they speak, they breathe what Love inspires,
Warm from the Soul, and faithful to its Fires.
Pope's Eloisa to Abelard.

LONDON:

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

[Price Six Pence.]

Handwritten signature or note at the bottom of the page.



A
LETTER
TO
POLLY.

To the Tune of O Jenny, O Jenny, where hast thou been?



I.



POLLY, speak thy restless Charm,
Which bewitches all the Town;

Is it thy Action,
Or thy Complexion,

Which makes fighting Crowds thy own?

BEGGARS OPERA

BLOWN UP,

AND

Capt. *MACKHEATH* Entangled
in his *Bazzle-Strings*.

*Tho' the Cocks are all running, there's not enough Water,
For the Girl is brimful of combustible Matter :
Then play with your Buckets, and work for your Soul,
Or the best Toast in Town will be burnt to a Coal.*

Wherein also are contained,

I. *POLLY's* Description of a *Terrible HAIRY MONSTER*, lately discovered by her and
S--- R---- F-----.



WHEN full 'tis round, when empty long,
Sometimes an Hole, sometimes a Slit;
Hairy when old, and bald when young,
Too wide for some, for others fit.

Two white *Herculean* Pillars prop
The tufted *Gin*, the tempting Snare:
When they divide, then in we pop,
Before we well know where we are.

Miss Fenton

While Crowds attentive sit to Polly's Voice,
And in their Native Harmony rejoice;
Th'admiring Throng no vain subscription
draws,
Nor Affectation prompts a false Applause.

Nature untaught, each Pleasing strain
supply's,
Artless as her unbidden Blushes rise,
And charming as the Mischief in her Eyes.



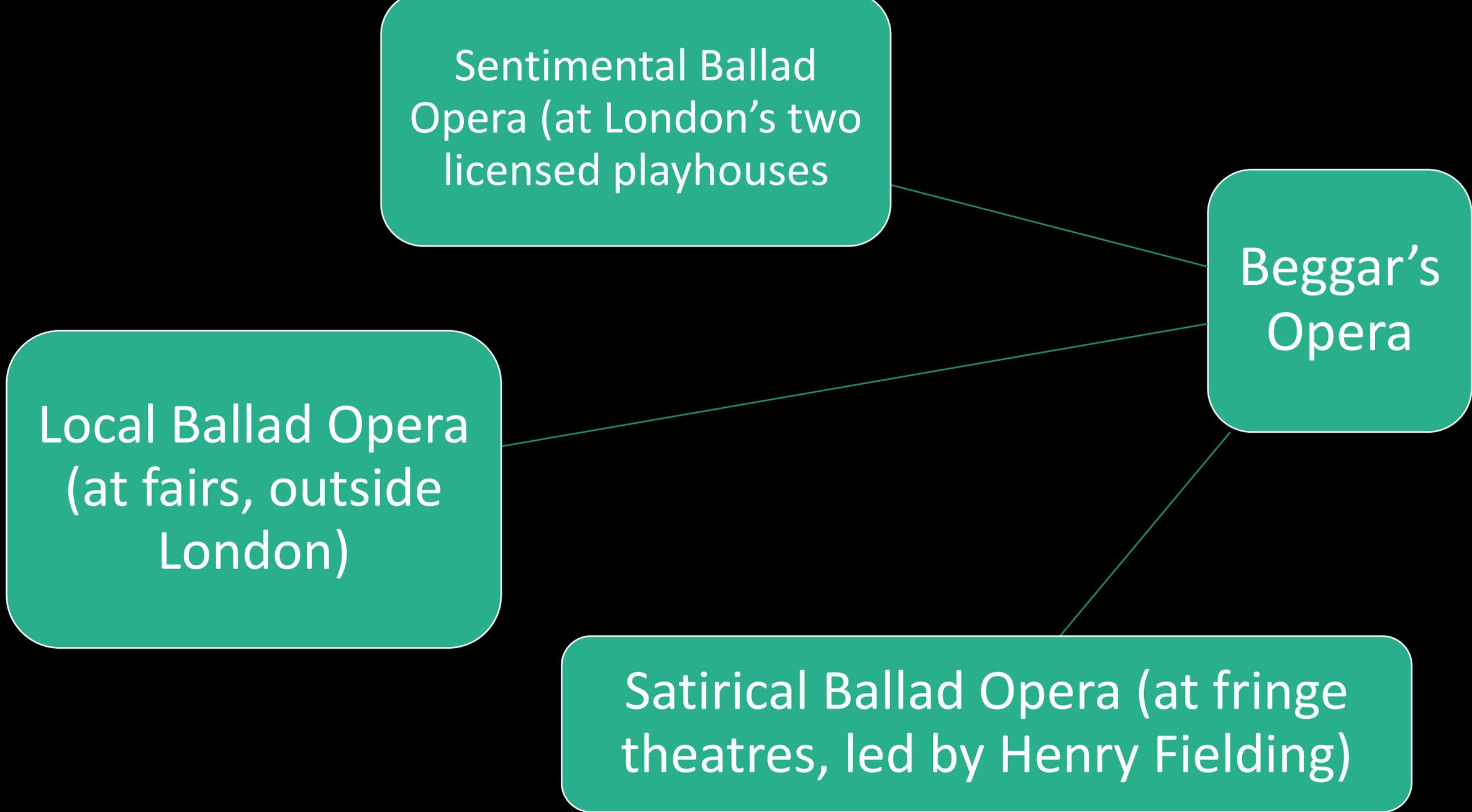
J. Elip Pinx. *J. Faber Fecit 1720*
While Crowds attentive sit to Polly's Voice,
And in their native Harmony rejoice;
Th'admiring Throng no vain subscription draws,
Nor Affectation prompts a false Applause?
The original Polly Peachum in the Beggar's Opera; afterwards married to Charles Paulet Duke of Bolton.
Nature untaught, each Pleasing strain supply's,
Artless as her unbidden Blushes rise,
And Charming as the Mischief in her Eyes.
Miss Fenton

Sentimental Ballad
Opera (at London's two
licensed playhouses

Beggar's
Opera

Local Ballad Opera
(at fairs, outside
London)

Satirical Ballad Opera (at fringe
theatres, led by Henry Fielding)



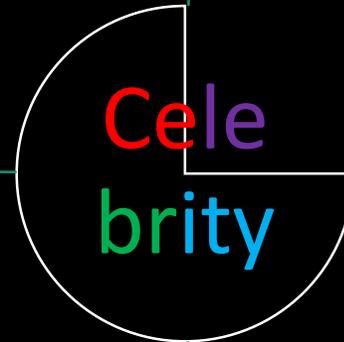
Exit Lavinia
Fenton,
Enter Kitty
Clive



Celebrity: Converging Aspects

Notorious:
lawless

The Entitled:
Inherited Rank



Charismatic:
channels,
articulates and
leads community

Star:
virtuoso, represents
ideal individual



***The Beggar's
Opera***
Act III, scene 9,
air 55.
William Hogarth.
Oil on canvas.
1731. Tate
Gallery, London



Performers.

Macheath—*M. Walker*. 2. *Lockitt*. *M. Hall*. 3. *Peachum*. *M. Hippisley*. 4. *Lucy*. *M. Egleton*. 5. *Polly*. *Miss Fenton*, afterwards
Dutchess of Bolton.

Audience.

Duke of Bolton.—7. *Major Paunceford*.—8. *Sir Robert Fagg*.—9. *M. Rich*, the Manager.—10. *M. Cock*, the Auctioneer.—11. *M. Gay*.—
Lady Jane Cook.—13. *Anthony Kenley Esq.*—14. *Lord Gage*.—15. *Sir Conyers D'Arcy*.—16. *Sir Tho. Robinson*.