THE STUDY OF BURLESQUE AS IT ORIGINALLY APPEARED IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY IN THE PLAY THE BEGGAR'S OPERA AND AS IT APPEARS TODAY IN THE PLAY OF THEE I SING

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This book is dedicated to my parents Mr. and Mrs. D. S. Glotfelty, and my husband, John T. Rhoads.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND DEFINITION OF TERMS USED

In the twentieth century the term burlesque seems to be synonymous with "burleycue." These words bring to mind an endless procession of scantily clad women. This leads to the question, "What is burlesque?" This thesis seeks to find the answer to this question. What was burlesque? What is it today? How did it get this way? And the most important question from the standpoint of the study, does burlesque, as it was originally conceived, have a counterpart today?

I. THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. The proposed study will seek to accomplish two objectives: (1) to give a background and brief history of burlesque as it originally appeared in England in the seventeenth century; and (2) to show that, although burlesque as it originally appeared no longer exists, similar types of drama can be seen in the twentieth century.

Importance of the study. It is necessary to understand the background of burlesque because it developed to criticize dramatic and social conditions. Although the original

style of burlesque no longer exists, the need for dramatic and social criticism is still present. It will be shown that a good example of burlesque writing in the twentieth century is the play Of Thee I Sing.

II. DEFINITIONS OF TERMS USED

> If Definitions had been constantly exacted from Authors there would not have appeared one hundredth Part of the present Books . . .[1]
>
> Corbyn Morris, 1744

The problem of definitions is indeed a difficult one. There are several terms such as burlesque, farce, satire, parody, and comedy which are not too readily distinguishable in the abstract. These become even more difficult to deal with then when they are applied to a body of dramatic material. It is therefore necessary to agree upon some common definitions.

Burlesque. Richmond P. Bond writing in English Burlesque Poetry 1700 - 1750 says that the word "burlesque" came into the English language from the French, which had imported it from Italy. In the Italian burla means "ridicule, mockery."[2]

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[1]Corbyn Morris, quoted in Richmond P. Bond, English Burlesque Poetry 1700 - 1750 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 3.

[2]Richmond P. Bond, English Burlesque Poetry 1700 - 1750 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 18.

The first essential quality of burlesque is imitation. Bond gives the following definition for the word. "Burlesque consists, then in the use or imitation of serious matter or manner, made amusing by the creation of an incongruity between style and subject."[1] This incongruity between form and content, this opposition between what is said and the way it is said, brings in the second essential quality of burlesque, ridicule.

Leo Hughes, writing in A Century of English Farce, explains ridicule by means of burlesque in this way. In order to ridicule a subject the author dislikes, he compares that subject with something else which is "grotesquely ridiculous, and by this action hopes to condemn or even annihilate it."[2]

In burlesque there is an opposition between form and content. This opposition can be accomplished in several ways. A writer may use material that would ordinarily be handled seriously and debase that theme by a trivial treatment. On the other hand, a writer may utilize the manner of serious composition for a subject of inferior value.

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[1] Ibid., p. 3.

[2] Leo Hughes, A Century of English Farce (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 19.

Pope, writing in Martinus Scriberus his Treatis of the Art of Sinking in Poetry in Miscellanies, uses the terms "diminishing or magnifying" when referring to the two methods of handling material in burlesque.[1]

Richmond Bond credits burlesque with having two major functions, "criticism and creation."[2] The critical function can be seen in the way burlesque can satirize contemporary manners by representing them in a ludicrous style or by elevating them to a plane obviously too far above the matter at hand.

Besides being critical, burlesque at times is extremely creative. Bond says, "Burlesque as creation cannot be divorced from burlesque as criticism, but art may breed beauties not identical with the primary purpose of satire."[3]

There seems to be much confusion concerning the relationship of burlesque to other forms of drama. To eliminate this confusion other types of humorous drama will be qualified for this study.

Farce. Writing in the preface to his Evenings' Love (1668), Dryden was the first to undertake the treatment of

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[1]Alexander Pope, Martinus Scriberus his Treatis of the Art of Sinking in Poetry in Miscellanies, quoted in Richmond P. Bond, English Burlesque Poetry 1700 - 1750 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), p. 3.

[2]Bond, English Burlesque Poetry, p. 16.

[3]Bond, English Burlesque Poetry, p. 17.

farce as seen in the English literature, yet he seemed more intent on disparaging than on defining.

> Farce . . . consists principally of grimaces . . . . Comedy consists, though of low persons, yet of natural actions and characters; I mean such humours, adventures, and designs, are to be found and met with in the world. Farce on the other side, consists of forced humours, and unnatural events. Comedy presents us with the imperfections of human nature: Farce entertains us with what is monstorous (sic) and chimerical.[1]

Bishop Hurd, writing in his Dissertation . . . on the Provinces of the Drama (1753), expressed the difference he saw in comedy and farce. Comedy's sole aim was to excite "the sensation of pleasure arising from a view of the truth of characters, more especially their specific differences." Whereas the "sole aim and tendency of farce is to excite laughter."[2] Laughter could be caused by using a ridiculous situation which could not possibly have existed in real life.

Farce has only one goal, that of being funny. Mason Brown, writing in The Saturday Review of Literature, says, "It [farce] is a comedy written with a slapstick rather than a pen."[3] Here is the point at which the difference between burlesque and farce becomes clear. Both use exaggeration,

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[1]John Dryden, Evenings' Love, quoted in Leo Hughes, A Century of English Farce (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 14.

[2]Bishop Hurd, Dissertation . . . on the Provinces of the Drama, quoted in Leo Hughes, A Century of English Farce (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956), p. 16.

[3]Mason Brown, The Saturday Review of Literature, XXIV (March, 1951), 26.

but in farce there is no attempt to criticize. Criticism is an important quality in burlesque.

Parody. The strict meaning of the word may be found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica: "parody implies a comic imitation of a serious poem."[1] Parody is defined in the New Oxford Dictionary as: "A composition in prose or verse, in which the characteristic turns of thought and phrase in an author or class of authors are imitated in such a way as to make them ridiculous."[2] This imitation is accomplished by taking a work by an author, and writing another more or less closely modeled on the original. The words are changed to produce a ridiculous effect.

In the Encyclopaedia Britannica the origin of parody is credited to the time school boys were assigned to write compositions after the manner of classical poets. It was an easy step from compulsory imitations of the Greek dramatists, to critical imitations of contemporary verse.

Parody has no value unless there is criticism. "But the target aimed at by the parodist is not always the poet whose dress he wears."[3] Satire of current manners, politics, or morals may be conveyed by using parody as a vehicle. The parody represents the reaction of custom to attempted change,

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[1]"Parody," Encyclopaedia Britannica, ed., XVII, 333.

[2]New Oxford Dictionary, quoted in George Kitchin, A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1931), p. xx.

[3]"Parody," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 333.

to complacency, to adventure of the mind or senses and to the established political and social forces.[1]

Antoine La Motte, a French poet and critic, said, "Far from degrading truth by ridicule, parody will only strike at what is degrading and false; it is not so much a piece of buffoonery as a critical exposition."[2]

Burlesque and parody have several things in common. They both strive to criticize through imitation. Parody, however, follows the poem or story much more closely, and often word for word. Burlesque may make specific reference to lines from another play, but for the most part it is a specific dramatic genre which is imitated. Another distinction is that burlesque, as the term is used in this paper deals with drama; parody is most commonly thought of in relation to poetry. Because it often is done in poetic form, parody "if well executed, has this merit, that it pours criticism swiftly into an unforgettable mold."[3]

Travesty. Richmond Bond writing in English Burlesque Poetry describes travesty as a form of humor which lowers a particular work by applying a jocular, familiar, and undignified treatment.[4] Travesty amuses the reader or

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[1]George Kitchin, A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1931), p. ix.

[2]Ibid., p. xvii.

[3]"Parody," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 333.

[4]Bond, English Burlesque Poetry, p. 4.

audience by showing what can be done with a stated piece of writing by expressing the same subject matter in diction that is often highly familiar and coarse.

Reverend A. G. L'Estrange made the following comment concerning travesty: "In travesty the object is always to throw contempt on the original."[1]

Travesty is a form of parody. The distinction between the two is a matter of degree. Travesty is defined in Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language as a "grotesque likeness of something else."[2] Travesty is more severe or crude in its imitation than is parody.

Burlesque and travesty differ in that travesty is a more direct imitation of subject matter than is burlesque. A travesty is a play written using another play as a model. A burlesque play derives its source of inspiration from many works.[3]

Satire. Broader in its scope than burlesque or parody, satire is almost as old as literature. As each people in turn developed a literature, they developed satire

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[1]Rev. A. G. L'Estrange, History of English Humor, Vol. II (London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1878), p. 3.

[2]William Allan Neilson, ed., Webster's New International Dictionary of the English Language (2nd ed.; Springfield, Massachusetts: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1961), p. 2697.

[3]Burlesque drama in England during the nineteenth century became largely a travesty on one show, but continued to be known as burlesque.

also. It is defined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica "as the expression in adequate terms of the sense of amusement or disgust excited by the ridiculous or unseemly."[1] Satire has two important qualities other than criticism. First, humor must be present, and second, the piece of work must have literary form. The comment is made in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Without humour, satire is invective, without literary form, it is mere clownish jeering."[2]

Satire seeks to ridicule a situation taken seriously in daily life. It shows the human or individual vices or folly, or abuses or shortcomings, and often hopes to provoke amendment.

Satire is not just another form of drama which seeks to ridicule through humor; it is the main channel in which are found all the previously mentioned types of drama. All contain some element of satire.

Efforts have been made to distinguish among the various types of humorous and critical forms of literature by understanding their purposes and literary styles. Perhaps Leo Hughes had the best idea for distinguishing between farce and burlesque. Hughes' criterion is the laughter evoked from an audience. "The laugh, the smile, the smirk,

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[1]"Satire," Encyclopaedia Britannica, ed., xx, 6.

[2]Ibid.

with which an audience receives high comedy or the laughter tinged with scorn which greets the jibes of the burlesque writer differ appreciably from the nonreflective guffaw with which the antics of the farce are received."[1]

Conclusion. Burlesque, farce, parody, and travesty are all forms of satire. With the exception of farce each of these forms of drama seeks, to a certain degree, to combine criticism with humor. Burlesque drama contains opposition between form and content. Farce is written for the sake of humor and not criticism. Parody is the imitating of a specific play. Criticism is an important part of parody. Travesty lowers a particular work by applying the familiar and the coarse, to formal works.

III. PROCEDURES

Limitation of the Subject. There are several types of burlesque literature: plays, poetry, and novels. This paper deals only with burlesque drama in England and America since 1660. Likewise, the term burlesque itself has come to have several meanings. Unless otherwise specifically noted, the definition given in this chapter is the one with which this paper is concerned.

Organization of Thesis. Chapter II will be concerned with the history of English burlesque from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth, and of American burlesque from the

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[1]Hughes, English Farce, p. 19.

nineteenth to the twentieth century. This development is important because, as burlesque evolved and changed, it in turn influenced other forms of drama. Some burlesque qualities are present in contemporary drama.

Chapter III centers around the eighteenth century burlesque, The Beggar's Opera. The chapter will study not only the play itself, but also the social, political, and dramatic customs of the time.

Chapter IV will be similar in form to Chapter III. This chapter will be a study of the twentieth century play, Of Thee I Sing. An examination will also be made of the conditions which fostered its writing.

The final chapter, V, will contain a comparison of the two plays, attempting to determine in what ways they are similar and dissimilar. An effort will be made to discover whether any of the burlesque elements present in The Beggar's Opera are to be found in Of Thee I Sing.

CHAPTER II

THE HISTORY OF BURLESQUE

The history of burlesque drama is indeed a long one. The purpose of this chapter is to trace briefly the history of English and American burlesque.

I. THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH BURLESQUE BEGINNING IN 1660

The year 1660 has been chosen as the seminal point of this history; it was then and the drama of the period which produced the burlesque style of humor.[1]

First Burlesques. V. C. Clinton-Braddeley, writing in The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660, gives credit for the introduction of burlesque into England to Sir William Davenant. Davenant was in exile in France for a period of time. His burlesque writings were influenced by French drama.[2] The first stage play to claim the name

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[1]For a history of burlesque before 1660 refer to V. C. Clinton-Braddeley, The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660 (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1952).

[2]V. C. Clinton-Braddeley, The Burlesque Tradition in the English Theatre after 1660 (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1952), p. 29.

burlesque was included in Davenant's mixed entertainment, The Play-house to be Lett (1663).

George Villiers, Second Duke of Buckingham. The first major burlesque work of the seventeenth century was The Rehearsal by Buckingham. Heroic tragedy was very annoying to Buckingham. Because of his dislike for heroic tragedy Buckingham led the most noteworthy attack against it.

Dougald MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones, editors of Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century, make the following comments concerning The Rehearsal.

> The Rehearsal was not, in its original, a personal attack on Mr. Dryden, which it later became . . . . Originally they [the authors] intended to ridicule Sir William Davenant, Sir Robert Howard, and Henry Howard, particularly The United Kingdoms (a heroic tragedy by Henry Howard.)[1]

Buckingham conceived of the idea for the burlesque a long time before he actually wrote the play. By the time The Rehearsal was finished many references were made to Dryden.

When Buckingham produced The Rehearsal, Dryden's Conquest of Granada, the greatest of heroic plays, was on the crest of its popularity. In The Rehearsal Dryden was represented as a fool and a knave who stole the ideas of others, and who kept a mistress, making no secret of either offense.

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[1]Dougald MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones, Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century as they were acted at the Theatres - Royal by Their Majesties' Servants (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), p. 51.

Clinton-Braddeley credits Buckingham with two important contributions to the evolution of burlesque. First, Buckingham established critical parody. Second, he originated the eighteenth century style of humor out of which the tradition of English theatrical burlesque was gradually built.[1] The Rehearsal may not have brought about the downfall of heroic tragedy, but it at least exposed the characteristic weakness of this genre.

Thomas Duffett. A writer of burlesque who seems rather unimportant today is Thomas Duffett. Nevertheless, he made contributions to the development of burlesque. In July, 1673, The Empress of Morocco was presented. In November Duffett presented a burlesque of this work. This was to happen several times. Thomas Shadwell presented the Tempest. Duffett presented the Mock-Tempest. Again Shadwell produced a play, Psyche, and Duffett burlesqued it in Psyche Debauch'd. Duffett introduced the idea of burlesquing one particular show, author, or actor.

There was little development of burlesque for some time after Duffett. There seem to be several reasons for this. Between 1680 and 1690 the national controversy was political and religious, not literary. Also the two rival theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, had merged. There was no competitor at whom to poke fun and criticize.

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[1]Clinton-Braddeley, Burlesque Tradition, p. 31.

John Gay. The next burlesque to appear was The Beggar's Opera by John Gay in 1728. It was one of the brightest things of the age, burlesquing politics, society, music, and literature.

The influence of The Beggar's Opera was wide and powerful. The play was the first truly successful comic opera in English. The Beggar's Opera was also the first ballad opera to use existing ballads instead of having new ones written. This type of play retained popularity until it was replaced by the works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

Henry Fielding. The next important burlesque writer was Fielding. Perhaps his best work was Tom Thumb. Unlike previous writers, Fielding wrote in mock-heroic style, and his work was a burlesque which utilized the reductio ad absurdum device. He used this absurdity for exposing the extravagance of the stage of his time.

Fielding was not a true parodist, but took bits and pieces from other works. Tom Thumb is a collection of material from many plays. Although he used other people's ideas, Fielding was able to bring these lines to perfection in his works, and he created a vogue for burlesque which lasted in that form into the 1730's.

Henry Carey. The only writing which approached Fielding's in burlesque style was done by Henry Carey, who

is best remembered for The Tragedy of Chrononhotonthologos: Being the Most Tragical Tragedy that ever was Tragediz'd by any Company of Tragedians. The title is a clue to one reason for the play's popularity--the author's delight in pure extravagance. Also Carey's works were enjoyed because they made fun of bombastic drama without being cruel.

Carey's burlesque, Clinton-Braddeley notes, was not as carefully constructed as Gay's or Fielding's, but because of the author's comic verbosity, the work long remained a model. Clinton-Braddeley credits Carey's work with being an obvious ancestor of the Bombastes Furioso written in 1810, and George Bernard Shaw even borrowed from it in The Admirable Bashiville.[1]

Richard Brinsley Sheridan. The interval between Carey and Sheridan saw little of value produced in the way of burlesque. The Critic written in 1779 by Sheridan was a masterpiece of green-room humor because Sheridan had been both author and manager, and he had had an opportunity to detect the characteristic absurdities of the stage. Frederick Tupper and James W. Tupper, writing in Representative English Dramas, 1700-1750, had this to say concerning the subject of Sheridan's burlesque:

> Like Buckingham, Sheridan ridicules the awkwardness of many a dramatist in conveying necessary information to his audience, the lack of connection between the two

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[1] Ibid., p. 71.

> plots of many tragedies, the mixture of the love motive with the historical without regard to dramatic unity. He ridicules stock situations, as when a deadlock is suddenly broken, a hidden identity is revealed, a disguise is thrown off . . . . He brings in scenes of splendor and mad scenes of utter gibberish, and he ends with the usual spectacle of a battle, in which on this occasion, the enemies of England are routed.[1]

The effect of Sheridan's work can be seen in this article written in the Critical Review, published in 1781. "Certain however it is, that since the exhibition of The Critic, tragedy, which a celebrated writer has declared to be one of the greatest exertions of the human mind, is fallen into contempt; it will be some time at least before she can recover from the blow."[2]

Clinton-Braddeley, places The Critic at the end of the era of tragedy.[3] The place of tragedy was filled by romantic and sentimental drama which continued from the end of the eighteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century. Clinton-Braddeley summarizes romantic and sentimental drama in this way:

> Plots became darkly entangled; theatrical effects brilliantly complicated, characters more than ever clear-cut, white and black. Sentimentality directed the actions of the just; implacable hatreds corroded the hearts of the proud.[4]

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[1]Frederick Tupper and James W. Tupper, eds., Representative English Dramas 1700 - 1750 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914), p. 293.

[2]Critical Review, 1781, quoted in Clinton-Braddeley, Burlesque Tradition, p. 72.

[3]Clinton-Braddeley, Burlesque Tradition, p. 79.

[4]Ibid., p. 79.

J. R. Planché. Planché was not so much a writer of burlesque as extravaganza, but he is the link between the old burlesque and the new. Clinton-Braddeley states that Planché's writing could be called burlesque without an object, a whimsical entertainment centering on old stories such as fairy tales, Shakespeare, or myths.[1] His writing for the most part had no critical purpose. The only burlesque element to be found in his works was the wide contrast between what was said and the way it was said. Planché wrote merely to amuse, and this was the type of burlesque which was popular in the United States from 1828 until 1868. An example of American burlesque written in the style of Planché was Much Ado About a Merchant of Venice.[2]

W. S. Gilbert. Gilbert was an important figure in the history of burlesque. Although he was an extravaganza writer, deriving his style directly from Planché, his works carried elements of burlesque. This can especially be seen in Trial by Jury, H. M. S. Pinafore, and Ruddigore. Clinton-Braddeley calls H. M. S. Pinafore a "classic of burlesque" because of Gilbert's treatment of sailor humor and his amiable abuse of operatic convention."[3]

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[1]Bernard Sobel, A Pictorial History of Burlesque (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1956) p. 11.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 118.

The growing lack of criticism in burlesque may have been due to the increasing size of the audience and the lowering of the audience's general educational level. In the original burlesque the enjoyment and understanding of the play was due to a familiarity of the greater part of the audience with the play or prevailing mode which was under dissection.

By the time of Planché the things that the audience really applauded in burlesque were the love of the fantastic, the impossible, the exaggerated, and the patently absurd. Most burlesque existed for its own ridiculous qualities, and many scripts had little connection with the original play or story travestied. Allardyce Nicoll, writing in A History of English Drama, 1660 - 1900, said, "To turn a pair of doves in a would be poetic simile into a boar and a sow implies criticism: to make Romeo speak like a navy [sic] and Cleopatra like a Cockney flowergirl show only the desire to be openly absurd."[1]

As the nineteenth century closed, burlesque also came to an end. In 1660 Fielding had written to criticize an existing form of drama. This type of burlesque had continued for a hundred and fifty years, but gradually it changed. Burlesque no longer sought laughter as criticism. Its goal was laughter for its own sake.

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[1]Allardyce Nicoll, A History of English Drama 1600 - 1900, Vol. IV (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), p. 148.

The efforts and accomplishments of burlesque are presented in the following poem by H. J. Byron:

> Though some may scout it, . . .
> Burlesque is like the winnowing machine:
> It simply blows away the husks, you know
> The goodly corn is not moved by the blow.
> What arrant rubbish of the clap-trap school
> Has vanished - thanks to pungent ridicule
> What stock stage-customs, nigh to bursting goaded,
> With so much "blowing up" have been exploded!
> Had our light writers done no more than this
> Their doggrel efforts scarce had been amiss.[1]

Conclusion. Burlesque was introduced into English by Sir William Davenant. He was followed by a number of writers: Buckingham, Duffett, Gay, Fielding, Carey, Sheridan, Planché and Gilbert. Burlesque as it was originally conceived was a critical form of humor, but gradually as the years passed burlesque began losing its critical purpose.

III. DEVELOPMENT OF THE AMERICAN STYLE "BURLESQUE"

> "The history of American burlesque begins with Greek classics and ends with a leg show."[2]

Before beginning a study of burlesque in America, a brief survey of the origin of American drama will be made. The first fully professional American touring company was the Murray-Kean Company from England.[3] This company was

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[1]H. J. Byron, quoted in Clinton-Braddeley, Burlesque Tradition, p. 219.

[2]Ibid., p. 9.

[3]Hugh F. Rankin, The Theatre in Colonial America (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), p. 30.

organized in 1749 and continued until 1752. The Murray-Kean Company's procedure was to play in a city at a time when the most people were likely to be present, such as at state capitols during the sessions of legislature, or resorts or race tracks during their busy seasons. This company is important to our study because they introduced The Beggar's Opera to America as part of their repertoire.[1]

The next theatre company of importance was founded by Lewis Hallam and played in Williamsburg, New York, Philadelphia, Charleston, and Jamaica from 1753 to 1758.[2] The company left the country during the Revolution. Following the war the company returned headed by the son of Lewis Hallam. From 1785 until the end of the eighteenth century this company had what amounted to a monopoly of the American theatre. After this monopoly was broken, there was wholesome competition among acting companies in this country.

Burlesque probably began in America in 1828 when the English production of Hamlet by John Poole was imported. This travesty originated what Bernard Sobel, writing in A Pictorial History of Burlesque, termed, "legitimate burlesque," and created a great demand for travesties.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 43.

[3] Ibid.

Some of the travesties on literary and historical themes were: Much Ado About a Merchant of Venice, Pocahontas, and Columbus. John Brougham, author of Pocahontas, or The Gentle Savage, was an important author of American historical burlesque.[1] Grand opera was also travestied. Some of the works used were The Bohemian Girl which became Bohea Man's Girl; Norma became Normer; Friech'utz developed into Fried Shots and Her Nanny was based on Hernani.

In 1868 the Worrell Sisters produced Field of the Cloth of Gold, and this show marked the decline of legitimate burlesque. This had begun due to the popularity of tights which were introduced by Lydia Thompson and her British Blondes in the play The Black Crook.

The scandal of tights was the chief enticement of burlesque in America. The innovation of tights began in 1827 with the obscure Mlle. Hulin and reached new heights in 1861 when Adah Isaacs Menken displayed herself in tights while strapped to a life horse in a play derived from Byron's poem, "Mezeppa."

The inclusion of a stranded ballet company in The Black Crook by Charles Barras in 1866 shocked reformers. The ballet costumes turned a rather dull piece into an

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[1]Arthur Hobson Quinn, A History of the American Drama: From the Beginning to the Civil War, sec. ed. (New York: Apelton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1951), p. 273.

Amazon parade of legs. Because of public interest, managers got busy and created plays like The White Faun and Humpty Dumpty.

Legs became so popular that in May, 1869, Olive Logan made the following speech before the Women's Suffrage Convention:

> No decent woman can now look to the stage as a career. Clothe her in the dress of an honest woman, she is worth nothing to a manager. Stripped as naked as she dare, and it seems there is little left when so much is done, she becomes a prize to her manager, who knows the crowds will rush to see her.[1]

Denunciation of this sort did wonders for box office returns, and the managers quickened their purchases of tights. It is interesting to note that by today's standards the women showed little of themselves. The legs were covered with tights and over them was often worn a foot length skirt of thin material.

The American burlesque show is a compilation of several forms of drama. Michael Leavitte, a pioneer producer of American burlesque credited Lydia Thompson with introducing the kind of entertainment which served as his model, but he also borrowed from other forms.

One source for his burlesque was the minstrel show. The first Minstrel shows began on the Southern plantations and were popular until the 1890's. The show was made up of three parts: the songs and gags, the "olio," which was a condensed variety show, and the song-and-dance finale called

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[1]Olive Logan, quoted in Sobel, History of Burlesque, p. 12.

a "general ruckus" or "walk-around." This last part was used in burlesque shows as the grand finale by the entire company. The later burlesque productions also borrowed the first part of the minstrel show, the songs and gags.

Another source of ideas for burlesque came from variety shows. These began about the time of the Civil War, and gradually worked their way up from shows for men in beer halls to mixed audiences in music halls. The new name for variety was vaudeville. Sobel credits the birth of vaudeville to Tony Pastor in 1881.

The pattern of burlesque show developed by Leavitt lasted until about 1890, but could still be found in some burlesque shows of the twentieth century. Just as the pattern of burlesque stayed the same, so did the acts within the pattern. Bernard Sobel states in A Pictorial History of Burlesque that "the audience loved the same old thing, welcoming back the same stars, laughing again at the familiar wheezes, stage business, by-words, and double entendre."[1]

The whole burlesque show had a certain delightful flavor to it. Before the performance began, the candy butcher would come to the front of the house. He would sell pornographic literature and pictures, and his pitch was designed to get everyone in the proper mood for the show.

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[1]Sobel, History of Burlesque, p. 49.

Next the orchestra leader would enter. From that time on he was part of the show, not only with his music, but by exchanging lines with the performers.

The opening chorus of the burlesque show consisted of girls and songs, monologues, songs and dances, and other "bits." This would be followed by the intermission where the candy butcher would sell boxes of candy for a nickel. The olio came next featuring wrestlers, jugglers, and contortionists. The "Added Attraction" was a customer bait. It might be "hootchy" dancers or a retired pugilist.[1]

The closing of the show consisted of the prima donna surrounded by the entire company. This led into the grand finale which was quite a display. The dancers maneuvered themselves into a straight line, "forming a blazing display of bosoms and legs known as the Amazon parade."[2]

Contributions of American Burlesque. Burlesque had many good points. Perhaps the best was that it was a training ground for comedians. If a performer could hold the attention of a rowdy audience, he at least had to have a powerful voice. The star comedian was called the "top banana" and then there was always someone to feed him the

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[1]Hootchy-kootchy was introduced to America by "Little Egypt" at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893.

[2]Sobel, History of Burlesque, p. 60.

lines, a "Chink," "Dutchman," "Jew," "Dude," or "Nigger."

Another important part of burlesque humor was obtained by optical effect. The physical appearance and properties which a comedian used had a lot to do with his popularity and became his symbols.

"Bits" were what made the comic. These bits, after being used for years and years in burlesque, went on to become the material for a large percentage of sketches and black-outs used in present-day revues. The bit has a formula. It centers around a menacing situation--a man caught with another man's wife, for instance. Because this is a situation with no certain solution, it is open to innumerable deviations. Each bit depends on the actor performing it. The burlesque actors confined themselves to a few elemental emotions: lust, fear, appetite, greed, and pain.

The burlesque stars realized how popular their bits were, and they started memorizing them and never writing them down. By doing this the bits could not be stolen and used in Broadway shows.

The years from 1900 to 1910 are known as the "Golden Era of Burlesque." The Weber and Fields Music Hall opened, and their style of travesty created a new audience. Yet in the wake of this new popularity, burlesque took a new turn. It began to become synonymous with the term, "strip tease." Finally, the "strip" reached a point where it took over the whole show, and the comic element was diminished.

Gradually, burlesque and the strip came, in some degree, to Broadway. Some examples of this are Bus Stop, On Your Toes, Damn Yankees, and Mr. President. Other plays using American style burlesque as a them include The Naked Truth, Top Banana, and Strip for Action.[1]

Several burlesque shows went from the burlesque circuit to Broadway. In 1901, Me, Him, and I by Willard Halcombe was changed from two to three acts and appeared on Broadway. This was the first play to introduce an airplane to the stage. In 1905, Wine, Women, and Song started out as a road burlesque and finally played in legitimate houses. This show introduced character imitations to a Broadway audience for the first time.

American burlesque has produced a number of stars. Two of the best known burlesque comics were Webber and Fields. They grew to be important Broadway stars and produced such elegant burlesques as Twirly-Whirley and Whoop-Dee-Doo. Eddie Cantor began as a burlesque entertainer and went on to help shape musical comedies, revues, black-outs, and television sketches. Al Jolson, beginning his career selling water in the gallery of a burlesque house, introduced singing in the first talking film, The Jazz Singer. Others who began in burlesque were Bert Lahr, Fanny Brice, and Sophie Tucker.

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[1]The most important work written about it was Burlesque by Arthur Hopkins and George Manker Watters.

The inventions of burlesque stars had a great deal to do with creating a new entertainment medium. The "bits" of the comedians and the songs and dances of the chorus seemed to blend and take on a new form called musical comedy.

Downfall of Burlesque. For ten or twenty years before Prohibition, burlesque thrived. Then business began to decline, and in a short time it collapsed entirely. There were a number of external causes, over which the people of burlesque had no control. World War I had taken away a number of men and thus weakened the audience. The advent of movies and of radio meant that people could get entertainment for less money, and with the radio, right at home. The popularity of the new Broadway revues cut into the burlesque audience. The Ziegfeld Follies, a revue which was basically lacquered burlesque, became very popular.

Because of the Depression, and the need to save money, burlesque began to adopt "grinds"--shows from early morning till late at night. The cast was reduced, and the shows were repeated over and over each day. The strip tease became a fatal force in the show; it was the sole feature of entertainment and eradicated comedy.

The history of burlesque reflects our changing morality and ideas. Times and amusements changed. But change is a part of show business. One form of entertainment fades and another form comes to replace it.

CHAPTER III

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

This chapter is a study of The Beggar's Opera as an example of eighteenth century burlesque. The play will be examined from three points of view: as a literary work, as a dramatic work, and finally as a document of protest.

I. JOHN GAY

"In wit a man, simplicity a child."[1]
Alexander Pope

If John Gay had been a deeply intense and pessimistic or fatalistic person, his writings of criticism might have been bitter and never attained half the popularity or influence that they did. As it was, he wrote with sparkle and humor, and many listened.

John Gay seemed to be a man who never quite grew up. He was always dependent on other persons. Bolingbroke, Swift, Arbuthnot, and Pope were his loyal friends, and the Duchess

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[1]Frederick Tupper and James W. Tupper, eds., Representative English Drama 1700 - 1750 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914), p. 261.

Monmouth had taken him into her service. His friends took Gay in when his fortunes were low, and his loudly bewailed martyrdom assumed the form of an agreeable dependence.

During the reign of Queen Anne, Gay was a favorite at court, even participating in a diplomatic mission to the Court of Hanover in 1714. Anne's death seemed to bring an end to Gay's hopes. In 1727, Gay was offered the deprecating position of Gentleman-usher to little Princess Louisa. Gay was quite upset at his fall from favor and declined the position.

Gay's disappointment was not long-lasting, because within a year, Gay had written a satire about courts and ministers, The Beggar's Opera. The success of this play was amazing, and Gay became very popular. A year after his first play, Gay published Polly, a sequel to The Beggar's Opera. The Lord Chamberlain prohibited this work from being produced.

John Gay died four years later, having produced nothing of note since the plays. His epitaph, written by Pope, said,

> "Life is a jest, and all things show it.
> I thought so once, and now I know it."[1]

II. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Popularity of The Beggar's Opera. Pope, writing in Spence's Anecdotes, had this to say about the first night

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[1]Alexander Pope, quoted in Frederick Tupper and James W. Tupper, eds., Representative English Dramas, p. 263.

of The Beggar's Opera produced at Lincoln's-Inn Fields, in London, starring Lavinia Fenton and Thomas Walker.

> We were all, at the first night of it, in great uncertainty of the event; till we heard the Duke of Argyll, who sat in the next box to us say, 'It will do, it must do! I see it in the eyes of them.' This was a good while before the first act was over, and gave us ease soon; for the Duke (besides his own good taste) has a particular knack, as any one now living, in discovering the taste of the public. He was quite right in this, as usual; the good nature of the audience appeared stronger and stronger every act, and ended in a clamor of applause.[1]

The audience did indeed love the show, and so long was its run, from then on, the popularity of any current show was measured by comparison to The Beggar's Opera. The play ran sixty-three nights in London the first season and fifty-nine nights the second season. Because of this long run at Rich's Lincoln's-Inn Fields, the joke went around London that The Beggar's Opera "made Gay rich and Rich gay."[2]

The influence of the production could be seen in every aspect of London life. People discussed and analyzed it. The Beggar's Opera became "the" thing to see. The following quotation from The Daily Post for March 12, 1728, is an example of the play's popularity. "Last Tuesday Mr. Hungerford treated in one Day at his House for Speakers of the House of Commons, Viz. Mr. Bromley, Sir Thomas Hammer,

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[1]Alexander Pope, Spence's Anecdotes, quoted in Fredrick Tupper and James W. Tupper, eds., Representative English Dramas, p. 263.

[2]Tupper and Tupper, eds., Representative English Dramas, p. 263.

Lord Wilmington, and the present Speaker, and afterwards entertained them at the Playhouse with The Beggar's Opera."[1]

The British artist, Hogarth, painted several pictures relating to The Beggar's Opera. One of them showed a scene where the stage boxes were filled with the notables who patronized the first performance. The scene was in Newgate with Macheath in the center and both Lucy and Polly pleading with their respective fathers.

Scenes from the play appeared on screens which decorated houses. Also, pictures of Macheath and Polly appeared on ladies' fans and playing cards. Lavinia Fenton, the girl who played Polly, reigned as a universal favorite of London and later married a duke. Pope said, "The piece drove out of England (for that season) the Italian Opera, which had carried all before it for ten years."[2]

In the next few years the play was produced in nearly all of the British colonies. In 1750, The Beggar's Opera was one of the earliest musical comedies produced in America by the Murray-Kean Company. The play was to be found

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[1]The Daily Post, March 12, 1728, quoted in William Eben Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera: Its Content, History and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 16.

[2]Alexander Pope, quoted in Frederick Tupper and James W. Tupper, eds., Representative English Dramas, p. 263.

in the repertoire of almost every theatrical company, British or American, in the colonies during the eighteenth century.[1]

During the nineteenth century The Beggar's Opera was frequently presented, but the number of performances gradually diminished. In the twentieth century there was a revival of the play in 1920 at Hammersmith, England, and in 1967 it appeared on television.

Origin and Development of The Beggar's Opera. The idea for writing a Newgate pastoral was suggested to Gay as early as twelve years before he actually began work on it. Pope wrote to Gay,

> . . . I believe further, the pastoral ridicule is not exhausted, and that a porter, footman, or chairman's pastoral might do well. Or what think you of a Newgate pastoral, among the whores and thieves there?"[2]

By the time Gay began writing The Beggar's Opera, a great deal had happened. The London underworld had some rather celebrated heroes. Also, in that period of time, Italian opera had become popular, and it provided many ideas for satire. Gay's disappointment at being rejected by the court gave him the courage to ridicule the government of England.

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[1]Refer to Appendix.

[2]Alexander Pope, quoted in William Eben Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 127.

The play itself was written in 1727 while Gay was staying with Pope. Commenting on the finished play, Pope wrote to Swift:

> John Gay's opera is just on the point of delivery. It may be called, considering its subject, a jail delivery. Mr. Congreve, with whom I have commemorated you, is anxious as to its success, and so am I. Whether it succeeds or not, it will make a great noise, but whether of claps or hisses I know not.[1]

Gay first took his work to Colley Cibber at Drury Lane, but he refused the work. Finally, John Rich accepted the piece and put it into rehearsal. A development during rehearsals that greatly increased the popularity of the work was the addition of music to accompany the songs. Dr. Pepusch was called in to arrange the old tunes and also to write an overture.

Gay's The Beggar's Opera introduced a new type of opera known as ballad opera. This piece fixed the form and started the development of a new genre of dramatic literature which was preserved for over a quarter of a century.[2] William Schultz, writing in Gay's The Beggar's Opera, defines ballad opera as " . . . an opera which makes use mainly of old ballad airs, instead of specially composed music."[3]

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[1] Ibid., p. 126.

[2] Refer to Appendix.

[3] William Eben Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera - Its Content, History and Influence (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1923), p. 128.

A contrary view concerning the origin of ballad opera is held by Frank Kidson writing in The Beggar's Opera, Its Predecessors and Successors. It is Kidson's opinion that The Gentle Shepherd written by Alan Ramsay was actually the first ballad opera and that Gay got his idea from that work.[1]

Although The Gentle Shepherd was published by 1725, it was not presented on the stage till after The Beggar's Opera. At first glance the two works seem quite alike, but upon closer inspection they are quite different. The Gentle Shepherd was a very romantic verse drama. This work is different in spirit from The Beggar's Opera.

By looking at comments made by Gay's contemporaries, it is easy to tell that they believed The Beggar's Opera to be a totally new form. Robert Hitchcock, comments in The Irish Stage in 1788, it "was in a stile [sic] of composition which had not hitherto been tried, and concerning which, the public opinion was more difficult to ascertain."[2] Joseph Warton, in Essay on Pope, calls The Beggar's Opera "the parent of that most monstorus sic of all dramatic absurdities, the Comic Opera."[3]

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[1]Frank Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, Its Predecessors and Successors (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), p. 30.

[2]Hitchcock, The Irish Stage, quoted by Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 129.

[3]Joseph Warton, Essay on Pope, quoted by Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 129.

Why did Gay choose this form of presentation? One reason may lie in the fact that many people were tired of Italian opera with its affected singing. Many people enjoyed Gay's songs sung to simple English melodies, more than the music of Italian operas.

Plot of The Beggar's Opera. The Beggar's Opera is set in the eighteenth century London underworld. The play is introduced by the Beggar and the Player. The conversation between these two characters establishes the idea that the show is to be a burlesque. In the first act Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, receivers of stolen goods, discover that their daughter, Polly, has committed the worst social sin: she has married Macheath, a daring highwayman. The Peachums are displeased with Polly for two reasons. They feel it would have been much wiser for her simply to have had an affair with Macheath, and they do not want Macheath to ruin their business. Mr. Peachum comes up with a solution which will turn the situation to his advantage. He will have Macheath sent to prison and murdered, and thereby getting money for turning him in, and Polly will inherit the highwayman's money.

Polly is much distressed by this idea and warns Macheath. In the second act Macheath returns first to his gang, and then to his ladies. Macheath had scarcely been reunited with his various women friends when Peachum and the Constables appear and arrest him; i.e., it seems that one of the ladies had accepted a bribe from Peachum. Macheath is taken to

Newgate prison and put under the guard of Lockit, the keeper of Newgate.

Lucy, Lockit's daughter, appears. She is going to have Macheath's child and is furious with him because he has married Polly. Both Polly and Lucy meet at the prison and confront Macheath. He swears he is not married, and after Polly leaves, he convinces Lucy to steal the keys and release him.

The third act finds Lockit furious with his daughter for releasing Macheath, especially since she did not make any money by the betrayal. Polly visits Lucy at the prison, and Lucy tries to kill Polly by giving her gin with poison in it. This scheme fails because Polly does not drink. About this time Macheath reappears under guard and is again put in prison. This time his death is imminent.

The arrival of four more women who all claim to be his wife leads Macheath to welcome death. The play seems doomed to end as a tragedy, but to suit the tastes of London, the Player and Beggar arrive with the intention of making the play have a happy ending. Macheath is pardoned, chooses Polly to be his wife since they were really married, and all of the women and prisoners begin dancing.

Characters of the play. Even in this satire, the individual roles do not become charicatures. Each has an individual identity. There is an exact balance of men and women in the play. The highwaymen are balanced by the women

of the town. There are six principal parts: Macheath, Polly, Lucy, Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, and Lockit.

The whole play centers around Macheath. He always remains a cut above everyone else, and never descends to the level of his men. Although Macheath is a highwayman, he is a gentleman.

Polly has always been the favorite of audiences. She stands out as different from anyone else in the play because of her simplicity, sweetness, and daintiness. She appears as a rose among thorns.

Lucy has taken on some of the sordidness of Newgate where she lives under the shadow of the criminal world. She has a passionate temperament in contrast to the sweetness of Polly. Lucy, Macheath, and Polly make a varied and exciting triangle.

Peachum is the sordid individual who represents the grimmer side of Gay's farcical atmosphere. At times he is a philosopher and humorist. He owes his success as an underworld leader to his understanding of human nature.

Although often shocked by her husband's ideas, Mrs. Peachum always decides to go along with them in the end. Mrs. Peachum appears only in the first act, but she is a strong character there.

Lockit has several of Peachum's traits of villainy, and the sentiments of the two rogues are practically the same, but they are not alike as characters. Lockit is the

great jailor of English drama. He is proud of his position and the control he has over his prisoners. Of course, he uses this position to his own best advantage.

The gang of highwaymen who open the second act are delightful. They are disreputable in dress and character, and they are a "Set of practical Philosophers."[1] Although all the men are much alike, Mat of the Mint seems to be the spokesman.

Unlike the highwaymen who are similar in character, the women of the underworld are described individually as they appear. These ladies are satires on great ladies. This may be seen in the women's action, and topics of conversation. Their names are suggestive and add an interesting touch. Some of the women of the underworld include: Mrs. Coaxer, Mrs. Vixen, Suky Tawdry and Molly Brazen.

In the dialogue, Gay secured his best effects. First of all, the dialogue is not an excuse for songs (as in the case of many musicals), but an important part of the play. Much of the jargon of the characters is rendered comic by the burlesque spirit. The burlesquing of speeches can especially be seen in Macheath's assurances to his sweethearts, given almost simultaneously. Gay achieved much of his humor by mixing the grave and the gay.

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[1]Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, and William Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies (New York: The New American Library, 1958), p. 250.

III. ITALIAN OPERA

English and Italian Opera 1656 - 1728. In tracing the history of Italian opera in England, it is necessary to look back to English entertainment of 1642. During the Interregnum stage plays were prohibited, and musical as well as legitimate drama was under a cloud. In 1656 Sir William Davenant produced a play with Italian music and it was allowed mainly because the Protector did not think it would be harmful since no one understood it. This was the beginning of Italian operas in England. Davenant and his musical plays paved the way for the operas and musical dramas that later became so popular.

When Charles II came to the throne in 1660, he removed the ban on theatres and encouraged production of drama and of musicals. Charles' interest in music was developed during his stay in France.

Dryden gave this description of opera as it was understood in his day.

> An opera is a poetical tale or fiction, represented by vocal and instrumental music, adorned with scenes, machines, and dancing. The supposed persons of this musical drama are generally super-natural, as gods, and goddesses, and heroes, which at least are descended [sic] from them and in due time to be adopted into their numbers. The subject . . . admits of that sort of marvellous [sic] and surprising conduct which is rejected in other plays . . . .[1]

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[1]John Dryden, quoted in Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, p. 12.

In 1670 Henry Purcell wrote music for his first opera, Dido and Aeneas. For the next twenty-five years Purcell wrote music for forty dramatic pieces. Some of these include The Tempest, Dioclesian or the Prophetess, King Arthur, and Bonduca. After the death of Purcell, the English opera declined. His death left room for men of lesser talent to put on the stage operas either wholly of Italian origin or founded upon the Italian model.

An important Italianate opera was Camilla, translated directly from the Italian. The interesting thing about this piece was that it was performed half in English and half in Italian. The English and Italian singers each sang in their own tongue.

In 1720 George Handel undertook to put Italian opera on a permanent basis in England. The Royal Academy of Music was established. Some of Handel's operas were Numitore, Radamisto, Narciso and Astarto, Admetus, and Ricardo Primo. The last was produced in 1727, the same year as The Beggar's Opera appeared.

Addison, writing in his Spectator papers on March 21, 1711, made the following comment on the English and Italian opera.

> There is no question but our great grandchildren will be very curious to know the reason why their forefathers used to sit together like an audience of foreigners in their own country and to hear whole plays acted before them in a tongue they did not understand . . . .

> In short, our English music is quite rooted out, and nothing yet planted in its stead.[1]

Although the nobility and those seeking to emulate the high life enjoyed Italian opera, there were a number of Englishmen who did not. Several prominent writers had a great deal to say about the opera, but for the most part they went unheard. John Dennis expressed this feeling. He said that, that entertainment in Italy is "a beautiful harmonious Monster, but here in England 'tis an ugly howing one."[2]

In The Irish Stage Hitchcock makes the following comment concerning the situation which preceded the satire, The Beggar's Opera.

> That exotic species of entertainment called Italian Opera had for several years been rising into fashion and at that time entirely engrossed the attention of the higher and more fashionable ranks of people. The seduction of foreign music, the novelty of those unnatural warblers then imported, the charms of dancing, with the glare of decorations, had bewitched the fancy, and diverted the tide of encouragement, and applause from the more rational, though less gaudy representations of the English theatre. This corruption of public taste and perversion of judgement, it was Mr. Gay's intention, by humorously satirizing, to correct.[3]

The Beggar's Opera as a Satire on Italian Opera.

George Hogarth, a music critic of the nineteenth century,

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[1]Addison, Spectator, quoted in Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, p. 27.

[2]John Dennis, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 137.

[3]Hitchcock, The Irish Stage, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 135.

wrote in his book Musical History that The Beggar's Opera is

> . . . said to have been intended to ridicule the Italian opera, which was then becoming very fashionable in England though if this was the object, it certainly was not accomplished, as there is not the slightest resemblance in any particular between The Beggar's Opera and the pieces of the Italian stage.[1]

Hogarth was wrong in assuming that just because The Beggar's Opera was not exactly like Italian opera, that it was not ridiculing the latter. The very fact that The Beggar's Opera was so different in every way helped to point to the falseness and the faults of Italian opera. Schultz says, "By substituting the powerful antidote of familiar English music, Gay was able to render the foreign musical drama unnecessary."[2]

Gay countered Italian opera with its fine frills and decorations with over sixty simple British airs. Instead of portraying unreal subjects as Italian opera did, Gay chose his incidents for the play from the low-life of a prison. He replaced elaborate staging, costuming, and plots with simple scenes and characters.

When Gay did use lofty and exaggerated language, it was for effect. He poked fun at the serious opera by having the everyday gossip of thieves and prostitutes spoken in

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[1]George Hogarth, Musical History, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 105.

[2]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 139.

lofty and exaggerated language. Hitchcock commented on this use of elegant language in the midst of low comedy. "The same loftiness of stile [sic], and unnecessary flow of forced similes, which, from an Italian hero, gave such delight, when put in the mouths of sharpers and highwaymen, could not fail to produce an effect as ludicrous, as the former had been grand."[1]

Even further evidence that Gay ridiculed Italian opera is in his play's introduction which contains the speeches of the Beggar and the Player. These speeches are full of satirical hints. The Beggar mentions the use of "Similies that are in all your celebrated Operas: The Swallow, the Moth, the Bee, the Ship, the Flower." The Beggar mentions his "Prison Scene which the Ladies always reckon charmingly pathetick [sic]." Sir John Hawkins supports the idea of ridicule when he suggests that Macheath's appearance in the Newgate fetters might be supposed to ridicule the prison scene in Coriolanus, performed a few years earlier.[2]

Another good example of direct reference to Italian opera concerns a bitter quarrel in 1727 between two rival Italian singers, Cuzzoni and Faustina, over the leading part

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[1]Hitchcock, The Irish Stage, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 146.

[2]Sir John Hawkins, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 143.

in an opera. Referring to this quarrel the Beggar states, "As to the Parts, I have observ'd such a nice Impartiality to our two Ladies, that it is impossible for either of them to take Offence."[1]

Gay's opera was surprisingly natural in both scene and speech. To this the Beggar said, "I hope I may be forgiven, that I have not made my Opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue . . ."[2]

The final scene between the Beggar and the Player, (Act III, Scene 16) makes a criticism of opera. The Player says, " . . . for an opera must end happily." The Beggar replies, " . . . that in this kind of Drama, 'tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about." And the Player answers, "All this we must do, to comply with the Taste of the Town."[3]

Schultz points out that without the opening and closing scenes performed by the Beggar and the Player many points of satire would go unnoticed, but, because of them, The Beggar's Opera must be realized as a burlesque on Italian opera.[4]

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[1]Barnet, Berman, Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies, p. 134.

[2]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 145.

[3]Ibid., p. 135.

[4]Ibid., p. 285.

Regardless of Gay's intentions it is interesting to view contemporary comments concerning the play and its effect on Italian opera. Swift says, "The comedy likewise exposeth with great Justice, that unnatural Taste for Italian music among us, which is wholly unsuited to our northern climate, and the Genius of our people, whereby we are over-run with Italian effeminacy and Italian nonsense."[1]

In comparing the reception of The Beggar's Opera to Italian opera presented at the same time, this comment appeared in the Craftsman for February 17, 1728: "We hear that the British Opera, commonly called the Beggar's Opera, continues to be acted at the Theatre in Lincoln's-Inn Fields with general Applause, to the great Mortification of the Performers and Admirers of the Outlandish Opera in the Haymarket."[2]

A series of letters of Mrs. Delany to Ann Granville are full of references to the decline of Italian opera in the spring of 1728. She places much of the blame on the success of The Beggar's Opera.

In a letter dated January 19, 1927/28, Mrs. Delany writes, "Yesterday I was at the rehearsal of the new opera composed by Handel: I liked it extremely, but the taste

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[1]Swift, quoted in Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, p. 50.

[2]Craftsman, February 17, 1728, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 46.

of the town is so depraved, that nothing will be approved of but the burlesque . . . "[1]

February 29 of the same year Mrs. Delany included this comment in her letter, "The Opera will not survive after this winter; I wish I was a poet worthy the honor of writing its elegy."[2]

In summarizing the effect of The Beggar's Opera on Italian opera, William Schultz in Gay's Beggar's Opera has this to say: "It either laughed the opera off the stage for that season, or as a permanent attraction, forced its competitor to yield to its success. Opera did not recover from the setback for several years."[3]

IV. POLITICAL SATIRE

Political Conditions in England. The Beggar's Opera satirized a number of things, including politics. It is hard to determine just how many lines of the play refer directly to the administration of Sir Robert Walpole, but the public certainly interpreted them as striking at the Prime Minister. In Memoirs of Macklin written in 1804, Thomas Cooke calls attention to a specific passage and the

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[1]Mrs. Delany quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 156.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 146.

audience's reaction to it. In the scene where Peachum and Lockit are described settling their accounts, Lockit sings the song:

> "When you censure the age, etc." which had such an effect on the audience, that, as if by instinct, the greater part of them threw their eyes on the stagebox, where the minister was sitting and loudly encored it . . . The name of Bob Booty, whenever mentioned, again raised the laugh against him, and the quarreling scene between Peachum and Lockit, was so well understood at that time to allude to a recent quarrel between the two Ministers, Lord Townsend and Sir Robert, that the House was in convulsions of applause.[1]

The question arises, why was Walpole treated in this manner and why did the people react to it? Thomas Babington Macaulay in his Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems asserts that "Walpole governed by corruption, because in his time, it was impossible to govern otherwise."[2] The Parliament had managed to shake off the Royal control, but had not yet come under the control of public opinion. If Walpole governed by corruption, it was because that was the only way to govern.

The large portion of the members of Parliament had very little motive for public service except personal gain, and Walpole was just better at using his money than most. Walpole's primary love seemed to be that of power. Macaulay

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[1]Cooke, Memoirs of Macklin, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 187.

[2]Thomas Babington Macaulay, Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems, Vol. II (New York: John W. Lovel), p. 27.

says, "He was in power twenty years and not one great measure, not one important change for the better or worse, took place."[1] Walpole apparently was interested only in remaining in office and maintaining the status quo.

In 1741 Walpole was accused of having made himself "sole and prime minister," which at that time was regarded as an invasion of the rights of his colleagues, and a motion was made for his dismissal from Parliament.[2] The following quotations are taken from Walpole's speech to the House of Commons in defense of himself in February, 1741.

> My great and principal crime is my long continuance in office; or in other words, the long exclusion of those who now complain against me . . . . This pretended virtue patriotism proceeds from personal malice and disappointed ambition. There is not a man among them whose particular aim I am not able to ascertain, and from what motive they have entered into the list of opposition.[3]

In his book, Macaulay lists the following as those who, in Parliament or out of Parliament, assailed the administration of Walpole: Bolingbroke, Carteret, Chesterfield, Argyle, Pulteney, Wyndham, Doddington, Pitt, Lyttelton, Barnard, Pope, Swift, Gay, Arbuthnot, Fielding, Johnson, Thompson, and Glover.[4]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] William Jennings Bryan, ed., The World's Famous Orations (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), p. 154.

[3] Robert Walpole, quoted in Bryan, The World's Famous Orations, p. 155.

[4] Macaulay, Critical, Historical, and Miscellaneous Essays and Poems, p. 32.

There is no doubt that Walpole did govern by corruption and did use money to accomplish his aims. Macaulay asserts: "that he practised corruption on a large scale is . . . indisputable."[1] There were more than enough things to justify criticism of Walpole, but, in a sense, the abuses were without purpose. Walpole's opponents stirred the public to a popular fury but did not know what to do with power when they got it. Macaulay says, "They held up a single man as the sole cause of all the vices of a bad system which had been in full operation before his entrance into public life, and which continued to be in full operation when some of those very bawlers had succeeded to his power."[2]

The Beggar's Opera as a Satire on England's Political Situation. The Beggar's Opera did have a political appeal to the audience. People of both political parties probably came to see the play because of the political satire, and both groups were disappointed. As Frank Kidson put it, "one because the satire was there, and the other because the satire wasn't stronger."[3]

Writing contemporary with The Beggar's Opera shows the political interpretations of the play. In a letter from Swift to Gay written February 26, 1728, the following passage

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[1]Ibid., p. 24.

[2]Ibid., p. 33.

[3]Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, p. 92.

appears:

> Does Walpole think you intended an affront to him in your opera? Pray God he may, for he has held the longest hand at hazard that ever fell to any sharper's share, and keeps his run when the dice are changed.[1]

The following poem was written to describe the reception in London of Gay's play.

> Its Want of Taste the Town did most display,
> When it receiv'd the Operas of Gay.
> Dukes, Earls, and Knights, to Lincoln's Theatre throng,
> To hear themselves lash'd in each painted Song.[2]

In defense of Gay and his motives, his nephew, The Reverend Joseph Baller wrote:

> In his severest remarks upon the vices and follies of mankind, he carefully avoided all invectives and acrimonious reflections . . . . It was only undeserved honor, luxury, and immorality that he struck at, and left the vicious to make a self-application; and to suffer remorse from their own inward shame and sense of guilt.[3]

Just as some people saw too many political references in The Beggar's Opera, Baller probably did not see enough. The fact that Gay's best friends were violent opponents of Walpole could not help influencing him. Gay's play ranks, along with Swift's Gulliver's Travels and the Dunciad of Pope, as one of important protest documents by Walpole's opposition.

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[1]Swift, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 179.

[2]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 184.

[3]Rev. Joseph Baller, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 188.

Another factor influencing Gay's writing was the fact that Gay had been disappointed at court. Schultz asserts that "the disdain with which he refused a post of attendance on a royal child may have led directly to specific satire on the court."[1] Two actions by the government showed that it felt that Gay was hitting at it. Gay was deprived of his lodgings at Whitehall which he had occupied for several years, and all of his letters were read by the post office.

The Beggar's Opera led the government to realize that drama could become an embarrassing mirror of contemporary politics. In fact Gay's next play, Polly, was censored and not allowed to appear on stage.

The text of the play contains numerous examples of the habits of nobility. "What business hath he to keep Company with Lords and Gentlemen? He should leave them to prey upon one another."[2] "A Woman knows how to be mercenary, though she hath never been in a Court or at an Assumbly."[3] "In one respect indeed, our Employment may be reckon'd dishonest, because, like Great Statesmen, we encourage those who betray their Friends."[4] Other examples of political

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[1]Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 188.

[2]Barnet, Berman, Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies, p. 237.

[3]Ibid., p. 240.

[4]Ibid., p. 261.

satire may be seen in such songs as "When you censure the Age" and "Since Laws were made for ev'ry Degree."[1]

There are other passages in which Gay abuses the government. In one scene he implies that under the existing laws, the Peachums could soften the evidence or with proper bribery a jury could be persuaded to bring a verdict of manslaughter instead of murder.

The whole concept of the Newgate pastoral is in itself a source of criticism. A Newgate pastoral is a play exposing the author's views of the corruption of the Newgate prison. By humorously exposing the corruption of Newgate, Gay is able to hit at a system of justice which allows unfair treatment of prisoners. The scene between Macheath and Lockit shows that, with money, one's stay in prison could be more pleasant. Macheath says, "The fees here are so many, and so exorbitant, that few Fortunes can bear the Expense of getting off handsomely, or of dying like a Gentleman."[2]

There are probably three ways Gay alluded directly to Sir Robert Walpole. The first was through proper names. Schultz reports that the following names are thought to refer to Walpole: "Robin of Bagshot, alias Gorgon, alias Bluff Bob, alias Carbuncle, alias Bob Booty."[3] These were supposed to

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 258.

[3] Ibid., p. 236.

refer to Sir Robert's unrefined manners and alleged robbery of the public. There is not one single character who stands for Walpole explicitly. References to him are made through several characters.

The second method of allusion to Walpole could have been in the relationship among Macheath, Polly, and Lucy. The Memoirs of Lord Hervey tell how the minister kept as a mistress a merchant's daughter named Maris Skerrit, whom he married after his wife's death.[1] Peachum says in one of his speeches Bob Booty "spends his Life among Women."[2]

The quarrel between the two ministers, Walpole and Townsend, can be seen in the quarrel between Lockit and Peachum. The Ministerial power was shared between Walpole and Townsend, just about the way Peachum and Lockit decided to "go halves in Macheath."[3] The fact that Townsend and Walpole were brothers-in-law may account for the expression "Brother" which is used often by both Peachum and Lockit.[4]

Because the satire of Walpole was not confined in one character, it is difficult to know just how much of the satire was really against Walpole and how much was against

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[1] Memoirs of Lord Hervey, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 195.

[2] Barnet, Berman, Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies, p. 236.

[3] Ibid., p. 260.

[4] Ibid., p. 261.

the whole court system. Cooke reports that the interesting thing is that many of the lines seem to fit Walpole remarkably well, and circumstances show that the Minister understood for whom the satire was intended.[1]

V. SOCIAL SATIRE

Every society has had weaknesses, and eighteenth century England was no exception. Much of the humor of Gay's play comes from poking fun at the people themselves, especially the rich and noble. Gay does this by picturing the low life as equally bad as the high life. This idea can be seen in these statements. "The lower Sort of People have their Vices in a degree as well as the Rich," and "it is difficult to determine whether (in the fashionable Vices) the fine Gentlemen imitate the Gentlemen of the Road, or the Gentlemen of the Road the fine Gentlemen."[2]

Although Gay satirizes almost all professions, Law is the one he hits the hardest. In a letter written in 1778, Hanna More said, "But the best of all was Sir William Ashurst, who sat in a side box, and was perhaps one of the first judges

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[1] Supra, p. 16.

[2] Barnet, Berman, Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies, p. 285.

who ever figured away at the Beggar's Opera, that strong and bitter satire against the professions, and particularly his."[1]

An example of lines which indicate practices of lawyers are the following: "A Lawyer is an honest Employment, so is mine," (said by a highwayman); and "You might sooner tear . . . a Fee from a Lawyer."[2]

Gay also satirizes the contemporary ideas of marriage, widowhood, and the keeping of mistresses. Polly is treated quite cruelly by her parents when they discover she has married. She said she did not marry Macheath "(as 'tis the Fashion) coolly and deliberately for Honour or Money," but rather because she loved him. Her mother was shocked and replied, "I thought the Girl had been better bred."[3] Mrs. Peachum also said there never was a marriage that made a woman "less followed by other Men."[4]

The state of widowhood is presented as the height of matrimonial achievement. "The common Views of a Gentlewoman" in marriage look to the good fortune of "a Jointure and of being a Widow." Also the following was said concerning widowhood: "The comfortable state of Widow-hood, is the only

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[1]Hanna More, quoted in Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 200.

[2]Barnet, Berman, Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies, p. 234.

[3]Ibid., p. 242.

[4]Ibid., p. 238.

hope that keeps up a Wife's Spirits. Where is the Woman who would scruple to be a Wife, if she had it in her Power to be a Widow whenever she pleased?"[1]

The love of money is always present. Concerning this the play says, "Money well tim'd, and properly apply'd, will do any thing."[2] "A rich Rogue now-a-days, is fit Company for any Gentleman."[3]

The habit or fad of playing cards is mentioned. Polly tells Macheath that he can't tear him from her. "You might sooner tear . . . any Woman from Quadrille."[4] And Mrs. Peachum finds that "handsome Daughters" take "as much Pleasure in Cheating a Father and Mother, as in cheating at Cards."[5]

Drinking had become quite fashionable in this period. Polly said her mother "drinks double the Quantity whenever she is out of Order."[6] Lucy's statements also show how prevalent and popular gin drinking was. When Lucy offered Polly a fatal drink she said, "Not even the greatest Lady in the Land could have better in her Closet, for her own

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[1] Ibid., p. 245.

[2] Ibid., p. 263.

[3] Ibid., p. 244.

[4] Ibid., p. 248.

[5] Ibid., p. 242.

[6] Ibid., p. 243.

private drinking."[1] And "I run no Risque; for I can lay her Death upon the Ginn, and so many dye of that naturally that I shall never be called in Question."[2]

VI. LITERARY BURLESQUE

In spirit, The Beggar's Opera is a burlesque and not a melodrama or a sentimental comedy. The ending is proof of that. This play is not a parody on another play or direct caricature of people in high life. William Schultz, writing in Gay's Beggar's Opera says, "It [The Beggar's Opera] is largely a by-product, rather than the product, of literature, but attains an art of its own."[3]

The first literary style to be burlesqued was that of sentimental comedy, which had been made popular by Cibber and Steele. In close connection with the ridicule of artificiality and absurdity of much of the sentimental comedy, The Beggar's Opera can also be seen as a spoof of the grand declamation and frenzy of heroic dramas of Dryden and Lee. Ridicule directed against this type of work is difficult to distinguish from that directed against Italian opera.

Extreme sentimentality appears in the ludicrous dialogues of Macheath and his two ladies. The soliloquy of

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[1] Ibid., p. 277.

[2] Ibid., p. 276.

[3] Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 204.

Polly in Act I is a parody on the elaborate heroic parting scene, "One Kiss and the -- one Kiss -- begone -- farewell."[1]

The play is full of mock pathos and tragedy, and if the Beggar had not changed his piece, the opera would have ended in the deepest gloom. At this point the ending seems to be a slap in the face for English sentimental drama. The Beggar confesses his original scheme: "To make the Piece perfect, I was for doing strict poetical Justice; and Had the Play remain'd as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent Moral." But the Beggar changed the ending by having "the Prisoner brought back to his wives in Triumph." The Player adds, "All this we must do, to comply with the Taste of the Town."[2]

Another element of Gay's literary burlesque was his attack on the overly tender songs of the period. These affectedly tender lyrics were found in Italian operas, but they were also very much in vogue in England. These lyrics were very greatly concerned with sentimentality. Some of Gay's lyrics were slight parodies of the original words.

The fashionable reading of romantic tales was another element of literary burlesque. Polly says, "Nay, my Dear, I have no Reason to doubt you, for I find in the Romance you lent me, none of the great Heroes were ever false in Love."

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[1]Barnet, Berman, Burto, eds., Eight Great Comedies, p. 249.

[2]Ibid., p. 284.

One of Macheath's speeches to Polly sounds as if it comes directly from a romance novel. "Suspect my Honour, my Courage, suspect any thing but my Love. May my Pistols miss Fire, and my Mare slip her Shoulder while I am pursu'd, If I ever forsake Thee."[1]

It is impossible to separate all of the elements of literary burlesque, just as it was difficult to pick out definite lines of social satire against Walpole because this play's examples are general, rather than specific. Schultz says: "The fusion of all of these classes is a distinct characteristic of the play and of Gay's broad scheme of ridicule."[2]

VII. INFLUENCES OF THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

Moral Influences. As a means of humor and satire Gay chose to contrast the high life of the court to the low life of a gang of highwaymen. Gay's desire was not to make the low life characters examples of the way people should live, but to use them as a satirical contrast. People, however, got the wrong ideas about the attitude of the author and pounced upon him as unfit for the patronage of the Christian world. Many people took the play too seriously.

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[1] Ibid., p. 248.

[2] Schultz, Gay's Beggar's Opera, p. 208.

Sir John Hawkins in his History of Music written in 1776, has this to say:

> The effects of The Beggar's Opera in the minds of the people have fulfilled the prognostications of many, that it would prove injurious to society. Rapine and violence have been gradually increasing ever since its first representation. . . . Everyman's house is now become, what the law calls it, his castle; or at least it may be said that, like a castle, it requires to be a place of defence. Young men . . . now betake themselves to the road, affect politeness in the very act of robbery, and in the end become victims to the justice of their country. And men of discernment, who have been at the pains of tracing this great evil to its source, have found that not a few of those, who during these last fifty years have paid to the law the forfeit of their lives, have in the course of their pursuit been emulous to imitate the manners and general character of Macheath.[1]

Gay used his method of writing to strike at the evils in society and it was unfortunate that the Puritans missed the worthy lessons of the play. The question of morality did not seem to hurt the play though, and countless playgoers were willing to risk their better selves at a performance.

Political Influences. The Beggar's Opera was first done in 1727. From then on it was popular and eventually became a standard in many theatre companys' repertoires. That means that a great number of people saw the play, many, several times. This fact is important when one thinks of the political influences of the play.

The Beggar's Opera was produced thirteen years before Sir Robert Walpole was forced from office. It

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[1]Sir John Hawkins, History of Music, quoted in Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, p. 96.

probably would be safe to say, though, that Gay's work did have some influence on the public's opinion of Walpole, and his corrupt way of running the government.

Dramatic Influences. The most obvious and important contribution Gay made to drama was founding the school of ballad opera. After 1728 it flourished. Between 1728 and 1733 there was a rage for ballad operas. They were acted at Drury Lane, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Goodman's Fields. Most of the works were far inferior to The Beggar's Opera but it began a trend which eventually led to works by Sheridan and by Gilbert and Sullivan. In some respects, the dancing and singing even anticipated the spectacular effects of modern musical comedy.

The Beggar's Opera was one of the first three act comedies. Preceding that time most works had been written in five acts. Because this piece was short, it could logically be credited with the instigation of many of the afterpieces, because something was needed to make the evening's entertainment long enough.

VIII. CONCLUSION

When John Gay wrote The Beggar's Opera, it is doubtful that he saw more in his work than a satire on passing customs of the day. He did not anticipate the fact that it would set a record for the length of a run of a play in London, or stir up so much controversy concerning his meanings. He

also was unable to know that the play would still be performed two hundred years later.

Gay did not just burlesque eighteenth century England, but he burlesqued mankind. For that reason people still find it amusing today. The Three Penny Opera by Berthold Brecht and Kurt Weill is a twentieth century adaptation of The Beggar's Opera. The first audiences enjoyed The Beggar's Opera because of its music. Because the play is composed of a number of simple, pretty airs, the music is still enjoyed today. The success of The Beggar's Opera lies in its universality of dramatic writing, of things burlesqued, and of people presented.

CHAPTER IV

OF THEE I SING

This chapter is a study of Of Thee I Sing as an example of eighteenth century burlesque used in the twentieth century. Several different aspects of the play will be analyzed. The play will be examined with respect to the authors' background, popularity of the play, and subjects burlesqued: politics, music, and social conditions. In order to understand the meanings of the burlesque, a brief study will be made of the political and the social customs prevalent prior to the writing of the play.

I. AUTHORS

> There is a blithe spirit to George Kaufman. Like most humorists, he wears a saddened, elongated countenance; he possesses a slow, sedate walk and bearing. Yet there is a skylark soaring of his wit.[1]

George S. Kaufman. George Kaufman was born in Pittsburgh into a middle-class Jewish family. The family later moved to Patterson, New Jersey, and George went with them.

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[1]Montrose J. Moses, "George S. Kaufman," The North American Review, 273 (January, 1934), 79.

After trying a number of occupations, Kaufman held a position with the Washington Times from 1912 to 1913, and then had a column of his own in the Evening Mail from 1914 to 1915. The next change of jobs brought Kaufman to the New York Herald Tribune as drama reporter, and then he spent thirteen years with the New York Times in the same capacity.

While he was working for the Times Kaufman wrote his first play, Going Up, which was never presented. Kaufman had his first big success with Dulcy. This show was the hit of the 1921-22 season. Following Dulcy, Kaufman had an incredible number of successful shows.[1]

The most striking feature about the writing of George Kaufman is his wit. Maxine Block, writing in Current Biography, makes this comment.

> He [Kaufman] has responded to nearly everything in American life, and has almost always consistently made sport of it. He is a satirist able to make us laugh at ourselves. And yet he never gives offense.[2]

A similar idea is expressed by J. Brooks Atkinson in the New York Times.

> His genius is for wit. In his hands the common wisecrack becomes an instrument for the expression of a point of

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[1]Refer to Appendix.

[2]Maxine Block, ed., Current Biography: Who's News and Why 1941 (New York: H. W. Wilson Company, 1941), p. 457.

> view. Hating buncombe, it reveals the buncombe in every person or subject it attacks.[1]

One characteristic of Kaufman's writing was that he almost always worked with a collaborator. Joseph Wood Krutch asserted the opinion that Kaufman was best at building character and shining wit but did not have much ability in constructing plots.[2]

With so much wit and satire in his writings, people often wondered what Kaufman's philosophy was. Joseph Wood Krutch writing in The Nation felt that Kaufman always exhibited the traits of a columnist, "one, that is to say, whose chief business it is to make brief random comments upon a thousand things."[3] Columnists are not required to develop a philosophy, "they are supposed to sparkle a dozen times a day, not to throw the steady light of sustained criticism upon life or society as a whole."[4]

Perhaps this quotation from Current Biography is the best way to summarize the philosophy of George Kaufman. He is actually a "really great practical theatre mind with no philosophy except that the theatre is entertainment, and good entertainment pays."[5]

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[1]Block, Current Biography, p. 458.

[2]Joseph Wood Krutch, "The Random Satire of George S. Kaufman," The Nation, 137 (August 9, 1933), 157.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Block, Current Biography, p. 457.

Morrie Ryskind. George Kaufman's collaborator for Of Thee I Sing was Morrie Ryskind. Born on the east side of New York on October 20, 1895, Ryskind had the ambition to be a professional baseball pitcher. His life did not work out this way. Six weeks before he was to have earned his degree at the Columbia School of Journalism, he was expelled for writing some anti-war articles.

Ryskind worked with Kaufman on several scripts, and later wrote screenplays in Hollywood.[1] Later Ryskind became a columnist for the Los Angeles Times.

Ira Gershwin. Ira Gershwin was a noted lyricist. The list of shows he has worked on is a long one.[2] Ira wrote lyrics for all of the shows composed by his brother, George. Working together they produced lyrics and music for Of Thee I Sing.

George Gershwin. The musical score for Of Thee I Sing was written by one of the most gifted of composers, George Gershwin. Gershwin's career was marked by his desire to bring musical significance to American popular music. Charles Hambitzer, his first important teacher, wrote:

> I have a new pupil who will make a mark in music if anybody will. . . . The boy is a genius, without a doubt; he's just crazy about music and can't wait

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[1]Refer to Appendix.

[2]Refer to Appendix.

> until it is time for his lesson. . . . He wants to go in for this modern stuff, jazz, and what not. But I'm not going to let him for a while. I'll see that he gets a firm foundation in the standard music first.[1]

Throughout his life George continued to study, but as Nicolas Slonimsdy in Backer's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians states, "it was his melodic talent and genius for rhythmic invention rather than any studies, that made him a genuinely important American composer."[2]

A milestone in Gershwin's career occurred in 1924 when he wrote "Rhapsody in Blue" for piano and orchestra. In this work, he applied the jazz idiom to an essentially classical form.

Beginning in 1925, Gershwin wrote one excellent score after another for musical comedies. David Ewin, author of American Composers Today holds the opinion that these were just a prelude to the crowning success of his musical comedies career, Of Thee I Sing. Gershwin's last work, the opera Porgy and Bess, was perhaps his greatest accomplishment. It's merit was not fully realized until after his death.

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[1]David Ewin, ed., American Composers Today (New York: The W. H. Wilson Company, 1949), p. 99.

[2]Nicolas Slonimsdy, ed., Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians (New York: G. Schirmer, 1958), p. 552.

II. GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

Popularity of Of Thee I Sing. Of Thee I Sing was a play that showed America's ability to look at herself, with all her faults, and laugh. There was a time, however, when no one knew for sure how the play would be received.

Of Thee I Sing made its pre-Broadway opening in Boston, and as the New York Times pointed out:

> It was with some slight misgivings that the new show was launched in conservative Boston. The censorship in that city is notoriously a menace to the full and free expression of opinions and ideas on the stage and they did not know if this show would go.[1]

The fear was in vain because even Mr. Casey, the chief censor, sat through the opening performance and was not the least offended.[2]

H. T. Parker of the Boston Transcript has this to say about the opening performance:

> At last it has been done. George Kaufman and George Gershwin with incidental assistance from Morrie Ryskind for the book, Ira Gershwin for the rhymes have written, unabashed, a musical play setting scenes in the White House, in the Senate Chamber at Washington, on the steps of the Capitol itself. . . . From half past eight to a quarter to midnight the first audience rejoiced unflaggingly in what was set before it.[3]

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[1] "Events Leading Up to a Congressional Record," The New York Times, January 10, 1932, sect. 8, p. 2.

[2] Ibid.

[3] H. T. Parker, Boston Transcript, quoted in The New York Times, December 13, 1931, sect. 8, p. 4.

Despite the warm welcome in Boston, there was still much uneasiness when the show made its Broadway debut on December 26, 1931. The New York Times contains the following report of the first night activities in connection with Of Thee I Sing. This account was given a year later as the show celebrated its first birthday.[1]

Sam H. Harris, the producer, was isolated in his office "just a little disturbed at his own daring in bringing a lampoon of sacrosanct political life to Broadway." George Kaufman had already "started prowling restlessly around the block to warm up for his customary first night promenade at the back of the auditorium." Morrie Ryskind and Ira Gershwin were greeting friends in the lounge.

> Back in the dressing room, concern was also evident. William Gaxton, impersonator ofthe President, dropped into the dressing room of Victor Moore, who is now better known as Alexander Throttlebottem, the comic Vice President, and jittered:
>
> 'You don't suppose we'll be arrested, do you, Victor?'
>
> 'I don't know,' replied Mr. Moore, also shakily. 'I hear Hoover and a lot of other people are pretty sensitive about the dignity of the high offices of President and Vice President.'

The play began and the spontaneous laughter that arose from all over the house showed the audience's warm reaction. There was particularly loud laughter from the second row center.

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[1]"Happy Birthday to Of Thee I Sing," The New York Times, December 18, 1932, sect. 5, p. 1.

'Who's that laughing so hard down in front?' inquired Mr. Harris, who had ventured out to a secluded spot on the stairs.

'Al Smith and Jimmie Walker. They are having the time of their lives,' was the report brought him by a spy.[1]

The New Yorkers loved the show. In fact the New York Times reports the following statistics concerning the show's profit. For twenty-eight weeks the Music Box was filled to capacity bringing in $30,000 a week. During the summer the show's weekly intake was never less than $24,000. In the fall the show moved to the larger Forty-sixth Street Theatre and continued to do good business. For the first year of the run, "the total gross intake up to and including next Saturday night's performance will be well over $1,400,000."[2]

This show enjoyed the longest run of any Gershwin musical, four hundred and forty-one performances. After that, it went on an extended road tour, returning to Broadway on May 15, 1933, for a new engagement. The second Broadway run had thirty-two performances. While the tour was in progress, a second touring company opened in Chicago early in 1933 and was on the road for eight months. This was the only Gershwin musical to have two productions running simultaneously. Twenty years later, Of Thee I Sing was revived at the Ziegfield Theatre, but had to close due to lack of patronage.[3]

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid.

[3] David Ewin, A Journey to Greatness: The Life and Music of George Gershwin (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1956), p. 226.

Besides Of Thee I Sing's ability to make money, it had several other distinctions. The play was the first American musical ever to be published in book form. This was done by Alfred A. Knopf Publishing Company in 1932.[1]

Of Thee I Sing was awarded the Pulitizer Prize in 1932. In making the award, the prize committee made the following comment on the play.

> This award may seem unusual, but the play is unusual. Not only is it coherent and well knit enough to class as a play, aside from the music, but it is a biting and true satire on American politics and the public attitude toward time. . . . The play is genuine and it is felt the prize could not serve a better purpose than recognize such work.[2]

Origin and Development of Of Thee I Sing. The play's development was not a simple one. Many changes were made before the final script emerged.

The first thing the authors decided was that there would be "no compromise with expediency and no considering the personal feelings of the Republicans and Democrats."[3] This was a good beginning, but there was doubt concerning the play's ability to be produced. Sam H. Harris finally did it reluctantly.

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[1]"With a Hey, Nonny Nonny," The New York Times, April 17, 1932, sect. 3, p. 4.

[2]"Winning Pulitzer Award," The New York Times, May 3, 1932, sect. 8, p. 1.

[3]"Events Leading Up to a Congressional Record," p. 2.

The original plot centered around the Presidential campaign. The great issue was to be a national anthem. Each party would endorse one and both would be practically alike.

This was a fine idea except for one thing, there was no romantic interest. Next they conceived of the idea as it finally appeared in Of Thee I Sing.

After writing a summary of the play, the two writers sent copies to Sam H. Harris and to the Gershwin Brothers. Harris' reply was, "It certainly is different."[1]

The two authors commenced to write the show. In five consecutive week-ends, covering a period of exactly seventeen days, they finished the book and turned it over to the Gershwins, who immediately began the lyrics and the music. By this time, Sam Harris had committed himself to the production.

The authors started with a musical comedy, but they wanted to make it more. The writers, both of the book and of the music, went further than any others "to raise from banality a form of theatre peculiarly our own, and make it a vehicle for writing that is critical as well as hilarious."[2]

The writers wanted to create an effect that had never been used in this country. Of Thee I Sing was in the Gilbert and Sullivan tradition. Isaac Goldberg makes the following

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[1] Ibid.

[2] John Hutchens, "End of a Season," Theatre Arts Monthly, XVI (June, 1932), 448.

comment in George Gershwin: A Study in American Music, "though its form resembled the work of those British satirists, its outlook and attitudes were unique."[1]

H. T. Parker of the Boston Transcript pointed out the unique quality of the work.

> Hitherto our theatre has produced nothing like Mr. Kaufman's and Mr. Gershwin's musical play. It is a long, brave step upward in the progress of such pieces from characterless, threadbare convention to lively reflection of our life and comment upon it.[2]

Of Thee I Sing was a revolutionary play at the time it was written if for no other reason than its dialogue and music were integrated. Previously when a musical was written, the composer would write ingenious tunes and then have words put to them. Lyrics which evolved in this fashion were often clever and sounded good when sung, but made no sense when set down in type divorced from the musical score to which they had been set. This is one reason why, up to the time of the writing of Of Thee I Sing, the Gilbert lyrics occupied almost a solitary place on the literary shelf.

Because Ira Gershwin wrote the lyrics before George set them to music, the lyrics scan perfectly. By the same token, George Gershwin showed new talent when working on this show. David Ewin states that Gershwin "adroitly adapted

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[1]Isaac Goldberg, George Gershwin: A Study in American Music (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1958), p. 298.

[2]H. T. Parker, Boston Transcript, p. 4.

sound to sight, tone to words, and musical means to stage action."[1] The score, book, and lyrics were inextricably combined into a single unit.

Plot of Of Thee I Sing. The first act of Of Thee I Sing centers around the problem of how to get John Wintergreen elected as President. He has been nominated because he has a good name, but his party does not have a good reputation. Wintergreen's running mate for Vice President was selected when his name was drawn from a hat. Upon occasion someone remembers the Vice President's name which happens to be Alexander Throttlebottem.

In an effort to find a campaign issue which will make the voters forget the party's past record, the committee asks a chambermaid what she wants most in the world. She answers, "Money." But of course that will not do; money would suggest that the party had sold Rhode Island. Her second wish is for "Love!" And this becomes the issue and slogan for the campaign. The candidate, being a bachelor, will marry the winner of a bathing-beauty contest to be held in Atlantic City. Calvin Coolidge is wired for a thousand-word editorial on love.

When Wintergreen gets to the bathing-beauty contest he realizes he does not want to marry somebody he does not know, even if she is beautiful. To overcome this problem, he asks Mary Turner, his secretary, to marry him. Mary may

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[1]Ewen, A Journey to Greatness, p. 221.

not be the most beautiful girl in the world, but she can make corn muffins. Diana Devereaux, the winner of the contest is most upset and vows to make trouble.

John and Mary tour the country, with John proposing to her in each state. As the grand climax of the tour, they are to appear in Madison Square Garden. Preceding their entrance, a Senator makes a speech while two enormous wrestlers slip in and out of half-Nelsons and toe-holds, rising at intervals to salute the American flag.

John and Mary appear and the crowd goes wild. Mary promises to marry John if he is elected. The next scene is the election returns. The returns are flashed on a screen, alternating with pictures of various candidates, persons of history, and the MGM lion roaring in triumph.

The second act finds the couple married and in the White House, facing every problem with the Love slogan. Diana Devereaux has been conducting a national campaign against them. Diana is supported by the French ambassador who announces that the honor of France is at stake since Diana is "the illegitimate daughter of the illegitimate son of the illegitimate nephew of Napoleon."[1]

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[1]George S. Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1932), p. 152.

In order to avoid embarrassment, the national party committee decides that John must either marry Diana or be impeached. Mary, however, saves the day by announcing that she is to become a mother. Because no expectant father has ever been impeached, the menace is thwarted and the Senate breaks into a dance. The play ends with Mary coming on stage in a bed after giving birth to twins, and Alexander Throttlebottem assumes the responsibility of marrying Diana.

Characters in Of Thee I Sing. John Wintergreen is an aspiring political candidate, and then later, President of the United States. He is handsome and friendly, but not particularly bright. His solution to every political crisis is Love.

Alexander Throttlebottem is a character part, and one of the favorites of the show. He is a man who is without friends, and worst of all he is Vice President. The part is one of warmth and simplicity. Everyone immediately feels sorry for a man who can not even get into the White House except as a member of a tour.

Mary Turner is the typical American Girl. She is not only pretty, but she can bake corn muffins. What more can a man ask of a girl?

The villainess of the play is Diana Devereaux. She would break up a happy home simply because she was promised the President as the prize for winning a beauty contest.

The minor parts are by no means lacking in color. In fact, some of the funniest scenes involve them. The National Committee is made up of a Jewish comedian, an Irish comedian, and a fat comedian. Several verbose senators add humor to scenes, and when the Senate or Supreme Court are in session the action is particularly wild. The French Ambassador is another small but interesting part. He is constantly threatening, but no one seems to care.

III. POLITICAL SATIRE

Political Conditions in the United States. It is not difficult to determine that Of Thee I Sing was written as a satire on the play's contemporary political situation. In order to understand the writing of the play, it is necessary to consider the conditions that existed prior to its writing.

The political nominations of 1920 were a good example of how party politics worked. Everyone knew Wilson's party would be defeated. Consequently, the Republican nomination became very important. United States Senator Warren G. Harding was one of the many candidates. At the onset Harding was uninterested in the office. However, he had a political counselor who began to steer him toward the White House.

By February, 1920, Harry M. Daugherty, Harding's sponsor made the following prophecy:

> I don't expect Senator Harding to be nominated on the first, second, or third ballots, but I think we can

> afford to take chances that about eleven minutes after two, Friday morning of the convention, when fifteen or twenty weary men are sitting around a table, someone will say, 'Who will we nominate?' At that decisive moment the friends of Harding will suggest him and we can afford to abide by the result.[1]

Harding was nominated after many ballots and won the election. At this point Harding's success ends. Ralph Volney Harlow, writing in The United States: From Wilderness to World Power states, "Harding never had any understanding of national or international affairs."[2] It seemed that in domestic policies Harding's concept of service was simple--he wanted everybody to be happy. In his own statement of policy Harding said:

> Service is the supreme commitment of life. . . . I pledge an administration wherein all the agencies of the government are called to serve and even promote an understanding of government purely as an extension of the popular will.[3]

Harding's administration became noted for its corruption. There were two primary examples of this. The Veteran's Bureau was spending over half of its budget on sheer graft. The crowning piece of criminality in public office centered around the Teapot Dome oil scandal.

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[1]Harry M. Daugherty, quoted in Ralph Volney Harlow, The United States: From Wilderness to World Power (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959), p. 659.

[2]Ralph Volney Harlow, The United States: From Wilderness to World Power (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1959), p. 661.

[3]Warren G. Harding, quoted in Ralph Volney Harlow, The United States, p. 661.

After Harding's death, Calvin Coolidge became President and was later re-elected. The six years of Coolidge's career as President happened to coincide with a decided upswing in economic prosperity for everyone except farmers, but Coolidge was not without his problems.

One of the most obvious problems was the debts owed to the United States by most of the European governments. During World War I and after the armistice, these governments had borrowed $10,338,000,000. Great Britain had been the heaviest borrower with France and Italy ranking second and third.

There was a great deal of discussion on the part of the European countries of the reasons they should not have to pay their war debts. To all this Coolidge replied, "Well, they hired the money, didn't they?"[1] Eventually default became a settled policy, and most of the money was never repaid.

Of Thee I Sing as a Satire on the United States Political Situation. Those reviewing the play at the time of its writing had no doubt about its effect as a vehicle of political satire. J. Brooks Atkinson, writing in the New York Times says, "Nothing has peeled the skin off national politics so adroitly as Of Thee I Sing. . ."[2] And the Outlook and

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[1]Calvin Coolidge, quoted in Ralph Volney Harlow, The United States, p. 661.

[2]J. Brooks Atkinson, "After Thinking It Over," The New York Times, March 20, 1932, sect. 8, p. 2.

Independent had the following comment to make.

> It is a musical comedy which holds up to uproarious ridicule our political rulers without ever ceasing to be good-natured about it, all while it continues to be apt and penetrating.[1]

The first and most striking subject burlesqued was the position of the political party's national committee. This group had been responsible for getting a ticket nominated. The play opens with the national committee sitting around in a hotel bedroom, trying to find an issue for the campaign. This scene was reminiscent of the way Harry M. Daugherty suggested President Harding would be nominated.

The candidate's absence of any real interest in or knowledge of domestic or foreign affairs also bears resemblance to the Harding administration. Harding was concerned only that the people had their way and were happy. The committee of Of Thee I Sing decided that the platform upon which their candidate would run would be Love. By doing this they avoided mentioning such bad deeds they had done as selling Rhode Island.

Of Thee I Sing places the activities of the national campaign on the level of a mere circus. Madison Square Garden is pictured as the location of the final and largest of all rallies. As the scene opens, Senator Carver Crockett Jones

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[1]"Of Thee I Sing," Outlook and Independent, 160 (January 13, 1932), 54.

makes a speech while two wrestlers are performing below him. Then the big event occurs: John Wintergreen proposes to Mary Turner with these words. "And if I am elected President will you marry me?" Mary replies, "I Will."[1]

One of the most thoroughly enjoyed burlesques was the Kaufman, Ryskind treatment of the Vice President. David Ewen in A Journey to Greatness states:

> The portrait of the Vice President--the man nobody knows--is particularly trenchant. He doesn't want to run because his mother might find out; once elected he cannot join the Public Library in Washington because he cannot provide two references; the only way he can gain admission into the White House is by joining a conducted tour; even the man who nominated him does not recognize him or remember his name.[2]

If the office of Vice President is ridiculed, it is in good company. The office of President is not shown to be the most desirable one in the world. Upon learning that he is to become President, Throttlebottem tells this to a scrubwoman. The scrubwoman's reply is, "I'd rather have this job. It's steady."[3]

When Throttlebottem asks Wintergreen for advice concerning the Presidency, the following conversation takes place:

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[1]"Of Thee I Sing," Outlook and Independent, 160 (January 13, 1932), 54.

[2]Kaufman and Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing, p. 89.

[3]Ewen, A Journey to Greatness, p. 224.

Wintergreen: I've written a book. It's got everything! Tells you just what to do! Of course the first four years are easy. You don't do anything except try to get re-elected.

Throttlebottem: That's pretty hard these days.

Wintergreen: It looks that way. The next four years you wonder why the hell you wanted to be re-elected. After that you go into the insurance business and you're all set.

Throttlebottem: Well, couldn't I save a lot of time and go right into the insurance business?

Wintergreen: No, you've got to work yourself up.[1]

President Coolidge came in for his share of satire. Coolidge's reputation for reticence was burlesqued when, in the play, he was wired to write a one thousand word editorial on Love.

The French war debt was an item that continually reappeared throughout the play. In Act Two, scene four, the French Ambassador announces: "You will pardon this intrusion, Monsieur, but I have received another note from my country." Wintergreen replies, "That's all right. We've got a lot of notes from your country, and some of them were due ten years ago."[2] In another scene the French Ambassador has just left, quite upset. When Wintergreen is asked what France will do, he replies, "What's the worst she can do? Sue us for what she owes us?"[3]

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[1]Kaufman and Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing, p. 165.

[2]Ibid., p. 167.

[3]Ibid., p. 195.

In February, after the show opened in December, The France-American Society asked for some changes to be made in the script because it showed lack of respect for France. Nothing was ever changed, though.

No institution of American government was sacred. Congress came in for its share of abuse. The lack of important subjects for debate was pointed out when the Senator from Massachusetts asked that Jenny, Paul Revere's horse, should be given a pension. It was then discovered that she had died in 1805, so the whole Senate rose for a one minute silent tribute to Jenny.

The President's relation to Congress can be seen in the following conversation between Wintergreen and Throttlebottem. Throttlebottem asks what to do about Congress, and Wintergreen suggests keeping them out of Washington.

Throttlebottem: Can you do that?

Wintergreen: St. Patrick did it.[1]

The Senate itself is a good example of the burlesque use of incongruity. During the solemn proceeding of impeachment the senators learn that the President is in a "delicate condition," and about to become a father.[2] Upon hearing this,

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Ibid., p. 185.

the Senators decided not to impeach Wintergreen, and the austere Senators produce tambourines and begin a Salvation Army song and dance.

The Supreme Court plays an important part in decision making, but the decisions they make are not worthy of consideration. In the closing scene of the first act as John Wintergreen has just been sworn in as President and married to Mary Turner, Diana Devereaux enters and serves John with a summons for breach of promise. To this John merely points out that Mary can bake good corn muffins.

> Diana: Who cares about corn muffins? All I demand is justice.
>
> John and Mary: Which is more important--corn muffins or justice?

This being a problem for the Supreme Court, the Justices get into a huddle and come up with this answer.

> Chief Justice: The decision of the Supreme Court is--corn muffins.[1]

The Supreme Court has a vital role to play at the final act. Mary is not allowed to have her child or children until its sex has been decided by the Justices.

Perhaps the best comment to summarize the political satire in Of Thee I Sing can be found in The Bookman. "The best thing about this show is that it manages to epitomize so many things in our national life."[2]

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[1] Ibid., p. 109

[2] The Bookman, 74 (January, 1932), p. 561.

IV. SOCIAL SATIRE

Social Conditions in the United States. Following World War I there was a period of cynicism and disillusionment. There was the feeling that the American people had been tricked into the war and that our losses in money and in men were nothing but useless sacrifice.

With increased prosperity people's attitudes began to change. Merle Curti, writing in The Growth of American Thought, states that, "there was a decline of reform, and the criticism of democracy. The general favorable attitude toward business reflected profound changes in the economic and financial structure of the country."[1] The old virtues of thrift and saving gave way to the idea that spending was a virtue.

One of the most striking social reforms of the 1920's and early 1930's was Prohibition. The Eighteenth Amendment prohibited manufacture, transportation, and sale of alcoholic beverages. There was only one problem; how to enforce Prohibition. Curti says, "They went into the experiment in a moment of exhaulted enthusiasm. This enthusiasm rapidly cooled, and as it cooled some people missed their liquor."[2]

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[1]Merle Eugene Curti, The Growth of American Thought (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1964), p. 678.

[2]Ibid., p. 692.

Because the people wanted to drink, they were able to obtain liquor. The licensed dealers were replaced by bootleggers. The illegal sale of liquor gave enterprising gangsters an excellent opportunity to control bootlegging and to make a huge profit.

In 1933 the Twenty-first Amendment repealed the "noble experiment" and liquor was once again legalized. The failure of Prohibition can be attributed to several things. First, the people were not in favor of it. Second, the government needed taxes from the sale of liquor. And, third, there was an alarming relationship between the illicit liquor business and crimes of violence.

When war-torn Europe began producing grain, the United States farmers encountered serious financial problems. Outside of this, the American economy rose steadily, and business flourished. Everyone began to invest and there was a tremendous feeling of optimism.

During the period of optimism there were several important social trends. The ideal of efficiency invaded the home. The role of the wife and the wife's ability to run a home became important. Many women's magazines ran articles on home efficiency. Merle Curti relates that, "Plain efficiency, these magazines would have it, leads to success in promoting moral cleanliness and civic spirit, in using leisure, in dulling heart-aches, and in promoting hope and happiness."[1]

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[1] Ibid., p. 681.

There was an ever increasing interest in the common man. A good example of this was the human interest and human problem sketches that appeared in True Story Magazine.

Sex and love were predominant themes in both novels and movies. After surveying a large number of movies, Edgar Dale concluded that in the years 1920, 1925, and 1930 the love theme was the primary concern in motion pictures. Crime was the second.[1]

Beginning in 1923, beauty was rewarded in the form of the Miss America contest. At first the prizes were mainly silver loving cups. But, as the contest continued, it gained in importance. In 1925, Miss America, Fay Lanphier, rode to New York in President Coolidge's railroad car, had a ticker tape parade, and was given a party by Rudolph Valentino. In 1926, Miss America won $100,000.[2]

If life in these days seemed too good to be true, that was because it was. On October 24, 1929, the stock market failed, and overnight people lost thousands of dollars in paper fortunes.

For a while American optimism held sway, but as the months ran into years, Merle Curti states, "The pull of

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[1]Edgar Dale, quoted in Curti, The Growth of American Thought, p. 692.

[2]"All the Miss Americas, then and now," Life, 47 (September 28, 1959), p. 88.

established habits of confidence failed to absorb all the doubts incident to wage cuts, unemployment, shanty towns, bread lines, and hunger."[1] At the depth of the depression in 1932, unemployment may have run as high as 15,000,000.[2]

During the depression, the people turned to movies and literature for escape. A few movies dealt with real social issues, but the majority were concerned, as always, with romance, physical passion, humor, and mystery. Many people enjoyed reading about others' lives in True Confession. For those who found this below their dignity, magazines such as Colliers provided escape into the happy lives of others.

Of Thee I Sing as a Satire on the United States Social Situation. One of the most obvious subjects satirized in Of Thee I Sing was the liquor situation. This is no doubt because the violation of Prohibition was so common and so popular. In several instances the President himself, the politicians, and the ambassadors produce flasks and pour drinks.

A routine function of the President is the opening of various important buildings, bridges and dams. President

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[1]Curti, The Growth of American Thought, p. 698.

[2]Ibid.

Wintergreen also was concerned with openings, but his were of a different sort.

> Wintergreen: What's this? Opening of a new speakeasy on Fifty-second Street, New York. Didn't I open that yesterday?
>
> Jenkins: Yes, sir. That is the re-opening. They closed it last night.[1]

The role of the housewife was important in this period. Efficiency and careful planning were virtues. Mary, the First Lady in Of Thee I Sing, exhibits many qualities of the ideal housewife. When faced with the problem of whether guests were coming for dinner or not, Mary solved it by ordering one hundred and forty-eight lamb chops, a car load of asparagus, and seventy-five loaves of bread.[2]

Even the Supreme Court considered corn muffins more important than justice. This was demonstrated on John and Mary's wedding day when Diana tried to interfere, but was stopped. The Supreme Court ruled that corn muffins were more important than justice.[3]

The up-swing in the economy of the 1920's and the abandonment of the old virtues of saving and strict morality, are reflected in a passage from Of Thee I Sing. Two Presidential co-workers are discussing the date of the forthcoming birth of

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[1]Kaufman and Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing, p. 132.

[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., p. 109.

the President's children in relation to his wedding date. The President's secretary says that it will be December because "the President wouldn't do a thing like that. He'd never be re-elected." The President's aid, Jenkins replies, "You can't tell. Might be the very thing that would re-elect him."[1]

After the glorious days of economic prosperity came the depression. Very little reference is made to the depression in the play. Perhaps this omission points more clearly to the problem. In one song, when Wintergreen is confronted by the press, and asked questions about his policies, he sings the following song:

> Who cares
> If the sky cares to fall in the sea?
> Who cares what banks fail in Yonkers
> Long as you've got a kiss that conquer's?[2]

In another instance, Wintergreen advises Throttlebottem only to make speeches "when you want the stock market to go down."[3]

Of Thee I Sing was written in an exciting time, socially speaking. In a little more than ten years, the country had shot to the heights and sunk to the depths. The play picks up the customs common to the era such as drinking,

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[1] Ibid., p. 190.

[2] Ibid., p. 147.

[3] Ibid., p. 169.

home efficiency, slackening of morals and problems of the depression. These customs are burlesqued by showing how ridiculous they really are.

V. MUSICAL SATIRE

In writing the music for Of Thee I Sing, George Gershwin showed his ability to burlesque common forms of music. An example of this can be seen in John Wintergreen's campaign song. The theme song begins like a solemn hymn and suddenly lapses into maudlin Tin Pan Alley sentiment. The theme song begins,"Of Thee I sing," and is very formal, but the fifth word, "baby" changes the whole character of the passage. David Ewen observes that in this one line "patriotic songs and Tin Pan Alley are thus felled with a single blow."[1]

The Senate scene makes a mockery of the pretenses of grand opera. Also in the quasi-operatic vein are the recitatives which are sprinkled throughout the play. An example of this may be seen in Act Two, scene two when Diana tells she has been wronged.[2]

Two other types of music are burlesqued. "I'm about to become a Mother" is done in the style of a Viennese waltz.

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[1]Ewen, A Journey to Greatness, p. 296.

[2]Kaufman and Ryskind, Of Thee I Sing, p. 154.

The Salvation Army type revival song is used as the pattern for the Senate's version of "Posterity Is Just Around the Corner."

The musical burlesque took recognizable forms of music and used them in situations where they were not appropriate. The burlesque was heightened by the effect of incongruous lyrics.

VI. INFLUENCE OF *OF THEE I SING*

Of Thee I Sing had the greatest influence in the area of music and in the form of musical comedy in all probability. The play was one of the first of its type, and marked a turning point in the American lyric theatre. Isaac Goldberg suggests that this new music was one in which the theme was topical, the plot tightly woven, and the production sophisticated.[1] No longer was a musical just a play with a line of chorus girls against a lavish backdrop.

The integrated score found in *Of Thee I Sing* has been seen again and again; and in the words of Goldberg, has "pioneered the tradition of the integrated score that has been the heart of contemporary musicals from *Oklahoma!* to *My Fair Lady*."[2]

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[1]Goldberg, *George Gershwin*, p. 297.

[2]*Ibid*.

VII. SUMMARY

Of Thee I Sing, written by George Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind, is a beautifully done satire on the 1920's and early 1930's. Because it offered something new, political and social criticism, its possible success was questioned. The show, however, was well-received and enjoyed for several years.

Although many subjects burlesqued in Of Thee I Sing are of a topical nature and are not particularly relevant today, certain elements remain which are still applicable to the American political situation and probably always will be. These elements include the Senate, the Supreme Court, and the office of Vice President.

CHAPTER V

COMPARISON OF THE BEGGAR'S OPERA AND OF THEE I SING

The Beggar's Opera and Of Thee I Sing are still important plays for audiences and readers because they deal with people. Although the specific political and social customs against which satire was directed have changed, the writing was of such quality that it still has relevancy to audiences.

After the extensive study of The Beggar's Opera and Of Thee I Sing in Chapters III and IV, this chapter will compare and contrast the two works. The study will conclude by attempting to answer the research question of the paper. Does burlesque as seen in the eighteenth century play, The Beggar's Opera have a counterpart in the twentieth century play Of Thee I Sing?

In the two plays, The Beggar's Opera and Of Thee I Sing, the plot centers around a love triangle. In both cases that triangle consists of two women and one man. The plays have little else in common in the area of plot.

The characters of the two plays offer interesting comparisons. In The Beggar's Opera, Polly, a sweet and innocent girl is opposed by Lucy, a hard lady of prison life.

Of Thee I Sing has for its two leading ladies, Mary, an excellent cook and wife, and Diana, a beauty contest winner who seeks revenge. The male leads of the two plays are not similar. Macheath is a gallant rogue while John Wintergreen is a good natured, rather simple minded political candidate.

The Beggar's Opera holds the distinction of having introduced a new type of musical drama. The ballad opera in England was originated in this play. Ballad opera was recognized as a new form of drama, and many other authors produced works modeled after The Beggar's Opera. An example of such a work is The Quaker's Opera written in 1728.

Of Thee I Sing did not introduce a new form of musical drama, but it did make a stride in developing better musical comedy. In Chapter IV it was found that Of Thee I Sing introduced the close integration of dialogue, music, and lyrics. The play was patterned after the works of Gilbert and Sullivan.

The Beggar's Opera was a direct satire on Italian opera which was very popular in England at the time. The upper class greatly enjoyed these elaborate productions. Instead of the Italian style of musical play, Gay used common English airs. His plot was simple, and his scenes were plain in contrast to the flamboyancy of Italian opera. Ridiculing and criticizing the Italian opera was one of Gay's primary purposes.

George Gershwin burlesqued common forms of music including grand opera, the Viennese waltz, hymns, Tin Pan Alley, and

Salvation Army tunes. He wrote more to cause laughter than to cause change. Conversely, Gay was more concerned with emphasizing a need for change.

In both plays the audiences enjoyed the political satire. Those watching The Beggar's Opera had no doubt concerning the play's political meanings. The United States' audiences viewed Of Thee I Sing and were able to laugh at their own political customs.

Political conditions in eighteenth century England were of great interest to John Gay. Gay felt very strongly about the inefficiency and corruption in the administration of Sir Robert Walpole. At the time The Beggar's Opera was written, a large number of people felt that there were many direct references to Walpole in the play.

Of Thee I Sing had a direct relation to the administrations of Harding and Coolidge. Examples of this relationship are seen in the problem of the World War I debt present in Coolidge's administration and the fact that in Of Thee I Sing the French war debt is often mentioned. Also, John Wintergreen's use of the "Love" slogan parallels Harding's domestic policy that centered around people being happy. The play was not, however, directed against one person in particular. Although the political conditions burlesqued in the two plays differed, they were both relevant to contemporary situations.

In the area social satire Gay chose several topics to burlesque: the rich and the noble, the customs of marriage, the love of money, the drinking customs, and the playing of cards. Kaufman and Ryskind burlesqued such social conditions as beauty contests, home efficiency, and drinking. Most of the customs satirized in the two plays are different, but equally significant in their time.

Another type of burlesque employed by Gay was literary burlesque. In The Beggar's Opera, Gay attacked various styles of writing and made them seem ridiculous. Of Thee I Sing was not written as a literary burlesque.

The types of burlesque in The Beggar's Opera and in Of Thee I Sing have been compared. The next important consideration is the influence that each of the two plays has had upon its respective audiences. The Beggar's Opera probably exerted more political and musical influence than did Of Thee I Sing. Because The Beggar's Opera was viewed by a number of audiences, and there were references to Walpole, the play may have helped turn the public mind against Walpole. In the area of musical influence, it is a commonly held opinion that The Beggar's Opera was a destructive force on Italian opera; the opera took several years to recover its popularity. The third area of importance in considering the influence of The Beggar's Opera is that of music. The play introduced ballad opera to the English stage. Works modeled after The Beggar's Opera continued in popularity for at least twenty years.

Of Thee I Sing was most influential in improving the quality of American musical comedy. The play brought a new unity to script, music, and lyrics. Of Thee I Sing demonstrated that a musical comedy could be enjoyable and also have a message for the audience.

CONCLUSION

In 1728 John Gay wrote The Beggar's Opera to burlesque eighteenth century opera, politics, social customs, and literary style. The burlesque effect was accomplished by taking serious subjects and presenting these subjects in a ridiculous manner. There is a contrast between form and content.

In 1931 George Kaufman and Morrie Ryskind wrote Of Thee I Sing. The play was written in the style known as the American musical, but it contained elements of the burlesque. Events taken seriously in daily life were treated with a lightness of manner in which the American social and political organization appeared ludicrous.

In Chapter I the idea was established that the two complimentary functions of burlesque are criticism and creativity. The element of criticism in both Of Thee I Sing and The Beggar's Opera is found in the incongruity between style and subject. There is an opposition between what is said and the way it is said. Besides being critical both works are creative. The Beggar's Opera introduced a new form of musical drama and Of

Thee I Sing improved upon an existing form of musical comedy. Each work made a significant contribution to dramatic literature. In view of the statements in preceding chapters, it is possible to say The Beggar's Opera and Of Thee I Sing both contain eighteenth century burlesque qualities.

APPENDIX

EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BALLAD OPERAS IN THE TRADITION OF THE BEGGAR'S OPERA

1728 The Quaker's Opera
Penelope

1729 Love in a Riddle
The Beggar's Wedding
The Cobler's Opera
Flora, or Hob in the Well
The Lover's Opera
Momus turned Fabulist, or Vulcan's Wedding
The Patron
The Village Opera
Damon and Phillida
The Wedding

1730 Robin Hood
Female Parson, or Beau in the Sudds
The Chambermaid
Patie and Peggy, or The Fair Foundling
The Fashionable Lady, or Harlequin's Opera

1731 The Highland Fair, or The Union of the Clans
The Devil to Pay, or Wives Metamorphos'd
The Lottery
The Jovial Crew
The Generous Freemason, or The Donstant Lady
Silvia, or The Country Burial
The Beggar's Wedding

1732 The Devil of a Duke, or Trapolin's Vagaries
The Mock Doctor, or The Dumb Lady Cured

1733 The Boarding School, or The Sham Captain
The Decoy
The Livery Rake
The Mad Captain
The Fancy'd Queen
Achilles

1734 The Intriguing Chambermaid

1735 An Old Man Taught Wisdom, or The Virgin Unmask'd
Trick for Trick
The Merry Cobler

1737 The Rival Milliners, or The Humourous of Covent Garden

1762 Love in a Village

1764 Midas

Source: Frank Kidson, The Beggar's Opera, Its Predecessors and Successors (Cambridge: The University Press, 1922), p. 114.

OCCURANCE OF PRESENTATIONS OF FOUR ENGLISH BURLESQUE DRAMAS IN THE UNITED STATES FROM 1801 - 1842

1801	The Critic
1804	The Critic
1806	The Critic
1815	Bombastes Furioso
1817	The Beggar's Opera
1818	The Critic
1820	Bombastes Furioso
1822	The Critic Bombastes Furioso
1823	Bombastes Furioso
1825	Tom Thumb
1826	Tom Thumb
1827	Tom Thumb
1828	Tom Thumb Tom Thumb The Beggar's Opera Tom Thumb The Beggar's Opera
1829	Bombastes Furioso The Beggar's Opera Bombastes Furioso
1830	The Critic The Beggar's Opera
1835	The Beggar's Opera The Beggar's Opera
1836	Tom Thumb Tom Thumb Tom Thumb

STAGE PLAYS BY GEORGE S. KAUFMAN

1918 Someone in the house. . . (with Larry Evans and Walter Percival)

1919 Jacques Duval . . . adaptation

1921 Dulcy . . . Marc Connelly

1922 To The Ladies . . .Marc Connelly
The 49'ers . . .Marc Connelly

1923 Helen of Troy, New York . . . Marc Connelly
The Deep Tangled Wildwood . . . Marc Connelly

1924 Beggar on Horseback . . . Marc Connelly
Be Yourself . . . Marc Connelly

1928 Animal Crackers . . . Morris Ryskind

1929 June Moon . . . Ring Lardner

1924 Minick . . . Edna Ferber

1927 The Royal Family . . . Edna Ferber

1932 Dinner at Eight . . . Edna Ferber

1925 The Butter and Egg Man
The Cocoanuts

1927 Strike Up the Band

1926 The Good Fellow . . . H. J. Mankiewicz

1929 The Channel Road . . . Alexander Woollcott

1930 Once in a Lifetime . . . Moss Hart

1931 The Band Wagon . . . Howard Dietz
Of Thee I Sing . . . Morris Ryskind

1933 Let'Em Eat Cake . . . Ryskind
The Dark Tower . . . Alexander Woollcott

1934 Merrily We Roll Along . . . Moss Hart
Bring on the Girls . . . Morris Ryskind

1935 First Lady . . . Katherine Dayton

1936 Stage Door . . . Edna Ferber
You Can't Take It With You . . . Moss Hart

1937 I'd Rather Be Right . . . Moss Hart

1938 The Fabulous Invalid . . . Moss Hart

1939 The American Way . . . Moss Hart
The Man Who Came to Dinner . . . Moss Hart

1940 George Washington Slept Here . . . Moss Hart

1941 The Land is Bright

1944 The Late George Apley . . . John P. Marquand

1946 Park Avenue . . . Nunnally Johnson

1948 Bravo! . . . Edna Ferber

1951 The Small Hours . . . Leueen McGrath

1952 Fancy Meeting You Again . . . Leueen McGrath

1953 The Solid Gold Cadillac . . . Howard Teichmann

1955 Silk Stockings . . . Leueen McGrath

Source: John Parker, Who's Who in the Theatre: A Biographical Record of the Contemporary Stage, ed., Freda Gay (New York: Pitman Publishing Corporation, 1961), p. 682.

WORKS OF MORRIE RYSKIND

Theatre

1925 The Cocoanuts . . . assisted G. S. Kaufman

1928 Animal Crackers . . . Kaufman

1926 America . . . wrote lyrics

1927 Merry-go-Round . . . Howard Dietz

1930 Strike Up the Band . . . adapted George Kaufman's libretto

1931 Of Thee I Sing . . . George Kaufman

1933 Let 'Em Eat Cake . . . George Kaufman

1940 Louisiana Purchase . . . adapted libretto

Films

1929 The Cocoanuts

1933 The Animal Crackers

1936 My Man Godfrey

1937 Stage Door

1941 Penny Serenade

1943 Claudia

1945 Where Do We Go From Here

Published Works

1920 Unaccustomed As I Am

1932 The Diary of an Ex-President

Source: Walter Regdon, ed., The Biographical Encyclopaedia and Who's Who in the American Theatre (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966), p. 796.

LYRICS OF IRA GERSHWIN

Theatre

1921 Two Little Girls in Blue

1924 Be Yourself
Primrose
Lady, Be Good

1925 Tell Me More . . . B. G. DeSylva
Tip Toes

1926 Oh, Kay

1927 Funny Face

1928 Rosalie . . . P. G. Wodehouse
That's a Good Girl . . . Douglas Furber
Treasure Girl

1929 Show Girl . . . Gus Kahn

1930 Strike Up the Band
Girl Crazy

1931 Of Thee I Sing

1933 Pardon My English
Let 'Em Eat Cake

1934 Life Begins at 8:40 . . . E. Y. Harburg

1935 Porgy and Bess . . . DuBose Heyward

1936 Ziegfield Follies

1941 Lady in the Dark

1945 The Firebrand of Florence

1946 Park Avenue

Films

1931 Delicious

1937	Shall We Dance A Damsel in Distress
1938	The Goldwin Follies
1943	North Star
1944	Cover Girl
1947	Where Do We Go From Here?
1949	The Barkleys of Broadway
1951	An American in Paris
1953	Give a Girl a Break
1954	A Star is Born The Country Girl
1964	Kiss Me, Stupid

Published Works

1959	Lyrics on Several Occasions

Source: Walter Regdon, ed., The Biographical Encyclopaedia and Who's Who of the American Theatre (New York: James H. Heineman, Inc., 1966), p. 479.

MUSICAL COMEDY SCORES BY GEORGE GERSHWIN

1920	George White's Scandals
1922	Our Nell
1923	Sweet Little Devil
1924	Lady Be Good Primrose
1925	Tip Toes Song of the Flame 135th Street
1926	Oh, Kay!
1927	Strike Up the Band Funny Face
1928	Rosalie Treasure Girl
1929	Show Girl
1930	Girl Crazy
1931	Of Thee I Sing
1932	Pardon My English
1933	Let 'Em Eat Cake

Source: Nicolas Slonimsky, ed., Baker's Biographical Dictionary of Musicians (New York: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1958), p. 553.

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