

The Beggar's Opera

by

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Introduction

BEGGAR, PLAYER.

BEGGAR. If Poverty be a Title to Poetry, I am sure no-body can dispute mine. I own myself of the Company of Beggars; and I make one at their Weekly Festivals at St. Giles's. I have a small Yearly Salary for my Catches, and am welcome to a Dinner there whenever I please, which is more than most Poets can say.

PLAYER. As we live by the Muses, it is but Gratitude in us to encourage Poetical Merit wherever we find it. The Muses, contrary to all other Ladies, pay no Distinction to Dress, and never partially mistake the Pertness of Embroidery for Wit, nor the Modesty of Want for Dulness. Be the Author who he will, we push his Play as far as it will go. So (though you are in Want) I wish you success heartily.

BEGGAR. This piece I own was originally writ for the celebrating the Marriage of James Chaunter and Moll Lay, two most excellent Ballad-Singers. I have introduced the Similes that are in all your celebrated Operas: The Swallow, the Moth, the Bee, the Ship, the Flower, &c. Besides, I have a Prison-Scene, which the Ladies always reckon charmingly pathetic. As to the Parts, I have observed such a nice Impartiality to our two Ladies, that it is impossible for either of them to take Offence. I hope I may be forgiven, that I have not made my Opera throughout unnatural, like those in vogue; for I have no Recitative; excepting this, as I have consented to have neither Prologue nor Epilogue, it must be allowed an Opera in all its Forms. The Piece indeed hath been heretofore frequently represented by ourselves in our Great Room at St. Giles's, so that I cannot too often acknowledge your Charity in bringing it now on the Stage.

PLAYER. But I see it is time for us to withdraw; the Actors are preparing to begin. Play away the Overture.

[Exeunt.]

OVERTURE

ACT I

SCENE I.

SCENE, Peachum's House.

Peachum sitting at a Table with a large Book of Accounts before him.

AIR I. An old Woman clothed in Gray, &c.

Through all the Employments of Life
Each Neighbour abuses his Brother;
Whore and Rogue they call Husband and Wife:
All Professions be-rogue one another:
The Priest calls the Lawyer a Cheat,
The Lawyer be-knaves the Divine:
And the Statesman, because he's so great,
Thinks his Trade as honest as mine.

A Lawyer is an honest Employment, so is mine. Like me too he acts in a double Capacity, both against Rogues and for 'em; for 'tis but fitting that we should protect and encourage Cheats, since we live by them.

[Enter Filch.]

FILCH. Sir, Black Moll hath sent word her Trial comes on in the Afternoon, and she hopes you will order Matters so as to bring her off.

PEACHUM. As the Wench is very active and industrious, you may satisfy her that I'll soften the Evidence.

FILCH. Tom Gagg, Sir, is found guilty.

PEACHUM. A lazy Dog! When I took him the time before, I told him what he would come to if he did not mend his Hand. This is Death without Reprieve. I may venture to Book him [writes.] For Tom Gagg, forty Pounds. Let Betty Sly know that I'll save her from Transportation, for I can get more by her staying in England.

FILCH. Betty hath brought more Goods into our Lock to-year than any five of the Gang; and in truth, 'tis a pity to lose so good a Customer.

PEACHUM. If none of the Gang take her off, she may, in the common course of Business, live a Twelve-month longer. I love to let Women scape. A good Sportsman always lets the Hen Partridges fly, because the Breed of the Game depends upon them. Besides, here the Law allows us no Reward; there is nothing to be got by the Death of Women--except our Wives.

FILCH. Without dispute, she is a fine Woman! 'Twas to her I was obliged for my Education, and (to say a bold Word) she hath trained up more young Fellows to the Business than the Gaming table.

PEACHUM. Truly, Filch, thy Observation is right. We and the Surgeons are more beholden to Women than all the Professions besides.

AIR II. The bonny gray-ey'd Morn, &c.

FILCH. 'Tis Woman that seduces all Mankind,
By her we first were taught the wheedling Arts:
Her very Eyes can cheat; when most she's kind,
She tricks us of our Money with our Hearts.
For her, like Wolves by Night we roam for Prey,
And practise ev'ry Fraud to bribe her Charms;
For Suits of Love, like Law, are won by Pay,
And Beauty must be fee'd into our Arms.

PEACHUM. But make haste to Newgate, Boy, and let my Friends know what I intend; for I love to make them easy one way or other.

FILCH. When a Gentleman is long kept in suspence, Penitence may break his Spirit ever after. Besides, Certainty gives a Man a good Air upon his Trial, and makes him risk another without Fear or Scruple. But I'll away, for 'tis a Pleasure to be the Messenger of Comfort to Friends in Affliction.

[Exit Filch.]

PEACHUM. But 'tis now high time to look about me for a decent Execution against next Sessions. I hate a lazy Rogue, by whom one can get nothing 'till he is hang'd. A Register of the Gang, [Reading.] Crook-finger'd Jack. A Year and a half in the Service; Let me see how much the Stock owes to his industry; one, two, three, four, five Gold Watches, and seven Silver ones. A mighty clean-handed Fellow! Sixteen Snuff-boxes, five of them of true Gold. Six Dozen of Handkerchiefs, four silver-hilted Swords, half a Dozen of Shirts, three Tye-Periwigs, and a Piece of Broad-Cloth. Considering these are only the Fruits of his leisure Hours, I don't know a

prettier Fellow, for no Man alive hath a more engaging Presence of Mind upon the Road. Wat Dreary, alias Brown Will, an irregular Dog, who hath an underhand way of disposing of his Goods. I'll try him only for a Sessions or two longer upon his Good-behaviour. Harry Paddington, a poor petty-larceny Rascal, without the least Genius; that Fellow, though he were to live these six Months, will never come to the Gallows with any Credit. Slippery Sam; he goes off the next Sessions, for the Villain hath the Impudence to have Views of following his Trade as a Tailor, which he calls an honest Employment. Mat of the Mint; listed not above a Month ago, a promising sturdy Fellow, and diligent in his way; somewhat too bold and hasty, and may raise good Contributions on the Public, if he does not cut himself short by Murder. Tom Tipple, a guzzling soaking Sot, who is always too drunk to stand himself, or to make others stand. A Cart is absolutely necessary for him. Robin of Bagshot, alias Gorgon, alias Bluff Bob, alias Carbuncle, alias Bob Booty.

[Enter Mrs. Peachum.]

MRS. PEACHUM. What of Bob Booty, Husband? I hope nothing bad hath betided him. You know, my Dear, he's a favourite Customer of mine. 'Twas he made me a present of this Ring.

PEACHUM. I have set his Name down in the Black List, that's all, my Dear; he spends his Life among Women, and as soon as his Money is gone, one or other of the Ladies will hang him for the Reward, and there's forty Pound lost to us for-ever.

MRS. PEACHUM. You know, my Dear, I never meddle in matters of Death; I always leave those Affairs to you. Women indeed are bitter bad Judges in these cases, for they are so partial to the Brave that they think every Man handsome who is going to the Camp or the Gallows.

AIR III. Cold and raw, &c.

If any Wench Venus's Girdle wear,
Though she be never so ugly;
Lilies and Roses will quickly appear,
And her Face look wond'rous smugly.
Beneath the left Ear so fit but a Cord,
(A Rope so charming a Zone is!)
The Youth in his Cart hath the Air of a Lord,
And we cry, There dies an Adonis!

But really, Husband, you should not be too hard-hearted, for you never had a finer, braver set of Men than at present. We have not

had a Murder among them all, these seven Months. And truly, my Dear, that is a great Blessing.

PEACHUM. What a dickens is the Woman always a whimpering about Murder for? No Gentleman is ever look'd upon the worse for killing a Man in his own Defence; and if Business cannot be carried on without it, what would you have a Gentleman do?

MRS. PEACHUM. If I am in the wrong, my Dear, you must excuse me, for no body can help the Frailty of an over-scrupulous Conscience.

PEACHUM. Murder is as fashionable a Crime as a Man can be guilty of. How many fine Gentlemen have we in Newgate every Year, purely upon that Article! If they have wherewithal to persuade the Jury to bring it in Manslaughter, what are they the worse for it? So, my Dear, have done upon this Subject. Was Captain Macheath here this Morning, for the Bank-Notes he left with you last Week?

MRS. PEACHUM. Yes, my Dear; and though the Bank hath stopt Payment, he was so cheerful and so agreeable! Sure there is not a finer Gentleman upon the Road than the Captain! if he comes from Bagshot at any reasonable Hour, he hath promis'd to make one this Evening with Polly and me, and Bob Booty at a Party of Quadrille. Pray, my Dear, is the Captain rich?

PEACHUM. The Captain keeps too good Company ever to grow rich. Marybone and the Chocolate-houses are his Undoing. The Man that proposes to get Money by play should have the Education of a fine Gentleman, and be train'd up to it from his Youth.

MRS. PEACHUM. Really, I am sorry upon Polly's Account the Captain hath not more Discretion. What Business hath he to keep Company with Lords and Gentlemen? he should leave them to prey upon one another.

PEACHUM. Upon Polly's Account! What, a Plague, does the Woman mean?--Upon Polly's Account!

MRS. PEACHUM. Captain Macheath is very fond of the Girl.

PEACHUM. And what then?

MRS. PEACHUM. If I have any Skill in the Ways of Women, I am sure Polly thinks him a very pretty Man.

PEACHUM. And what then? You would not be so mad to have the Wench marry him! Gamesters and Highwaymen are generally very good to their Whores, but they are very Devils to their Wives.

MRS. PEACHUM. But if Polly should be in Love, how should we help her, or how can she help herself? Poor Girl, I am in the utmost Concern about her.

AIR IV. Why is your faithful Slave disdain'd? &c.

If Love the Virgin's Heart invade,
How, like a Moth, the simple Maid
Still plays about the Flame!
If soon she be not made a Wife,
Her Honour's sing'd, and then for Life,
She's--what I dare not name.

PEACHUM. Look ye, Wife. A handsome Wench in our way of Business is as profitable as at the Bar of a Temple Coffee-House, who looks upon it as her livelihood to grant every Liberty but one. You see I would indulge the Girl as far as prudently we can. In any thing, but Marriage! After that, my Dear, how shall we be safe? Are we not then in her Husband's Power? For a Husband hath the absolute Power over all a Wife's Secrets but her own. If the Girl had the Discretion of a Court-Lady, who can have a Dozen young Fellows at her Ear without complying with one, I should not matter it; but Polly is Tinder, and a Spark will at once set her on a Flame. Married! If the Wench does not know her own Profit, sure she knows her own Pleasure better than to make herself a Property! My Daughter to me should be, like a Court-Lady to a Minister of State, a Key to the whole Gang. Married! If the Affair is not already done, I'll terrify her from it, by the Example of our Neighbours.

MRS. PEACHUM. May-hap, my Dear, you may injure the Girl. She loves to imitate the fine Ladies, and she may only allow the Captain Liberties in the view of Interest.

PEACHUM. But 'tis your Duty, my Dear, to warn the Girl against her Ruin, and to instruct her how to make the most of her Beauty. I'll go to her this moment, and sift her. In the meantime, Wife, rip out the Coronets and Marks of these Dozen of Cambric Handkerchiefs, for I can dispose of them this Afternoon to a Chap in the City. [Exit Peachum.]

MRS. PEACHUM. Never was a Man more out of the way in an Argument than my Husband! Why must our Polly, forsooth, differ from her Sex,

and love only her Husband? And why must Polly's Marriage, contrary to all Observations, make her the less followed by other Men? All Men are Thieves in Love, and like a Woman the better for being another's Property.

AIR V. Of all the simple Things we do, &c.

A Maid is like the Golden Ore,
Which hath Guineas intrinsical in't,
Whose Worth is never known before
It is try'd and imprest in the Mint.
A Wife's like a Guinea in Gold,
Stamp'd with the Name of her Spouse;
Now here, now there; is bought, or is sold;
And is current in every House.

[Enter Filch.]

MRS. PEACHUM. Come hither, Filch. I am as fond of this Child, as though my Mind misgave me he were my own. He hath as fine a Hand at picking a Pocket as a Woman, and is as nimble-finger'd as a Juggler. If an unlucky Session does not cut the Rope of thy Life, I pronounce, Boy, thou wilt be a great Man in History. Where was your Post last Night, my Boy?

FILCH. I ply'd at the Opera, Madam; and considering 'twas neither dark nor rainy, so that there was no great Hurry in getting Chairs and Coaches, made a tolerable Hand on't. These seven Handkerchiefs, Madam.

MRS. PEACHUM. Colour'd ones, I see. They are of sure Sale from our Warehouse at Redriff among the Seamen.

FILCH. And this Snuff-box.

MRS. PEACHUM. Set in Gold! A pretty Encouragement this to a young Beginner.

FILCH. I had a fair Tug at a charming Gold Watch. Pox take the Tailors for making the Fobs so deep and narrow! It stuck by the way, and I was forc'd to make my Escape under a Coach. Really, Madam, I fear I shall be cut off in the Flower of my Youth, so that every now and then (since I was pumpt) I have Thoughts of taking up and going to Sea.

MRS. PEACHUM. You should go to Hockley in the Hole, and to Marybone, Child, to learn Valour. These are the Schools that have bred so many brave Men. I thought, Boy, by this time, thou hadst lost Fear as well as Shame. Poor Lad! how little does he know as yet of the Old Baily! For the first Fact I'll insure thee from being hang'd; and going to Sea, Filch, will come time enough upon a Sentence of Transportation. But now, since you have nothing better to do, ev'n go to your Book, and learn your Catechism; for really a Man makes but an ill Figure in the Ordinary's Paper, who cannot give a satisfactory Answer to his Questions. But, hark you, my Lad. Don't tell me a Lye; for you know I hate a Liar. Do you know of anything that hath pass'd between Captain Macheath and our Polly?

FILCH. I beg you, Madam, don't ask me; for I must either tell a Lye to you or to Miss Polly; for I promis'd her I would not tell.

MRS. PEACHUM. But when the Honour of our Family is concern'd -

FILCH. I shall lead a sad Life with Miss Polly, if ever she comes to know that I told you. Besides, I would not willingly forfeit my own Honour by betraying any body.

MRS. PEACHUM. Yonder comes my Husband and Polly. Come, Filch, you shall go with me into my own Room, and tell me the whole Story. I'll give thee a Glass of a most delicious Cordial that I keep for my own drinking.

[Exeunt.]

[Enter Peachum, Polly.]

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

AIR VI. What shall I do to shew how much I love her, &c.

Virgins are like the fair Flower in its Lustre,
Which in the Garden enamels the Ground;
Near it the Bees in play flutter and cluster,
And gaudy Butterflies frolick around.

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