

BEGGARS' OPERAS Then & Now: OR,
John Gay Takes on King George & Walpole, Hitler, Brezhnev, Thatcher, Standard Oil, & More

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English 645, R 2-5, 206 Deady
Off. Hrs.: T 10-12; Th 10-11 & by appt.

John Gay's socio-political satire *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) was the most popular play of its time and has been recast by key satirists of the modern and postmodern eras. In this course we will study the original play and its background and context, beginning with tragic models by Shakespeare and Dryden. Gay's ballad operas critique inherited heroic prototypes in the context of emerging mercantile capitalism, colonial empire-building, and a modern nationalism premised on consuming individuals in a bourgeois family. Modern and postmodern reworkings reformulate Gay's satire as we shall see in Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill's *Dreigroschenoper* (1928) (stage and movie versions); Václav Havel's *Zebracka Opera* (1975); Wole Soyinka's *Opera Wonyosi* (1977); and Alan Ayckbourn's *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1984) (stage and movie versions). Critical reading of these variant *Beggar's Operas* opens to view pivotal moments and themes in 20th-century history: the imminent Nazi takeover of Germany, the Soviet invasion and repression of Eastern Europe, the corruption of African post-colonial oil politics, and 1980s corporate globalization and privatization in Britain. We will theoretically explore artistic adaptation itself as well as the interplay of (so-called) "high" and "low" culture.

BOOKS: M.H. Abrams, *Glossary of Literary Terms* (Wadsworth); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge); William Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* (Pelican); John Dryden, *All For Love* (Nick Hern); John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera & Polly* (Oxford); Bertolt Brecht, *Threepenny Opera* (Penguin); Alan Ayckbourn, *A Chorus of Disapproval* (French Inc.); "Reserve Packet" of plays from The Copy Shop, 539 E.13th St. Each week's criticism is on CANVAS. Films are on Reserve in Knight Library.

WORK: Midterm Exam (25%); Participation (journal/class discussion) (25%); Presentation/Paper (25%); Essay (25%).

WEEK 1 – 1/7 PART THE FIRST—EARLY-MODERN BACKGROUND: Concepts, Contexts, & Shakespeare

Introductions—The course & readings; resources; literary & historical background; theoretical approaches

Text: William Shakespeare, *Antony & Cleopatra*

Concepts & Terms: periods of Eng.Lit. (Elizabethan through Augustan); Renaissance; baroque; author & authorship; canon of literature; folklore; oral poetry; archetypal criticism; cultural studies; imitation; New Historicism (Abrams, *Glossary*)
*****Listed readings for each class must be completed by the scheduled date*****

WEEK 2 – 1/14 EARLY-MODERN HEROIC MODELS: Myth, Tradition, Adaptation, & Collective Imagination

Texts: William Shakespeare, *Antony & Cleopatra*; John Dryden, *All For Love*; *All Is Loveless* film scene (CANVAS)

Commentary: Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Preface & Ch.1; Dugaw, "Multi-Media Dryden"; DNB biographies of Shakespeare and Dryden (CANVAS);

Concepts & Terms: drama; tragedy; blank verse; plot; protagonist/antagonist; heroic drama; setting; 3 unities; influence & anxiety of influence; textual criticism; myth (Abrams); Herculean dilemma

WEEK 3 – 1/21 PART THE SECOND—The Beggar's Opera in the 18th Century (1): the 1st Play & Satiric Parody

Texts: John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*; also *Newgate's Garland & The Country Post* (CANVAS).

Commentary: Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody* "Introduction"; D.Dugaw, "Prologue" (from '*Deep Play*'); Ian Donaldson, "'A Double Capacity': *The Beggar's Opera*"; (CANVAS)

Recommended: Dugaw, "Dangerous Sissy" (from '*Deep Play*'); Gay, *Beggar's Opera* (1985) (V01303, Knight Reserve)

Concepts & Terms: satire, irony, burlesque, ballad opera, comedy, broadside ballad; paradox/oxymoron; pastoral; trickster; protagonist/antagonist; wit, humor, & the comic (Abrams);

WEEK 4 – 1/28: The Beggar's Opera in the 18th Century (2): the 2nd Play, Satiric Parody, & Cultural Context

Texts: Dryden's *All For Love* & Gay's, *Polly*

Commentary: Linda Hutcheon, "Defining Parody"; Dugaw, "Popular Songs & the Politics of Heroism" (CANVAS);

Recommended: Dugaw, "Country Dancing &c." (from '*Deep Play*') & "Epilogue" **Concepts & Terms:** convention/invention; pastoral; motif & theme; formalism, structuralism; narrative & narratology

WEEK 5 – 2/4: *The Beggar's Opera* in the 18th Century (3): Both Plays, Popular Ballads, & Cultural Context

*****MIDTERM ESSAYS DUE*****

Text: Gay's *Polly*; **Recording:** 'Dangerous Examples'—*Fighting & Sailing Women in Song*

Commentary: "Heroines Gritty & Tender, Printed & Oral, Late-Breaking & Traditional: Revisiting the Anglo-American Female Warrior"; Gallagher, "The Beggar's Opera & its Criminal Law Context" (CANVAS)

Recommended: *Memoirs of Scandalous Women*, Vol.5 (on Reserve)

Concepts & Terms: female warrior ballad, structuralism/structural pattern, broadside ballad, oral tradition

WEEK 6 – 2/11 PART THE THIRD—THE MODERN: Brecht & Weill's *Threepenny Opera*: Marxist Critique (1)

Texts: Bertolt Brecht & Kurt Weill, *The Threepenny Opera*.

Commentary: Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, Ch.2; Dugaw, "The Beggar's Opera in the 20th Century" (from 'Deep Play'); Böker, Detmers & Giovanopoulos, "From Gay to Brecht & Beyond"; Nigel Playfair, excerpt from *The Story of the Lyric Theatre*; Walter Benjamin from *Understanding Brecht*, "What Is Epic Theatre? [2nd version]," "Studies for A Theory of Epic Theatre" (CANVAS)

Required Film: *Mack the Knife* (1990) (Menachem Golan film adaptation of *The Threepenny Opera*) (Video 06689)

Concepts & Terms: modernism & postmodernism; Marxist criticism; epic theatre; alienation effect; satire; irony

WEEK 7 – 2/18 MODERNISM's FILM TRANSFORMATIONS: Gay & Brecht in Celluloid: Marxist Critique (2)

Texts: Brecht & Weill (adapted by Pabst), *The Threepenny Opera* (pckt); P.Rotha on *3Penny Opera*

Commentary: Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, Ch.3; Walter Benjamin from *Understanding Brecht*, "Brecht's Threepenny Novel," & "The Author As Producer"; Peter Baruth and Nancy West, "The History of 'The Moving Image': Rethinking Movement in the 18th-Century Print Tradition & the Early Years of Photography & Film" (CANVAS)

Required Film: *The Threepenny Opera* (1932) (Otto Pabst film adaptation) (Video 02320)

Recommended: Wolf von Eckard & Sander Gilman, *Bertolt Brecht's Berlin* (Reserve)

Concepts & Terms: cultural studies; Marxist criticism; epic theatre; alienation effect; melodrama

WEEK 8 – 2/25 PART THE FOURTH— THE POSTMODERN (1): Václav Havel Critiques a Marxist Postmodern

Texts: Václav Havel, *The Beggar's Opera* (1975) (pckt)

Commentary: Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, Ch.4; Calhoun Winton, "John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* & Václav Havel's"; David Remnick, "Letter from Prague: Exit Havel"; Paul Berman, "Velvet Revolutionary" (CANVAS)

Concepts & Terms: formalism; Prague School; antihero; naïve hero; irony; satire

WEEK 9 – 3/3 THE POSTMODERN (2): Soyinka's *Opera* Critiques Postcolonial 1st / 3rd-World Petro-Politics

Texts: Wole Soyinka, *Opera Wonyosi* (1977) (pckt)

Commentary: Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, Ch.5; Wumi Raji, "Opera Wonyosi (1977): Strategies of a Postcolonial Response to a Western Operatic Drama"; Aparna Dharwadker, "John Gay, Bertolt Brecht, & Postcolonial Antinationalisms"; Clement Hawes, "Singing the Imperial Blues: The Scriblerians after Wole Soyinka" (CANVAS)

Recommended: Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa"; Wilson Harris, "Frontier on Which *Heart of Darkness* Stands"

Concepts & Terms: postcolonial studies; protagonist/antagonist; myth; satire; irony

WEEK 10 – 3/10 THE POSTMODERN (3): Ayckbourn's *Macheath* in a Capitalist Privatizing Globalization

Texts: Alan Ayckbourn, *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1986)

Required Film: *A Chorus of Disapproval* (1989) (DVD on Reserve)

Commentary: Hutcheon, *Theory of Adaptation*, Ch.6; Anja Müller, "Alan Ayckbourn's *Beggar's Opera* as *A Chorus of Disapproval*"; Mel Shapiro, "Directing *A Chorus of Disapproval*"; Albert Kalson, "Preface" & "A Chorus of Disapproval" from *Laughter in the Dark*; Malcolm Page, "A Chorus of Disapproval" from *File on Ayckbourn* (CANVAS)

Recommended: Bernard Dukore, "An Interview with Alan Ayckbourn"

Concepts & Terms: protagonist; antihero; naïve hero; play-within-a-play

FINAL PAPERS DUE Mon. 5:00pm
