

Beggar's Opera

Questions for the Whole Play

1. How does metaphor function in *The Beggar's Opera*? (For example, watch the word *interest* and how it is used.)
2. What is being said in this play about the satirized features of 18<sup>th</sup>-century London culture? (e.g., class, gender, morality, marriage, the government, the legal system, etc.)
3. The *Beggar's Opera* is the first ballad opera written. What is the relationship between genre (i.e., opera, heroic literature, ballads) and the action of the play?
4. What allusions to the story of Christ's life can you see in the play? What do you think Gay is getting at?

Questions for Act I

1. What is Peachum's profession? How does he conduct it?
2. What is the state of law in England at this time?
3. What is transportation? Pleading one's belly?
4. What happens if one of Peachum's employees tries to leave his employ?
5. What professions are mentioned? How do they compare with Peachum's profession, in his view?
6. How do Polly's parents react to her marriage? Why? What course of action would they have preferred she take? What is odd about this?

7. What is Newgate? Old Bailey Sessions?
8. What are we supposed to think of Polly and MacHeath by the end of the first act?

#### Questions for Act II

1. How does MacHeath's gang see itself? To whom do they compare themselves?
2. What do we learn about MacHeath in Act II? Does your attitude toward him change?
3. What allusions do you notice in MacHeath's interaction with Jenny Diver?
4. What is the nature of MacHeath's relationship with Lucy Lockit? Who is she? Who is her father?
5. What is Lucy's problem? How does she feel about it?
6. To what current events does MacHeath's relationship with Polly & Lucy allude?

#### Questions for Act III

1. What is the significance of the scene that includes Lockit, Peachum, and Diana Trapes?
2. How is MacHeath recaptured? Why is he immediately sentenced to death?
3. MacHeath's songs in Act III have particularly strong political content. What do they contribute to our overall understanding of the "point" of the play?
4. Why is MacHeath ready to die in the end? What happens to alter that outcome?