

# Bibliotekarstudentens nettleksikon om litteratur og medier

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Sist oppdatert 03.12.20

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## Balladeopera

(\_sjanger) Et sangspill der talen er blandet med sanger, dvs. en forløper til musikalen. Sjangeren begynte som opera-parodier. “[T]he ballad opera (of which *The Beggar’s Opera* 1728 is the most familiar example) consisted of popular tunes of the day given new words and incorporated into a spoken drama” (Dyer 2007 s. 10). Hvis melodiene er komponert til skuespillet, hvis de altså ikke er eksisterende, populære melodier som folk kjenner godt, er det ikke en balladeopera.

På 1730-tallet ble det framført mange balladeoperaer i London (ca. 20 forskjellige i 1732). Irlenderen Charles Coffey skrev blant annet *The Devil to Pay, or The Wives Metamorphos’d* (1731) og *The Merry Cobbler, or The Second Part of The Devil to Pay* (1735). Den skotske dikteren Allan Ramsays *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725) ble framført med skotske melodier og regnes som en balladeopera, selv om den ikke er satirisk, men snarere idyllisk (hyrdediktning). Thomas Doggett and John Hippisleys *Flora, or Hob in the Well* ble fra 1735 også spilt i USA.

“*The Beggar’s Opera* is still the most successful example of the ballad opera genre. There were many authors in addition to John Gay who attempted to contribute to the genre after John Gay’s success in 1728. Some of these ballad operas included:

- an anonymous *Robin Hood* (1730)
- Walter Aston’s *The Restauration of King Charles II* (1732), which was banned
- John Mottley and Thomas Cooke’s *Penelope* (1728)
- John Breval’s *The Rape of Helen* (1733)
- Colley Cibber’s *Love in a Riddle* (1729), which was later cut and successfully produced anonymously as *Damon and Phillida*
- Charles Coffey’s *The Devil to Pay* (1731)
- Henry Carey’s *The Honest Yorkshireman* (1735)
- numerous examples written by Henry Fielding.

The only ballad opera that came close to the success of Gay's opera was the Irishman Coffey's *The Devil to Pay*. Henry Fielding was an important contributor of ballad operas. Although he is most famous today for his novels like *Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews*, Henry Fielding was a popular dramatist in his day, and he wrote thirty plays which include ten ballad operas. A few of his ballad operas are *The Author's Farce* (1730), *The Welsh Opera* (1731), and *Don Quixote in England* (1734). The success of the ballad opera not only inspired other writers, it also contributed to enlarging the audience for theater to include more of the social classes. This created a greater need for theaters and contributed to the increasing use of the theater in the Haymarket, the use of the Goodman's Fields Theatre, and the building of Covent Garden in 1732." (Porter m.fl. 2011) Fielding skrev teksten til ti balladeoperaer.

"The genre's London popularity only lasted a decade or so, yet English ballad opera went on to influence everything from the *singspiel* in Germany to comic opera in France to the Broadway musical. And one ballad opera in particular played a key role in the history of American theater. [...] In 1735 in Charleston, S.C., a ballad opera called *Flora [or Hob in the Well]* went down in recorded history as the first opera of any kind to be produced in North America. The next year, it was performed on a new stage in the same city called the Dock Street Theater. [...] The version of *Flora* produced in Charleston was resurrected by American composer Neely Bruce, who took the original song tunes and music from two surviving scores, and wove it all together with music of his own – recreating a world of bawdy comedy, often riotous stage action and truly charming music. The production features Andriana Chuchman in the title role, with Tyler Duncan as Flora's lover Mr. Friendly and Timothy Nolen as her nemesis, Sir Thomas Testy. The title character is an orphaned teenager left in the care of her malevolent uncle, Sir Thomas Testy. She's also in love with a man called Mr. Friendly. But the two can't get together because Testy won't let Flora out of the house – he has his own lascivious eye on the young woman." (<http://www.npr.org/2011/05/20/136469565/flora-an-18th-century-british-invasion>; lesedato 22.09.14)

Mange regner den engelske dikteren John Gray som skaperen av denne sjangeren, i og med hans verk *The Beggar's Opera* (1728; med musikken bearbeidet av Johann Christoph Pepusch). I balladeoperaer er sangene vanligvis skrevet til kjente melodier. *The Beggar's Opera* inneholder 69 sanger basert på den gang svært kjente engelske og skotske viser, men ofte lagde Gay en ironisk distanse mellom den opprinnelige teksten og hans egen tekst til melodien. Han skrev også en oppfølger, *Polly*, om Polly Peachums liv i Vestindia, men som lenge var forbudt og først ble framført i 1777.

*The Beggar's Opera* ble straks en suksess i London. I løpet av én teatersesong i 1728 ble det spilt 62 ganger på Lincoln's Inn Fields. Tittelen skyldes at det i stykket opptrer en tigger-forfatter som skal ha skrevet det hele. *The Beggar's Opera* er altså i selve fortellingen en opera komponert av en tigger. Charles Coffey

prøvde å spinne videre på suksessen med sin balladeopera *The Beggar's Wedding* (1729).

“In 1728, the first performance of John Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* attracted the acclaim and attention of the popular audience in England. The first run of the performance lasted 62 nights! Today, this sounds like a lot, but in the 18th century, it was an unprecedented touchstone. Later, the opera was performed internationally in Dublin, Glasgow, Jamaica and New York. In 1750, *The Beggar’s Opera* was one of the earliest musical comedies produced in America; appropriately, it was produced in New York, which today is the mecca of musical comedy. The opera launched the popularity of a new form of stage entertainment, the ballad opera. The audience for the ballad opera, unlike opera’s noble and upper-class following, included people from the lower class, middle class, and upper class. Londoners loved the realism and satire in the ballad opera; they left the theater talking about it and singing the familiar tunes. The book trade was also stimulated because of its controversial subject matter and satire.” (Porter m.fl. 2011)

Den største kjeltringen i stykket er “borgeren” Mr. Peachum, som er politispion og en slags advokat, men samtidig lar en hel bande av tyver arbeide for seg. Peachum beskytter også fengselsfanger ved hjelp fra fangevokteren Lockit, hvis fangene kan betale han. Gay presenterer Peachum gjennom dennes første sang, der den utspekulerte kjeltringen uttrykker sin kynisme:

“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.”

Peachum benytter sine verv i samfunnet til å berike seg selv, for “Money, Wife, is the true Fuller’s Earth for Reputations, there is not a Spot or a Stain but what it can take out”. (1. Akt)

Peachums datter Polly vil gifte seg med lederen for en kriminell bande, kaptein Macheath, fordi hun elsker han. Begge hennes foreldre er forferdet over hennes “naivitet” og mangel på vilje til å kapre en rikere ektemann. Foreldrene beslutter seg for å få Macheath arrestert, noe som for øvrig vil gi en fortjenste på 40 pund sterling fra politiet. Polly varslar Macheath, og han går i skjul hos en gruppe prositituerte. Men Peachum har kjøpt disse kvinnenenes lojalitet, slik at de forråder Macheath. I fengselet må Macheath høre på beibredelsene fra Lockits datter, Lucy, som han tidligere har lovet å gifte seg med. Mens Lockit og Peachum først krangler og deretter forsones av økonomiske grunner, lover Macheath å gifte seg med Lucy.

Lockit vil henge Macheath. Polly ankommer fengselet, og hun og Lucy blir voldsomt sjalu på hverandre. Med hjelp fra Lucy klarer Macheath senere å rømme, og Lucy planlegger å ta livet av Polly med rottegift. Macheath blir fanget på ny, og begge de to unge kvinnene trygler hver sin far om å slippe han fri. Ingen av fedrene bøyer av, og Macheath sitter og drikker brennevin mens han venter på henrettelsen. Plutselig trygler en av skuespillerne tigger-forfatteren som har lagd stykket om å la alt ende lykkelig. Macheath blir dermed brått benådet, byr alle opp til dans og lover Polly å gifte seg med henne.

Stykket har historisk forelegg. I 1725 ble Jonathan Wild henrettet. Han var en politispion og heler som samtidig i hemmelighet var leder en hel bande av tyver. Wild har blitt kalt “oppfinneren” av organisert kriminalitet (Oudin 1997 s. 73). Han kontrollerte mye av forbryterverdenen i London ved å pålegge de kriminelle sine regler. Han drepte motstandere eller overleverte dem til politiet (blant dem Jack Sheppard). Han regjerte ved trusler, vold og korrupsjon, og virket uovervinnelig. Da han til slutt ble arrestert, var det for heleri, altså av en relativt banal grunn, men han endte i galgen.

Jonathan Wild var “Director of a Corporation of Thieves, and a most famous Receiver [dvs. heler, mottaker av tyvegods]. Executed at Tyburn, 24th of May, 1725 [...] He said himself (in a pamphlet which he published in vindication of his character) that by misfortunes in the world he was subject to the discipline of the compter for above the space of four years, during which time he was, in some measure, let into the secrets of the criminals there under confinement; of which knowledge he afterwards availed himself.” (Jack Lynch i <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/wild.html>; lesedato 15.04.14)

“Formerly, when a thief had got a prize, he could easily find people enough to take it off his hands at something less than the real value, for the law had provided no punishment for the receiver. But after the legislature had passed an Act which made it felony to receive stolen goods, knowing them to be stolen, a considerable stop was put to this practice. The few who continued it were obliged to act very cautiously, and, as they ran great hazards, they insisted on such extravagant profits that the thieving trade was in danger of coming to nothing. But Jonathan [Wild] contrived a scheme that gave new life to the business, and convening some of his chief prigs he laid the matter before them. “You know, my bloods,” quoth he, “that as trade goes at present you stand but a queer chance; for when you have made anything, if you carry it to the pawnbrokers, those unconscionable dealers in contraband goods will hardly tip ye a quarter of what it is worth, and if ye offer it to a stranger, it’s ten to one but ye are babbled. So that there is no such thing as a man’s living by his labour; for if he don’t like to be half starved he must run the hazard of being scragged, which, let me tell you, is a d--d hard case. Now, if you will take my advice, I’ll engage to pay back the goods to the cull that owns them, and raise you more money upon that account than you can expect from the rascally brokers; and at the same time take care that you shall be all insured.” This was

received with general approbation, and immediately put in practice. No sooner was a robbery committed than Jonathan was informed what the goods were, when, how and from whom they were taken. The goods were deposited in some convenient place, but not in his own house; for at his first setting up in business he acted very cautiously, though afterwards he grew daring. When things were thus prepared, away went Jonathan, or the bone of his bone, to the persons who had been plundered, and addressed them to this purpose: "I happened to hear that you have lately been robbed, and a friend of mine, an honest broker, having stopped a parcel of goods upon suspicion, I thought I could do no less than give you notice of it, as not knowing but some of them might be yours; if it proves so (as I wish it may), you may have them again, provided that nobody is brought into trouble, and the broker has something in consideration of his care." " (Jack Lynch i <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/wild.html>; lesedato 15.04.14)

"[A]s he soon became eminent in his profession he altered some of his measures. He no longer applied to those who had lost anything, but they were obliged to apply to him if they expected his assistance, and he received them in his office with much formality. At their entrance it was hinted to them that they must deposit a crown as a fee for his advice. This being done, he demanded their names, where they lived, where and how they were robbed, if they suspected any persons and what kind of persons they were, the particular goods that were lost, and what reward would be given if the goods were returned. These articles being known were entered in a book he kept for that purpose, and then the persons were assured that a careful inquiry should be made, and if they called again in two or three days he might possibly give them some intelligence." (Jack Lynch i <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/wild.html>; lesedato 30.04.14)

"[H]e obtained the rewards offered for pursuing them to conviction, and greatly extended his ascendancy over the other thieves, who considered him with a kind of awe; while, at the same time, he established his character as being a man of great public utility. [...] A lady of fortune being on a visit in Piccadilly, her servants, leaving her sedan [= bærestol] at the door, went to refresh themselves at a neighbouring public-house. Upon their return the vehicle was not to be found; in consequence of which the men immediately went to Wild, and having informed him of their loss, and complimented him with the usual fee, they were desired to call upon him again in a few days. Upon their second application Wild extorted from them a considerable reward, and then directed them to attend the chapel in Lincoln's Inn Fields on the following morning, during the time of prayers. The men went according to the appointment, and under the piazzas of the chapel perceived the chair, which upon examination they found to contain the velvet seat, curtains and other furniture, and that it had received no kind of damage. [...] When people had been two or three times with him in quest of what they had lost, he would tell them that he had made inquiry after their goods and received information that if such a sum of money was sent to such a place the goods would be delivered to the person who carried it. This being agreed on, a porter was called, the money put into

his hands, and directions given him to go and wait at the corner of the street; when he came to the place appointed, or perhaps on his way thither, he was met by somebody who delivered him the goods upon his paying the money.” (Jack Lynch i <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/wild.html>; lesedato 15.04.14)

Wild ble arrestert i februar 1725. “The sessions at the Old Bailey beginning on Wednesday, the 24th of the same month, he entered his prayer to be tried that sessions, or bailed, or discharged. But on the Friday following there came down a warrant of detainer, which was produced in court with several informations upon oath, to the following effect:

1. That for many years past he had been a confederate with a great number of highwaymen, pickpockets, housebreakers, shoplifters and other thieves.
2. That he had formed a kind of corporation of thieves, of which he was the head or director, and that notwithstanding his pretended services, in detecting and prosecuting offenders, he procured such only to be hanged as concealed their booty, or refused to share it with him.
3. That he had divided the town and country into so many districts, and appointed distinct gangs for each, who regularly accounted with him for their robberies. That he had also a particular set to steal at churches in time of divine service; and likewise other moving detachments to attend at Court on birthdays, balls, etc., and at both Houses of Parliament, circuits, and country fairs.
4. That the persons employed by him were for the most part felons convict, who had returned from transportation before the time for which they were transported was expired, and that he made choice of them to be his agents because they could not be legal evidence against him, and because he had it always in his power to take from them what part of the stolen goods he thought fit, and otherwise use them ill, or hang them, as he pleased.
5. That he had from time to time supplied such convicted felons with money and clothes, and lodged them in his own house, the better to conceal them; particularly for counterfeiting and diminishing broad-pieces and guineas.
6. That he had not only been a receiver of stolen goods for nearly fifteen years past, but had frequently been a confederate, and robbed along with the above-mentioned convicted felons.
7. That in order to carry on these vile practices, and to gain some credit with the ignorant multitude, he usually carried a short silver staff, as a badge of authority from the government, which he used to produce when he himself was concerned in robbing.

8. That he had under his care and direction several warehouses for receiving and concealing stolen goods; and also a ship for carrying off jewels, watches and other valuable goods to Holland, where he had a superannuated thief for his factor.

9. That he kept in pay several artists to make alterations and transform watches, seals, snuff-boxes, rings and other valuable things, that they might not be known, several of which he used to present to such persons as he thought might be of service to him.

10. That he seldom or never helped the owners to the notes and papers that they had lost, unless he found them able exactly to specify and describe them, and then often insisted on more than half the value.

11. And lastly, it appears that he has often sold human blood, by procuring false evidence to swear persons into facts they were not guilty of, sometimes to prevent them from being evidence against himself, and at other times for the sake of the great reward given by the Government.”

(Jack Lynch i <https://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Texts/wild.html>; lesedato 15.04.14)

*The Beggar's Opera* var en provokasjon overfor de britiske myndighetene (Oudin 2010 s. 99). De fleste operaer handlet om mytologi og kjærlighetshistorier, mens Gay plasserte skuespillerne på scenen i rollene som tyver og prostituerte. Og folk gjenkjente Wild i karakteren Peachum og Sheppard i Macheath. Thomas Walker, den første som spilte røveren og forførereren Macheath, skyndte seg å skrive et lignende stykke: *The Quaker's Opera* (Hecht 1972 s. 74).

“The ballad opera not only made fun of Italian opera, but also provided a new popularity for native music that the masses knew and enjoyed. [...] *The Beggar's Opera* was a double satire of the Italian opera tradition and of the political corruption of incumbent Prime Minister Sir Robert Walpole and his government. Gay mocked the Italian opera tradition in many ways:

- Gay chose popular simple tunes to mock what many British believed to be the overly virtuous and artificial airs of Italian opera.

- The composer disposed of recitative altogether in favor of spoken dialogue.

- Gay's main characters are thieves and bawds, rather than the heroes and kings of Italian opera.

- Finally, he makes fun of the often-disliked Italian divas. The year before John Gay's opera premiered, the two leading prima donnas in London, Francesca Cuzzoni and Faustina Bordoni, were well known to be enemies. In 1727, their rivalry escalated to a fight on stage; the two divas scratched and pulled out each

other's hair! The rivalry between these ladies inspired Gay's leading female characters, Polly Peachum and Lucy Lockit, and their quarreling scenes. [...] Gay's ballad opera also satirized Walpole and his government. The main characters, Macheath and Peachum, were portraits of well-known criminals John Sheppard and Jonathon Wild, a notorious informer executed in 1725. Peachum was also meant to satirize Sir Robert Walpole. Peachum's behavior as a thief, womanizer, and double-dealer directly stabbed at Walpole who was known as a corrupt leader as well as an adulterer. Walpole had tried to eliminate free press many times through "spies, bribery, imprisonment, and the buying up of journalists and newspapers." When *The Beggar's Opera* premiered, the most controversial newspaper of the time, "The Craftsman," published numerous reviews praising Gay's ballad opera and reporting its success. Sir Walpole went to see Gay's opera and, not surprisingly, hated it. Walpole banned John Gay's sequel, *Polly*, in 1729. Although *Polly* was banned from the theaters, it was published and widely sold in the bookshops at a great profit to John Gay." (Porter m.fl. 2011)

"The ballad opera genre undoubtedly led to the body of 19th century work of Gilbert and Sullivan, the British librettist and composer who wrote over 20 satirical operettas that are still popular today. The influence of Gay's opera continued into the 20th century. In 1928, Bertold Brecht wrote an adaptation of *The Beggar's Opera* and called it *The Threepenny Opera*, including music written by Kurt Weill. Gay's opera's lasting influence is confirmed by the fact that it remains the most famous ballad opera in existence today, and some believe it is the only notable one as well." (Porter m.fl. 2011)

Sjangeren utviklet seg videre til "light opera" av den typen engelskemennene Gilbert og Sullivan ble kjent for, og senere til den moderne musikalen. En moderne opera som er direkte influert av balladeopera er Vaughan Williams' *Hugh the Drover* (1914).

Med sin *Tolvskillingsoperaen* (1928) ville den tyske dikteren Bertolt Brecht vise "gjennom-kapitaliseringen av alle menneskelige forhold" i et kapitalistisk samfunn (sitert fra Hecht 1972 s. 100). Stykket ble skrevet nøyaktig to hundre år etter Gays stykke, og akkurat som Gay ble Brecht anklaget for plagiat. Gay skal ha "stjålet" sitt stykke fra en person som het Bullock, som igjen skal ha lånt fra en Marston (Hecht 1972 s. 74). Hos Brecht har Peachum gjennom markedsundersøkelser funnet ut hvordan hans tiggere må se ut og presentere seg: Folk gir primært bort penger til krigsofre, trafikkofre og lignende. Den kriminelle underverdenen ikler seg roller og fungerer som et "speil" for resten av samfunnet. Mack the Knife reddes fra galgen, og koret kommenterer spriket mellom liv og kunst: I det ekte livet er kongen ingen deus ex machina som redder folks liv i siste sekund.

"Brecht was also toying with the famous *Beggar's Opera* by John Gay, from 1728, which had been revived in London in 1920 and run for years. Elisabeth Hauptmann, Brecht's assistant and collaborator, introduced him to the piece and



translated the English libretto into German. [...] Brecht drew on other sources besides the *Beggar's Opera*. One is the Bible, which is quoted frequently, especially in the first scene, where Mr. Peachum talks about arousing sympathy for his beggars. Other sources include the great French medieval poet, François Villon, and Rudyard Kipling. (In fact, Brecht had to pay a portion of his royalties to the translator of Villon when it was discovered that some song lyrics were taken nearly verbatim from the German edition.) [...] Accounts of the premiere agree that the audience sat in stony silence through most of the first act, until Mack and Tiger Brown's duet "Kanonen-Song" (The Army Song). For whatever reason, that rip-roaring number broke the ice, and the suddenly frenzied crowd demanded an encore then and there. From that point on, the show was assured of success, despite the fact that many critics didn't know what to make of it. Now that night has passed into legend as the cultural high-water mark of the Weimar Republic, just as *Threepenny* has come to represent the entire era." (<http://www.threepennyopera.org/histOrigins.php>; lesedato 22.09.14)

"Brecht's *Three Penny Opera* was an anarchistic vision of urban society, tempered by a sharp cynical wit, and an episodic form that had its roots in the cabaret. [...] For a number of songs, Brecht made use of ballads by François Villon, translated by K. L. Ammer in an edition out of print since 1909. As a result, the first *Three Penny Opera* scandal erupted in May 1929, when Alfred Kerr, the famed Berlin theater critic, accused Brecht of plagiarism. Brecht, in fact, relished such a scandal as a means of thumbing his nose at the pettiness of bourgeois culture. He simply published a note acknowledging the omission but stating that he never worried about such mundane matters. Meanwhile, the opera gained a notorious reputation as a semi-pornographic work. For months the opera ran on the Berlin stage, while "The Ballad of Mack the Knife" became a popular hit tune. [...] Despite (or because of) its brutal satire of bourgeois values and its intentional vulgarity, calculated to shock well-mannered sensibilities, the opera won critical acclaim. The communist press, on the other hand, most prominently the main organ of the German Communist Party, *Die Rote Fahne*, attacked the play for its lack of social concreteness. The dichotomy between Brecht's modernism and his Marxist commitment was clearly evident. The London underworld, with its cynical prostitutes, petty thieves, confidence men, and corrupt officials, as well as the opera's amoral and polygamous hero, fascinated audiences instead of repelling them. On the formal level, the fragmented narrative, non-naturalistic acting, ever-present posters, and cabaret atmosphere underscored the modernist and anarchistic content of the opera, including the grim urban setting, the aggressive attack on traditional culture in favor of popular culture, and the disbelief in social order or philosophical unity." (Jan-Christopher Horak i <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC15folder/3PennyOpera.html>; lesedato 05.12.14)

"In Brecht's original opera, the so-called Beggar-King, Peachum, wants the criminal Macheath (alias Mack the Knife) arrested for eloping with his daughter, Polly. Although the police chief, Tiger Brown, has previously managed to protect

Mack (for a fee, of course), Peachum threatens to send his beggars into the streets on the day of the queen's coronation unless Mack is hanged. The police arrest Mack while he is visiting Jenny, a prostitute and ex-lover, who betrays him for money and out of jealousy. Mack is freed, however, with the help of Lucy, the daughter of Tiger Brown. Finally he is arrested a second time while visiting another prostitute, Sucky Tawdry. Tongue in cheek, Brecht gives his opera an "American happy end" by having Mack saved from hanging in honor of the queen's coronation. A country estate and life-time pension are thrown in for good measure." (Jan-Christopher Horak i <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC15folder/3PennyOpera.html>; lesedato 05.12.14)

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