

The Hybrid Reality of *The Beggar's Opera*

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In this essay, I would like to consider the hybrid reality of John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.¹ One of the characteristics of the play is to pack as many kinds of material as possible within a single work of art. *The Beggar's Opera* refers to a variety of social activities from high and low life, including Grub Street pamphlets and the Italian opera. After its huge success, *The Beggar's Opera* was, in turn, to be made use of in other literary works: William Hogarth's graphic art and Henry Fielding's *Jonathan Wild* were among them. Many artists tried to reach a new audience by employing hybrid forms of representation. Thus Gay's diverse rendering of social reality gives us a clue to understanding the eighteenth-century public sphere in England, where the play was one of the topics for communal discussion. So I also argue the historical dynamics of the public through the examination of *The Beggar's Opera*.

One of the main activities in the eighteenth-century public sphere was, as Jürgen Habermas insists, intellectual and political discussions. "The periodical articles were not only made the object of discussion by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral parts of this discussion," writes Habermas, and indeed *The Beggar's Opera* was featured in many periodicals such as *The Craftsman* and *The Daily Journal*,

¹ John Gay, *Dramatic Works*, ed. John Fuller, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1983). Subsequent references of Gay's works refer to this edition.

most of which focused on the political aspects of the play.² Habermas also writes, “Men like Pope, Gay, Arbuthnot, and Swift combined literature and politics in a peculiar fashion comparable to Addison’s and Steel’s combination of literature and journalism.”³ Thus we may say that *The Beggar’s Opera* is based in Gay’s political consciousness.

The Beggar’s Opera also problematizes the status of a literary author. The traditional authority of culture would belong to some transcendent figures such as Homer or Aristotle, but now the *real* author of *The Beggar’s Opera* might not be identified with Gay himself. Why not? Because of its apparent hybridity, this play was inseparably intertwined with Pope, Swift, Lord Chesterfield, and many anonymous writers.⁴ Even though there is no doubt about Gay’s authorship, the inter-textuality of this work makes us notice the complex relations among contemporary authors.

In the first section of this paper, I will describe the early reception of *The Beggar’s Opera*. How did Gay gain far-flung fame among his contemporaries? Of course, there are many reasons for Gay’s success, but here I am concerned especially with Gay’s attitude toward the literary conventions. While making use of the contemporary criminal biographies, he revised the ordinary plot-line, which typically culminated in the

² Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT P, 1996), 42. For the references to *The Beggar’s Opera* in the contemporary journals, see William Henry Irving, *John Gay: Favorite of the Wits* (Durham: Duke UP, 1940), 256-57.

³ Habermas, 59.

⁴ For various subtexts of *The Beggar’s Opera*, see Dianne Dugaw, “Folklore and John Gay’s Satire” in *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31.3 (Summer, 1991), 515-33.

death of the hero. Paradoxically, this break with tradition has helped to give a much longer literary life to *The Beggar's Opera*. The craze for *The Beggar's Opera* is, therefore, thought to be part of the increasing demand for new fictional writing among the reading public.

Next, after seeing Gay's twist of fictional causality, I move to examine the hybrid nature of *The Beggar's Opera*. The crucial point is the inter-textuality of the play. Through Hogarth's paintings from the play, we come to realize that the gender reversal is essential to its realism. The feminization of the hero contributes to the play's success. Indeed, many cross-dressing performances were staged at the end of the century.⁵ We can understand easily that hero might be less a natural genius than an artificial product of author. Furthermore, I will emphasize the importance of Hogarth's theatrical perspective in order to comprehend the self-conscious artificiality of *The Beggar's Opera*.

Finally, we consider Gay's authorship from a socio-political viewpoint. Gay represents the freedom of middle-class trading strategies throughout the play: borrowing, copying, and recycling of as many materials as possible. His commercialization of literary products, then, would affect the subjectivity of author based on the traditional patronage system. Gay may appear to make an argument against literary subordination to a patron; however, that's not necessarily the case. I will describe Gay's ambivalence between two contradictory selves. In the end, he takes a meta-fictional position in the play and reveals the instability of the modern author in the eighteenth-century public sphere.

⁵ The playbill of the 1777 production tells us that Mrs. Farrell played the role of Macheath. See John Brewer, *The Pleasures of the Imagination: English Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 445-49.

I

The original performance of *The Beggar's Opera* was at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1728.⁶ *The Beggar's Opera* was one of the most successful plays of the eighteenth century, and the production ran for more than sixty performances in the first season. Throughout the eighteenth century there were annual revivals of the play in which many performers competed for playing the roles of Macheath and Polly. Three main factors contributed to the play's blockbuster success: (1) the brilliant performance of Lavinia Fenton (2) the adaptation of many traditional English ballads (3) the author's unique attitude toward literary conventions.

The Beggar's Opera has won an everlasting fame. However, before staging, its success was highly doubtful. It is said that Gay's patron, the Duke of Queensberry, on reading the play in advance of production, expressed the opinion that "[t]his is a very odd thing, Gay; I am satisfied that it is either a very good thing, or a very bad thing."⁷ In fact, Gay had much difficulty in getting the play staged at the major theaters. Colley Cibber at Drury Lane rejected Gay's proposal. Also John Rich at Lincoln's Inn Fields turned the play down at first, but with the guarantee of expenses by the Duchess of Queensberry, he reluctantly accepted *The Beggar's Opera*. Little was expected for the play's success.

What then made the audience so enthusiastic about the play? It is well known that Polly's song "Now ponder well, ye Parents dear" was a

⁶ For the staging background, see Irving, 235–65. My argument here draws on Irving's research.

⁷ John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, ed. Edgar V. Roberts, music ed. Edward Smith (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1969), xv.

crucial moment for the success of the play. Fenton as Polly sang the following song:

Polly. *Oh, ponder well! be not severe;
So save a wretched Wife!
For on the Rope that hangs my Dear
Depends poor Polly's Life.* (I.x.45-48)

Both Fenton's "innocent looks" and her "comic pathetic" song captured the admiration of the audience.⁸ Another account of the initial production insists that the gang's chorus in "March in *Rinaldo*, with Drums and Trumpets" was greeted with the first ovation from the audience.⁹

In any case, Rich's initial apprehensions were totally swept away, and Fenton became an overnight celebrity. Now, can we say that Gay's actors such as Fenton and Tom Walker as Macheath are the key to the play's success?¹⁰ We might admit the importance of their performances, especially in the first season, but the story of the play's first staging seems to be what Nokes calls "a familiar Hollywood scenario."¹¹ In fact, Fenton appeared on stage just one season, and then retired when she

⁸ For Fenton's performance and her reputations, see David Nokes, *John Gay: A Profession of Friendship* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995), 417-18. According to James Boswell's *Life of Johnson*, Fenton impressed the audience with her innocent looks and she got the legendary fame in the history of English drama.

⁹ For *Rinaldo*, Handel's first English opera, see Nokes, 77-78. For the association of highwayman with alchemists in this song, see John Gay, *The Beggar's Opera*, eds. Bryan Loughrey and T.O. Treadwell (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1986), 71.

¹⁰ For Walker's performance, see Irving, 245-46.

¹¹ Nokes, 418.

married her admirer, the Duke of Bolton. Irving also insists that the best actors are not the point: Gay's other dramatic works like *The Wife of Bath*, *Three Hours after Marriage*, or *The Captives*—all of which featured the possible best actors at that time—could scarcely provide comparable results.¹²

More important than the merits of actors might be Gay's use of music. In this mock opera, Gay's musical choices drew from traditional English ballads rather than exotic Italian sources. *The Beggar's Opera* was called as "Mr Gay's new English opera."¹³ His arrangements ran to an extreme, and Gay incorporated more than sixty English and Scottish ballads into the play.¹⁴ Therefore, as the title announces, *The Beggar's Opera* is a parody of Italian opera, and here we might see the nascent nationalism of this play.

However, it is dubious if Gay worked from the genuinely nationalistic point of view. One cannot take his xenophobic parody of opera at face value. Even if Gay's parody caused any damage to the opera-house, it did not necessarily mean that his intention was to demolish Italian opera. Because of the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera* there was a certain shift of public taste in drama.¹⁵ Yet Italian opera has continued to be performed. For Gay, without Italian opera, *The Beggar's Opera* could have lost its parodic merits. In order to maximize his satire in this play, Gay had to stake out an indecisive position. In fact, his use of two tunes from Handel, both of which had been used in Gay's previous plays,

¹² For the performances of these three plays, see Irving, 243.

¹³ Nokes, 418.

¹⁴ See Nokes, 433. According to Nokes, Gay's use of ballads was indebted to D'Urfey's *Wit and Mirth; or, Pills to Purge Melancholy*.

¹⁵ For the financial crisis of the Royal Academy of Music, see Nokes, 426-27.

suggests his personal attachment to the opera.¹⁶ Gay's Englishness, therefore, is quite ambivalent, and we will return to this point later.

The third point concerns Gay's attitude toward literary conventions. By the end of 1720, as Brewer notes, the analogies between Whig politicians and London criminals had become a cliché.¹⁷ So Gay's political attack on Sir Robert Walpole in the form of criminal biography was not entirely new to the audience. The novelty lies in his unique arrangement of the well-established conventions. In the composition of the play, he mixed up two genres: the official biographies mostly written by the Ordinary of Newgate and the sensational stories by Grub Street journalists. The Ordinary of Newgate generally emphasized the protagonist's confession of guilt because the chief purpose of the narrative was to enhance the public morals. On the other hand, Grub Street journalism detailed individual personalities, supplied descriptions of evil deeds, and demonstrated how thrilling episodes resulted in fatalities. Gay followed the latter journalistic version throughout the play, but near the denouement he inserted a sort of mortal confession of Macheath. Therefore, the audience was delivered two familiar types of criminal biographies at the same time, and which type of story they were reading was unknown throughout the play. The audience came to be conscious of the difference between two genres. In both genres, of course, the story concludes with the death of protagonist. But Gay defies all expectations of audience and *The Beggar's Opera* ends with Macheath's reprieve.¹⁸ We see

¹⁶ For the friendship between Handel and Gay, see William A. McIntosh, "Handel, Walpole, and Gay: The Aims of *The Beggar's Opera*" in *John Gay's The Beggar's Opera*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), 70–71.

¹⁷ See Brewer, 436.

¹⁸ Sir John Fielding asked two theaters—Covent Garden and Drury Lane—to

here Gay's outstanding originality.

The reason why Gay employed two types of criminal biographies was to demonstrate how the lives of criminals were constructed in literary ways. He was playing with both genres so that the audience might be aware of their own fictional readings. Thus *The Beggar's Opera* defamiliarized the conventional story-making, which led to a new critical attitude toward the fictionality. Gay insists that literary realism is not the reflections of reality but the *realization* of manifest fictionality. Now that we have seen Gay's self-reflexive incorporation of criminal biographies into the play, we will examine how *The Beggar's Opera* was interwoven with other contemporary discourse.

II

Hogarth's visual works of art have shed new light on the interpretation of *The Beggar's Opera* and correlations of the two artists have problematized the traditional concept of authority. Ronald Paulson discusses the inter-textuality operating in the works Gay and Hogarth. Hogarth's paintings of *The Beggar's Opera* and his engravings of *A Harlot's Progress* are especially significant and help us understand Gay's realism. First, let us examine Hogarth's *The Beggar's Opera*. There are at least five versions of the painting; we will confine ourselves to a treatment of the second and fourth ones (figs. 1, 2).¹⁹

modify the immoral ending. The former altered Macheath's reprieve into "three years of hard labor on the prison hulks." See John Bender, *Imagining the Penitentiary: Fiction and the Architecture of Mind in Eighteenth-Century England* (Chicago: The U of Chicago P, 1987), 102.

¹⁹ Hogarth's paintings and engraving are from Jenny Uglow, *Hogarth: A Life and a World* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1997), 138, 139, and 200.



fig 1. Hogarth, *The Beggar's Opera*, II (1729)

In both paintings, Macheath is torn between two wives, Polly and Lucy. Here he is singing “Which way shall I turn me” that, following Paulson’s argument, could be interpreted as a theme of “dramatic parody of Hercules’s hesitation.”²⁰ The Choice of Hercules is a classic allegory: young Hercules was accosted by two women, Virtue and Pleasure, and asked to choose between them. Pleasure promised him physical delights, while Virtue promised immortality. In the end, Hercules chose the latter, and was received amongst the gods. Hogarth made use of this popular topic of moral choice in order to depict the climax scene of *The Beggar's Opera*. Of course, Macheath’s dilemma between Polly (virtue) and Lucy (pleasure) is a parody of the traditional choice of Hercules.

²⁰ Ronald Paulson, *Breaking and Remaking: Aesthetic Practice in England, 1700–1820* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1989), 175.

The historical hero is demythicized: the following Macheath's somehow misogynic denial of choice in "Tom Tinker's my true Love" signifies his irrelevance to the moral hesitations:

Macheath. *Which way shall I turn me?—How can I decide?
Wives, the Day of our Death, are as fond as a Bride.
One Wife is too much for most Husbands to hear,
But two at a time there's no Mortal can bear.
This way, and that way, and which way I will,
What would comfort the one, t'other Wife would take
ill.* (III.xi.28-33)



fig 2. Hogarth, *The Beggar's Opera*, IV (1729)

So we know the moral allegory of *The Beggar's Opera* is a mere appearance, and that there could be hidden characters behind its ostensible hero.

We realize Macheath-Hercules's posture is somehow arrogant. As Paulson insists, this arrogant attitude with his legs spread and arms folded would remind the audience of the Great Man of the time, Walpole. Therefore, through Hogarth's paintings, we see Gay's political attack on Walpole administration replicated.

However, as we have already claimed, such a political allegory is not so important. Hogarth's paintings should be regarded as his imaginative depictions of the play, and behind these seeming realistic renditions there are more of his original readings of *The Beggar's Opera*. Why, then, did Hogarth use the classic theme, Choice of Hercules as an overall frame for the paintings? For, beside its impact of significant moment in his paintings, Hogarth put stress on the transformation of the concept of hero. He has superimposed an antihero, Walpole on the classical Hercules. So there are emerging contradictions in the image of hero. Paulson insists that in Hogarth a heroic action is "transformed from public to private, from political to sexual desire, and from male to female." (169) Here we can see that Hogarth has subverted the heroic image of *The Beggar's Opera*.

We can find another Hercules figure in *A Harlot's Progress* (fig. 3). Here we see clearly the gender inversions of the hero. Moll Hackabout, the central figure of the engravings is a transformed Hercules. In the first plate, she is an innocent country girl coming up to London for job hunting, and is seduced by a bawd, Mother Needham. Standing in a doorway and excited by this seduction, is Colonel Francis Charteris who is a notorious "Rape-Master of Great Britain."²¹ Charteris is a friend of

²¹ David Bindman, *Hogarth and his Times* (London: British Museum P, 1997), 93.

Walpole, and Walpole saved him in the rape case of Ann Bond. Paulson writes, “Hercules is reduced to helpless femininity, as opposed to active male power and strength. She is a travesty, but also a softened, sentimentalized (precisely in the sense of feminized) version of Hercules.”²² Therefore, we can identify Hercules with Moll, and from the start this young woman is completely surrounded by worldly pleasures. Ironically, Hercules can exercise no choice but becoming a harlot. Here the classic hero is completely demythicized from male to female and from moral dilemma to sexual scandal.



fig 3. Hogarth, *A Harlot's Progress*, Plate I (1732)

While feminizing Hercules figure in *A Harlot's Progress*, Hogarth deployed Walpole's image through various persons such as Edmund

²² *Breaking and Remaking*, 174.

Gibson, Charteris, or others. Each character has a part of what Walpole was.²³ Of course, there is more. In principle, any personality could be divided into pieces and transferable. Moreover, they are not to be integrated as a single unity. In Hogarth's graphic art, therefore, general human nature is omnipresent all over the plate. Since his displacement of political figures is not based on a simple binary opposition, we find Walpole figures one after another, and the associations continue to proliferate regardless of gender distinctions. Any number of contradictory characters can be found in a person, and Hogarth's originality lies in the attempt to sharpen our sensitivity to the complexity of human character.

So also is the case with *The Beggar's Opera*. Although the main target of satire is certainly Walpole, we cannot identify him with any one character of the play. Macheath, Peachum, or Robin of Bagshot, are all candidates to which we can ascribe Walpole's contemporary negative image.²⁴ In other words, Gay's satire can be also interpreted as an attack to all human beings in principle. Gay has tried to find out the common denominator of humanity in Walpole. Now the point of his satire is to depict many affinities rather than singularity of each individual. Thus one realistic aspect of *The Beggar's Opera* is to be found in the multiplicity of character. The inconsistency is often represented by dispersions of one character into others, and sometimes by mixture of contradictory elements in one character. In the latter case, our expecta-

²³ For the detailed explanation of this plate, see Ronald Paulson, *Hogarth's Graphic Works* (London: The Print Room, 1989), 76-79.

²⁴ For the topical satiric allusion, see Loughrey and Treadwell, 26-27. The quarrel between Peachum and Lockit was thought to be "the deteriorating relationship between Walpole and his close political ally Lord Townshend." Also, Robin of Bagshot's alias Bob Booty was Walpole's nickname.

tions to the ordinary unity of identity were betrayed through finding heterogeneous coexistence. Thus the author tries to represent realistic human beings full of contradictions.

If Hercules assumes a female figure in *A Harlot's Progress*, Polly in *The Beggar's Opera* also can become a feminized hero. As the fourth version of painting depicted, the audience including players on stage was attracted to Polly's revealing gesture as if she had been a main character of this play. Indeed *Polly* (1729) features her as an adventurer to West Indies, and when she gets there, she is trapped by a bawd named Trapes. Polly is sold to a rich old man Ducat who seduced and raped her. There is more than a mere overlap of two female heroes: Moll and Polly. Both have become harlots, feminized Hercules figures. Paulson writes:

The Harlot herself is an “actress” in the sense that she is a country girl who replaces her true, natural identity with the false, assumed role of a “lady”—as, for example, she appears beating hemp in Bridewell in the dress of a lady, as earlier she attempted to maintain a ladylike identity by keeping history paintings and portraits (in engraved copies) on her walls and having tea served by a decrepit servant.²⁵

“Acting serves as the middle term between the heroic and the real for Hogarth,” continued Paulson.²⁶ Thus the realism of *The Beggar's Opera* as well as *A Harlot's Progress* depends on its truthfulness of this acting. The point is not how the *real* is represented but how *realistic* the represen-

²⁵ *Breaking and Remaking*, 181.

²⁶ *Breaking and Remaking*, 181.

tation is in the works of art. This is Gay's and Hogarth's new style of realism.

Let us see the main difference between the two versions. The fourth version broadens our perspective to *The Beggar's Opera*. We have another realistic rendition of social life of this period. As Uglow writes, "Hogarth's painting, which had been a 'stage' scene, became a 'theatrical' scene, a comment on plays and playgoers and the wider world," we notice here the recession of the prison walls, the addition of windows, curtain, and flanking stairs, and the more vivid reactions of audience to the play.²⁷ Polly's outstretched arms toward Macheath were not there, and we would find secret exchanges of gaze between Polly-Fenton and Duke of Bolton among the audience. Thus by his expansion of the perspective, Hogarth shows us a new possibility of interpretation of *The Beggar's Opera*. When we take a theatrical perspective like the fourth version, the reality of *The Beggar's Opera* lies not only in the prison stage but also in the invisible communications between actors and spectators. Thus the realism of *The Beggar's Opera* could link the public figure with private experiences of the audience. It is this intersection of public and private that defines the new sociability in the world of letters.

III

Here we will examine the redrawing of the boundary between fact and fiction, and also think about who has the final, even though temporal, decision to the truthfulness of fiction. The latter is concerning cultural authority of this period. We will see the transformation of authority

²⁷ Uglow, 138-39.

from the traditional one based on patronage system to the new one supported by faceless public audience.

Bender focuses on the multiple representations of Newgate.²⁸ In Newgate as a punitive facility, there could be found many selfish transactions of a jailer and a thief-taker which signified the abuse of rightful authority to punish. In the very early scene of *The Beggar's Opera*, we see the corruption of the penal system as follows:

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

Peachum. Why, she may plead her Belly at worst; to my Knowledge she hath taken care of that Security. But as the Wench is very active and industrious, you may satisfy her that I'll soften the Evidence. (I.ii.1-7)

Peachum, a thief-taker and underworld fence, was modeled on historical figure of Jonathan Wild. His business was, as the name implies, to impeach the criminals for the sake of the reward, which enabled him to preside over the underworld in London. Here Peachum provided a loophole for his favorite woman robber so that Moll could get her false acquittal. Lockit, a Newgate jailer, was complicit in Peachum's misappropriation of the power to punish. The following shows us their exploitations of criminal lives.

Peachum. Here's poor *Ned Clincher's* Name, I see. Sure,

²⁸ See Bender, 99-100.

Brother *Lockit*, there was a little unfair proceeding in *Ned's* case: for he told me in the Condemn'd Hold, that for Value receiv'd, you had promis'd him a Session or two longer without Molestation.

Lockit. Mr. *Peachum*,—This is the first time my Honour was ever call'd in Question. (II.x.27–33)

Now, from their commercial quarrel, we realize that Newgate is not a correctional institution but a mere confinement facility in which the punishment was easily pardoned or reprieved by arbitrary authority of penal system. The corruptions of Newgate are of a piece with the political system of the period, and the many allusions to Walpole in *The Beggar's Opera* enable us to stretch the political interpretation of Newgate. In order to rectify arbitrariness of the traditional power in Newgate, novelistic discourse tried to adopt more indirect and objective relations.²⁹ A kind of democratic patronage was required: publisher's financial support based on the subscription-buying reading public.³⁰ As the direct subjection to a patron was gradually weakened, the arbitrary position of the patron was ceded to a group of people who looked like spectators in Hogarth's paintings. The concept of authorship has been relocated in the interaction between author and readers. Without this interaction, the eighteenth-century "author" can be hardly conceived. Thus *The Beggar's Opera* could be regarded as an example of the whole

²⁹ For the significance of novelistic discourse in the prison reform of the eighteenth century, see Bender, 165–98.

³⁰ On the historical changes of patronage system, see Paul J. Korshin, "Types of Eighteenth-Century Literary Patronage" in *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 7. 4 (Summer, 1974), 453–73.

project of making new authority in the literary world.

However, we could not solve the problems of Newgate merely by negating its contradictions. Also the historical change of authorship took a long time to complete. While Gay was adopting the literary version of Peachum's commercialism for his own narrative constructions, he kept a yearning for aristocratic patronage represented in Macheath's nobility. Moreover, even though the arbitrariness of the old prison was a target of criticism, the objective procedure was not always effective because the narrative causality would be also a kind of rhetoric. At the end of the play, the author rejected a logical inevitability of hanging: the sudden appearance of beggar insisting the happy ending.

Gay's authorial ambivalence is also reflected in his treatment of gender appearances. What can we find behind character's appearance? In the early part of *The Beggar's Opera*, as we have already seen, Polly became a dramatic symbol of ideal woman by her song "Now ponder well, ye Parents dear." There were erased the political or sexual expressions in her innocent looks. However, when Polly appears in *Polly*, she displays a sexual image of the harlot that reminded us of Hogarth's Moll. She has a male costume in order to search for Macheath.³¹ Why did she become an actress? How did she come to be a harlot figure?

Polly. In my voyage, Madam, I was robb'd of all I had.
Upon my landing in a strange country, and in want, I was
found out by this inhuman woman, who had been an

³¹ In *Polly*, Macheath disguised as the black slave leader Morano. For the colonial theme in the play, see John Richardson, "John Gay and Slavery" in *The Modern Language Review*, 97.1 (Jan., 2002), 15-25.

acquaintance of my father's: She offer'd me at first the civilities of her own house. When she was inform'd of my necessities, she propos'd to me the service of a Lady; of which I readily accepted. 'Twas under that pretence that she treacherously sold me to your husband as a mistress.
(I.xiv.63-70)

In this way, she became a harlot in the colonial setting. Here, if we remember that Moll in *A Harlot's Progress* is a feminized figure of Walpole, then we could grasp the innocence of Polly in a quite different way. It is not a natural innocence that is expressed by Polly, but an artificial performance of gender role. So, through the medium of Moll, we could see a *real* hybridity of Polly: a mixed persona of Fenton/Polly/Macheath/Walpole. Polly is an actress, a female hero, and a male politician. Then, how can we interpret her purity for Macheath? The following is her love confession which leads to the next "Now ponder well, ye Parents dear":

Polly. *I, like a Ship in Storms, was tost;*
Yet afraid to put in to Land;
For seiz'd in the Port the Vessel's lost,
Whose Treasure is contrebanded.
The Waves are laid,
My Duty's paid.
O Joy beyond Expression!
Thus, safe a-shore,
I ask no more,
My All is in my Possession. (I.viii.103-12)

I have no idea how the best actress could perform Polly's colonial interest. Here Macheath was represented as a "contreband" which Polly as a smuggling vessel might import from abroad. So in spite of her innocent confession of love, her natural purity was an excuse of her hidden interests. Furthermore, we can raise a question to Moll's innocence in Hogarth's Plate I. Is Moll really taken advantage of by Mother Needham? Or is she taking the part of a fool for her later career? Nobody knows the truth. However, if we overlap these two images of Polly and Moll, we could point out their *natural* ability to perform the gender roles. Most important is not the inversion of gender itself, but reading the fictionality of gender reversal. Thus behind a seeming simplicity of Polly in *The Beggar's Opera*, we can find the fluctuating boundary between fact and fiction.

As we know, Habermas's public sphere is characterized as a homogeneous literary realm in which the members are in principle equal regardless of their social status. Of course, Habermas presuppose the real opposition of class, race, and gender outside this arena. However, I think we should not put stress on its egalitarian tendency in the idealistic Republic of Letters. For while depicting the general characteristic of human beings in many characters, Gay has shown us a literary possibility of performing the hybrid of gender, class, and race in his *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*. In *The Beggar's Opera*, we cannot see the manifest inversion of gender. But through the inter-textuality of the two artists, we can anticipate Polly's inevitable masquerade, which was indeed realized in the later performance.³² Hogarth's *The Beggar's Opera* and *A*

³² *Polly* had been banned for a long time, and its first production was in 1777.

Harlot's Progress, then, would be an important hinge of inter-textuality concerning the gender reversal. This essay has shown that the pleasure of Gay's realism lies in its hybrid reality for the readers of long eighteenth-century.