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SATIRE'S LIMINAL SPACE: THE CONSERVATIVE FUNCTION OF
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SATIRIC DRAMA

by

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A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

SATIRE'S LIMINAL SPACE: THE CONSERVATIVE FUNCTION OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SATIRIC DRAMA

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Department of English

Master of Arts

The eighteenth century is famous for producing literary satire, primarily in verse (and later prose) form. However, during this period, a new *dramatic* form also arose of which satire was the controlling element. And like the writers of prose and verse satires, playwrights of dramatic satire claimed that their primary aim was the correction of moral faults and failings. Of course, they did not always succeed in this aim. History has shown a few, however, to have had a significant impact on the ideas and lives of their audiences. This thesis is an attempt to demonstrate how these satiric dramas achieved their reformatory aims by tracing the theatrical experience of an eighteenth century audience through Victor Turner's stages of liminality. Turner explains that by examining the

different ways in which specific genres of theatre (1) create a performance space that is apart from, but still draws symbolically on, the outside world, (2) invite the participation of their audiences in that space, and (3) urge audiences to act in different ways as they leave the theatre space, we can see how such experiences impact the ideas and outlooks of audience members. Because satiric drama invited a high level of participation from audience members, because it invited them into a very “liminal” space, it frequently served to sway audience members’ tastes, and in some cases even helped to revolutionize social and literary institutions.

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Chapter One

Introduction: Liminality and Satiric Drama

In “An Essay Upon Satire” written at the end of the seventeenth century, John Dryden explains the purpose of satire:

Satire has always shone among the rest,
And is the boldest way, if not the best,
To tell men freely of their foulest faults;
To laugh at their vain deeds, and vainer thoughts. (202)

Dryden here articulates the poetic aims that characterized much of Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry and drama. Because of the rapid and revolutionary changes in politics, government, religion, sexual and marital mores, and a host of other societal structures—changes occasioned by the English civil war and the restoration of Charles II—English poets of the Restoration and eighteenth century found themselves in a sea of change, not all of it welcome. They frequently sought the stabilizing influence of literature, to do exactly as Dryden had said, to expose misdeeds and vanity and to correct them. Consequently, this period was a highpoint in English literary satire, and Dryden, Swift, and Pope were among its primary proponents. Some of the greatest examples of satire in English literary history are a product of this time period: *MacFlecknoe*, *The Dunciad*, *The Rape of the Lock*, and *Gulliver’s Travels*, among others.

As can be seen from this list, however, most of the great literary satires of the Restoration and the first two decades of the eighteenth century were either in verse or prose form, although satire inarguably had its place in dramatic literature as well. This was seen primarily in the inclusion of satiric characters and specific satiric lines aimed at social institutions. Ursula Jantz points out in her book *Targets of Satire in the Comedies of Etherege, Wycherley, and Congreve*, that the comedies of the Restoration were full of pointed satiric jabs at marriage, religion, fashion, and politics. But satire had not been the controlling element in these plays. They had, rather, been comedies with elements of satire. Until the mid-1720s, most satires as such were still in verse or prose form. Except for the occasional elements of satire in some of the comedies, satire had not really been adapted for the stage. With the production of John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* in 1728, however, satire found a home in London's theaters.

Theater audiences, which were increasingly moving away from regular five act comedies and tragedies, readily welcomed the new, experimental dramas. Satiric comedies were soon vying with more traditional theatrical forms for audiences and were usually winning. Most of the prominent playwrights of the period tried their hand at the new genre, and some, such as Henry Fielding, wrote dramatic satires almost exclusively. In fact, according to David W. Lindsay, all of the

most significant works published between 1728 and 1737 (when dramatic satire was largely squelched by Robert Walpole's Licensing Act) were experiments with this unconventional new genre (xxv). And while Jean Kern calls these efforts "tentative and experimental" (3) and to some extent indicative of the eighteenth century's "decline in drama" (ix), many of these avant garde pieces are of great interest, not only in a historical, but also in a literary sense.

It would probably be useful here to define what we mean by dramatic satire, and to examine how this differs from the kind of satire that appeared in the five act comedies of the Restoration. In his book *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye calls satire "militant irony" (223). He writes that satire must contain some element readers will recognize as fantastical or grotesque and do so for a specific moral purpose. Some events or experiences, such as disease or death, may be grotesque, but to satirize them would fulfill no moral purpose; as Frye observes, "the satirist has to select his absurdities, and the act of selection is a moral act" (224). So the intention to ridicule or expose vices and follies, and to do so through irony, creates satire. As I mentioned previously, many Restoration playwrights utilized this function of satire in their comedies. But while these plays *utilized* satire, satire was not the controlling element. According to Jean B. Kern, only "when the techniques of satire so control the form of the play that no comic resolution softens the

author's intention to attack, [is] the play [. . .] a dramatic satire, distinct from either comedy or farce" (10). Clearly satire is related to comedy. Satirists design to make their audiences laugh. But laughter is not the final aim of satire; instead, the goal is moral correction.

Clearly the intention of these dramatic satirists was to reform society by targeting its follies and vices. But although this may seem an ostensibly progressivist aim, dramatic satire actually serves a conservative function, undermining subversive or revolutionary ideas. Thus we have the popular definition of satire as a mode of "correction." The writings of anthropologist and theatre scholar Victor Turner help to explain the way in which dramatic satire accomplishes this essentially conservative function. In his book *From Ritual to Theatre*, Turner describes the two primary social functions of drama. Essentially, he writes, drama serves either to conserve or to subvert society, conventions, culture, etc. And the difference in the functionality of various forms of theatre is found in the separate ways in which these forms engage their audiences. To examine the way that these forms achieve either a conservative or revolutionary function, Turner looks at the way that they construct the audience's role throughout the dramatic experience, an experience which Turner has termed "liminality." Taken from the root word *limen*, which means "threshold" in Latin, a liminal experience (such as theatre) is one that requires some sort of "crossing

over,” an entrance into a space, either physical or metaphorical, which is apart from everyday life.

A liminal experience, according to Turner, involves three distinct phases: separation, inversion, and reaggregation. In the first, the participants are removed from society, placing themselves in a space apart and exempt from the rules and conventions that dictate behavior in their everyday culture. In the second, they participate in “play” with the conventions or laws that govern their culture. And finally, in the last stage, participants re-enter society, empowered with new ideas that can challenge or uphold that society’s social structures and conventions. It is the way in which a particular piece or genre of theatre involves the audience in these three distinct phases that establishes its function in that society.

Drama that aims to reform or correct a society—drama that serves a conservative function—tends, Turner explains, to involve its audience much more closely in the performance. Because this kind of drama seeks to return a society to some idealized “good old days” version of the culture, it tends to utilize conventions, characters, and ideas that are readily recognizable to audience members. Because of their familiarity with the conventions, then, audience members are much more able to take an active participatory role in the performance.

These dramas, Turner further explains, are often generated either by crises or by rapid changes in the culture. For this reason, though they certainly contain “the potentiality for the formation of new ideas, symbols, models, beliefs,” they more commonly seek to reinforce social stability by proffering solutions for problems and seeking a group consensus to those solutions through the active participation of the drama (54). The new knowledge generated in the performance space is not meant to incite social revolution, but rather to heal breaches in the society, to cure social ills and reinforce order. And it is precisely this conservative function that eighteenth-century satiric drama fulfilled. The extreme cultural disruptions occasioned by the civil war and the restoration of the monarchy, and by the accompanying changes in government and society, led many eighteenth-century dramatists to seek stability by reinscribing time-honored English values and traditions. They chose satire as the “boldest way,” borrowing Dryden’s terms, to stabilize their culture from any ideas that seemed to threaten these traditions. By examining the way that these dramas engaged their audience in the three phases of the liminal experience, we can more clearly see *how* they accomplished this essentially conservative function.

The Plays

Out of dozens of examples of excellent satiric dramas of the period, I have chosen to look at the following three plays for a couple of reasons. First, all three were phenomenally successful—in fact, they were the three best-sellers of the years 1728-1735, selling more seats during those years than any other theatre productions. For this reason, they would have reached greater numbers of people and likely had a more discernable impact on eighteenth-century society than many lesser-attended plays. And secondly, I have chosen to focus on these three because they are all *literary* satires, rather than political or social satires. Literary satire was at its highpoint in this era, and these plays represent some of the finest examples of literary satire in English dramatic history. As Peter Lewis writes, “In no other period of English literary history were writers so self-consciously preoccupied with literary dramatic transformation” (“Transformations” 123). And this preoccupation led to a period of experimentation with literary satire that is unequaled. More importantly, however, I have chosen to focus on literary satire because the conventions and sign systems of literary and dramatic genres are so easily demarcated, and it is easy to see the way in which satirists reversed these conventions. However, although I have focused specifically on dramas that satirize other literary genres, rather than those that target politics or social structures, the three phases of the

liminal experience engage the audiences of these genres in much the same way to accomplish essentially the same aims.

The Beggar's Opera

When John Gay submitted his new play, *The Beggar's Opera* to Coley Cibber at the Drury Lane Theater, Cibber is rumored to have rejected it out of a misguided desire to protect "legitimate drama." If that is the case, he was almost assuredly sorry soon after. When Rich, the proprietor of Lincoln's Inn Fields, accepted the play for their 1728 season, he couldn't possibly have anticipated just how successful it would be. *The Beggar's Opera* enjoyed an unprecedented run of 43 nights, over 1/3 of that theatre company's comedy performances for the season (Nicoll 134). The old adage that *The Beggar's Opera* "made Gay rich and Rich gay" seem apropos (Nettletton 189). In fact, Frederick Boas has calculated the proceeds of the play as follows: "The impecunious Gay got about £800 and Rich £4,000, and Lavinia Fenton, who played Polly, became the Duchess of Bolton" (184). *The Beggar's Opera* played in all of the major towns of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and even made its way to Minorca. By 1745, barely 17 years after its debut, seven editions had already been published (Boas 184).

The story, which follows the exploits of a band of London thieves and prostitutes, centers around Macheath, the most dashing, if deceitful, member of the band. Macheath, who cannot resist women nor be

resisted by them, begins the play having lost favor with the band's leader, Peachum. While he is being sought by police and bandit alike, Macheath yet finds time to woo and marry Peachum's daughter Polly, as well as dally with a passel of whores. Peachum, however, who now finds Macheath and his peccadilloes more of a liability than an asset, successfully arranges Macheath's arrest. In prison we meet another of Macheath's "wives," Lucy, who is the daughter of the prison warden. Although she helps him escape, his freedom is only temporary, and he is caught a few scenes later and returned to prison where he awaits execution. In the end, however, Macheath, about to go to the gallows, is pardoned so as to prevent the play's ending unhappily. The play gains its satiric power through its oblique reference from this world of thieves and rogues to that of London society. The satire is multifarious in its targets: it lashes Walpole's government, societal institutions such as marriage and the justice system, and, of course, literary targets such as sentimental comedy and Italian opera.

It is the satire on Italian opera, however, that concerns us most directly in this study. Italian opera at this time was played by and to the socially elite. Its performers were the highest paid in London theatre, and its patrons were from the highest ranks. By creating an "opera" about the doings of England's lowliest citizens, Gay at the outset inverted the expectations and conventions of London theatre. Peter Lewis writes

that “in 1728 the linking of ‘opera’ with ‘beggar’s’ was so paradoxical as virtually to amount to an oxymoron” (“Transformations” 122). His stated goal in doing so was to critique a dramatic genre that he felt was beginning to threaten traditional English theatre. Peter Lewis explains that, as a member of the Scriblerus club, and in league with Pope and Swift, Gay was committed to resisting change and reaffirming classical rules and genres (“Transformations”). Therefore, *The Beggar’s Opera*, despite its novelty and innovation, was intended not to revolutionize drama (although it did this to some extent), but to protect legitimate drama from illegitimate usurpers.

The Tragedy of Tragedies

David Lindsay claims that while “*The Beggar’s Opera* is the greatest English play of this period [. . .] the most versatile and productive dramatist of the time was Henry Fielding” (xxvii). Of his 26 plays, one of the most interesting, both to scholars and audiences alike, was *The Tragedy of Tragedies*. In 1730, when Fielding produced his first burlesque play *The Author’s Farce* in the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, it was followed by an afterpiece entitled *Tom Thumb: A Tragedy*—also a burlesque piece. The crowds loved it. For over forty straight nights, from Friday, April 24 until Monday, June 22, the double bill played to crowds of both upper and lower class: “So great was the demand for seats from ‘persons of quality’ within a week or two that it was necessary to put pit

and boxes together in order to accommodate them” (Morissey 4). *Tom Thumb*, although only the afterpiece to the main dramatic showing, was still surprisingly popular. The absurd conclusion, where the ghost of the hero Tom Thumb is stabbed through and killed, reportedly made Jonathan Swift “laugh aloud for only the second time in his life” (Rivero 63). The Prince of Wales himself attended the second showing and demanded a repeat performance two weeks later.

Because of *Tom Thumb*'s unprecedented success, a year later in 1731 Fielding decided to revise the play into a mainpiece script. He added several new characters, including Glumdalca, queen of the giants, who at the beginning of the play has been conquered and taken captive by Tom Thumb, and Lord Grizzle, who plays a more prominent part in this version, becoming Tom's rival not only for court favor but also for the affections of the Princess Huncamunca. Most notable, however, is Fielding's addition of a fictional editor H. Scriblerus Secundus. The addition of this illustrious scholar allows Fielding further access to satirical jabs at his fellow authors. He claims that the play was written by a great Elizabethan playwright and that Scriblerus, through his 15 dedicated years of scholarship in the study of this play, has annotated extensively the particular phrases borrowed by successive writers. The footnotes and annotations make up over half the length of the play script itself, and although, obviously, any performance of the play has to stand

alone without reliance on the humor of the footnotes, still, these detailed annotations provide Fielding an additional and very clever means of satirizing previous authors of Heroic Drama. And that is what this burlesque is all about, parodying a genre that by the middle of the eighteenth century had become so overblown that there was little being written or produced of literary merit.

Chrononhotonthologos

Three years after Fielding wrote *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, Henry Carey wrote his most well known, and also extremely popular, burlesque play *Chrononhotonthologos*. Carey's play enjoyed much the same success that Fielding's play had done a few short years before. Peter Lewis, who has dedicated several extensive studies to Carey's plays, calls *Chrononhotonthologos* the "one outstanding burlesque play of the 1730s (the great decade of burlesque drama in the eighteenth century) not by Fielding" ("Henry Carey's" 129).

Henry Carey, the illegitimate son of the Marquis of Halifax, began his writing career, not as a dramatist, but as a poet. After publishing several volumes of poems, however, Carey became interested in the stage. Initially, he was fascinated by the music of the Italian opera, and trained in that musical style. He did not begin his theatrical career as a writer for the theater, but rather as a performer, and as a young singer and actor, he appeared in several Italian operas (Oldfield 8-9). However,

increasingly dissatisfied with the audiences' preference for "namby-pamby" language (a phrase coined by Carey himself) and absurdly melodramatic plot structures, Carey decided, instead, to become a writer in the burlesque tradition so successfully established by John Gay and Henry Fielding. *Chrononhotonthologos* was Carey's first dramatic satire. With some obvious similarities to Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, *Chrononhotonthologos* takes the mockery of Heroic Drama that Fielding began to even more ridiculous heights. Chrononhotonthologos is the name of the King of Queermania and, like Tom Thumb, he is a hero of epic proportions with a comically ridiculous hubris. The plot follows Chrononhotonthologos's conquering of the Antipodean nation and his triumphal return to his kingdom, only to find that his queen is in love with nearly everyone but him. The queen's dilemma, which involves choosing between the captured king of the Antipodeans and two of Chrononhotonthologos's courtiers, occupies much of the dialogue of the play. Cupid's assurance to the Queen that she shall soon be made a widow is realized at the end of the play when Chrononhotonthologos, furious at being served a cold meal, stabs his cook and thereby initiates a rash of killings that leaves the stage littered with corpses. The queen then decides to marry both of the courtiers, forgetting entirely the poor, imprisoned Antipodean king.

Although *Chrononhotonthologos* has not earned nearly as much critical attention as either *The Beggar's Opera* or *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, it is still a very entertaining, and historically interesting, piece of writing. Furthermore, Carey's experiences as a poet and a performer serve to create some witty, rhythmic dialogue. Boas, in fact, claims that Carey's verbal technique is second only to Gay's. More importantly, though, *Chrononhotonthologos* is just a lot of fun.

The following chapters will examine these three plays and the way in which they engaged their audiences in critiquing the dramatic genres of heroic tragedy and Italian opera. Using Victor Turner's three stages of liminality—separation, inversion, and reaggregation—I will discuss first the audiences that attended these plays, then the symbols and convention with which those audiences were familiar and which Gay, Fielding, and Carey inverted, and finally the ways in which these plays affected English dramatic history.

Chapter Two

Phase One: Separation

The first stage in Turner's liminal process is separation. This first step involves the movement of the participants in the liminal experience into both a new, liminal space and a new time. The participants must feel as if they have accepted a new role, one that is distinctly different from that of their normal, everyday world roles.

The actor [. . .] is detached from a prior condition of membership in the social structure, undergoes a transitional ordeal in which his structural attributes are neutralized or made ambiguous, and then reemerges into the social structure, usually with enhanced functions, status, or class. The liminal passenger thus "loses" his identifying characteristics (name, roles, affiliations, even sex) only to be newly inscribed with a higher, more authoritative set of meanings. (183)

Of course, the very act of entering a theatre to some extent fulfills these criteria. Every theatrical performance involves the movement into both the new space of the theatre itself, and into the new space and time of the play. And providing the audience is willing and the performance is adequate, audience members do adopt new roles, at the very least, of observers in the world of the performance. Jorge Luis Borges' introduction to Shakespeare clearly defines this participatory role of a

theatre audience: “the actor is someone who on stage plays at being another before a gathering of people who play at taking him for that other person” (qtd. in Kraus 13). This definition of both actor and audience as “players” is crucial to an understanding of any theatrical text. The audience’s willingness to become subsumed in the world of the play is key to the play’s success. This is more than just the “willing suspension of disbelief” described by Coleridge, because unlike other pieces of literature which are meant to be read, plays depend for meaning, and even for their continued existence, on this “playing” of an audience. As Norman N. Holland argues, any text, but especially a dramatic text, consists only of markings on papers until an audience “plays the part of a prince to the sleeping beauty” and gives meaning to those markings (976). Theatre, then, is *always* an interactive experience, relying on both performers *and* audience members, in a kind of dialogic relationship, for the creation of meaning.

However, some types of performance demand an even greater level of participation from their audiences than this essential, but still minimal role. Furthermore, Turner explains that the greater the demand of the performance on the participation of the audience, the more efficacious becomes the liminal process of separation. The more the audience is asked to contribute to the liminal space, the more separated they will feel from their outside roles.

English drama before the Puritan Commonwealth had traditionally involved a high degree of audience participation. After the closing of the theatres in 1642, and their subsequent reopening in 1660, however, there was a marked change in the actor/audience relationship. Charles II, returning from France, brought with him new ideas about drama and the structure of the theatre. The construction of new theatres that employed the proscenium arch stage placed the actor outside the circle of the audience, and in a more performative, rather than dialogic, role. In addition, the establishment of private theaters, the increase in admission prices, and the beginnings of more elitist audiences all served to separate the audience and the players in the popular theatrical forms of the time such as heroic tragedy, Italian opera and five act comedies. Leo Hughes, in his book *The Drama's Patrons*, writes that the increasing size of the play-houses made the drama of the Restoration "move [. . .] farther and farther in the direction of the loud and the spectacular" (185). This kind of drama, distanced from its audience, invited less and less the kind of participation, of "play," by audience members described by Borges.

The beginning of the eighteenth century saw an even further increased formalization of the audience's role. With the introduction of what Shirley Strum Kenney has named "humane comedy," much of the satire of the comedies of the Restoration that had elicited response and

participation from the audience was removed. And with Richard Steele's introduction of sentimental drama, and the movement of the action of a play behind the invisible fourth wall of the proscenium arch, the audience assumed a much more formal, and less participatory role, than they had ever played before.

Even as much of the drama of the eighteenth century was becoming more and more formalized, however, there was at the same time a kind of *avant garde* movement in some of the smaller houses toward a kind of theater that preserved the inclusivity of the audience. With the production of *The Beggar's Opera* at Lincoln's Inn Fields in 1728, satiric drama found a favored place among the London play-going public. In the decade following Gay's very popular piece, satiric drama became a popular option for theater audiences. Gay's play was followed by such big-sellers as Henry Fielding's *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, and Henry Carey's *Chrononhotonthologos*, both of which were produced at The Little Theatre in the Haymarket, a theatre which quickly made a name for itself as a home to experimental dramas and riotous audiences.

So who was this audience that took such delight in the mockery and ridicule characteristic of satire? It is difficult to say exactly. Trying to hypothesize about just who watched the plays at the Globe, Alfred Harbage laments, "Audiences leave few traces behind, few means of vindication" (qtd in Krauss 17). However, it is possible to make some

assumptions about eighteenth-century audiences from the writings of those in observance there. It is clear, for instance, that while the theater audiences of the Restoration were fairly elitist, those of the eighteenth century were becoming increasingly diverse.

Dryden, for example, in *An Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, writes of “the mixed audience of the populace and the noblesse” (qtd. in Hughes 173). And the following account of a typical eighteenth-century audience as described from one Londoner’s perspective is very revealing:

In our Playhouses at London, besides an Upper-Gallery for footmen, Coachmen, Mendicants, &c. we have three other different and distinct classes; the first is called the Boxes [. . .] for persons of Quality, and for the Ladies and Gentlemen of the highest Rank, unless some Fools that have more wit than money, or perhaps more Impudence than both, crowd in among ‘em. The Second is call’d the Pit, where sit the Judges, Wits and Censurers, [. . .] in common with these sit the Squires, Sharpers, Beaus, Bullies, and Whores, and here and there an extravagant Male and Female Cit. The Third is distinguished by the Title of the Middle Gallery, where the Citizens Wives and Daughters, together with the Abigail, Serving-men, Journeymen and Apprentices commonly take their Places (qtd. in Hughes 174).

Altogether London audiences were becoming much more diversified as increasing numbers of people from the working classes joined the gentry in leisure activities such as theater-going.

As more and more of the general populace began attending theatrical performances, the theatre-going public began separating in their choice of theatres. Thus the makeup of the audiences of Drury Lane were composed somewhat differently than those of The Little Theatre in the Haymarket. The Little Theatre, for example, did not enjoy the same royal patronage that Drury Lane did. According to Emmet Avery's *The London Stage*, the Royal family, and those who tried to imitate them, most often attended the high culture entertainments such as opera and tragedy, dividing their time equally between Drury Lane and Lincoln's Inn Fields (clxiv). The Little Theatre, where most of the decade's satiric plays were produced, on the other hand, catered to the tastes of London's intelligentsia—playwrights, poets, and satirists were all frequent attendants to the Little Theatre. Merchants, tradesmen, apprentices, and clerks were also becoming increasingly interested, and financially able, to attend the theater and comprised a large portion of the Little Theatre's audience. Hughes points out that this rise in the economic autonomy of the general populace from the ruling minority was accompanied by a comparable rise in their independence politically and aesthetically. The result was that as the audiences in attendance at the

larger theaters became more and more distanced from the action on the stage, the audiences in attendance at the satiric plays of the Little Theatre remained a crucial part of the production itself. It was not uncommon for audience members to shout out requests, which were often honored by the cast members. If some unexpected problem threatened the performance of the evening's play, the theater company often put the problem to the audience for a decision. One example is found in the *Daily Advertiser* of January 14, 1736:

The Gentleman who perform'd the Character of Osman in The Tragedy of Zara the first night having declin'd it, that Part was read last Night; and it being submitted to the Determination of the Audience, whether the Play should be continu'd, or the Repetition of it deferr'd till somebody was studied in the Part, they unanimously declared for the Continuation of the Play (qtd. in Avery, part 3 vol. 1, clxvi).

Sometimes, even the play to be performed was allowed to be determined by the audience. This account of a performance in Lincoln's Inn Fields is found in a letter from John Gay to Jonathan Swift:

On the benefit day of one of the actresses last week one of the players falling sick they were oblig'd to give out another play or dismiss the audience; a play was given out, but the people call'd

out for the Beggar's Opera, & they were forc'd to play it, or the audience would not have stayed (qtd. in Hughes 13).

This level of participation was expected of the audiences of satiric drama. Hughes writes that this was "an audience sometimes violently responsive to activities on the stage" (64). The drama itself *demand*ed this kind of participation. This drama was politically and socially charged, intended to incite its audience, and audiences entered the theatres prepared to participate.

Not only was this level of audience participation expected, it was also *necessary* for the creation of meaning in the text. For example, a twenty-first century reader who reads or watches *The Beggar's Opera* for the first time, will miss nearly all of the political satire so important to that play. Eighteenth-century audiences, however, were expected to both recognize and appreciate the political, social, or literary satire in these plays. Without the audience's understanding and participation, much of the meaning of the text would be lost. William Benton Kinsley writes that "the subtlety and complexity of much Augustan satire gave its audiences an important, and sometimes crucial, role in determining its meaning in social contexts" (6). The very nature of satiric drama demands a greater level of participation from its audience members than does other drama because satire is so culturally specific. The audience then plays a key role in imbuing the text with meaning through their

recognition of, and response to, the satire. So this was the type of audience to which Gay's, Fielding's, and Carey's drama played. Because this audience was composed not of the aristocracy but of a hodge-podge from the middle and working classes, they were more prone to riotousness in play productions. Consequently, they expected to be involved in those productions, and were prepared to be influenced, as well as to influence, the performances they attended.

Looking at the texts of these three plays will show that this demand for heightened audience awareness and participation is a crucial part of the play script itself. *The Beggar's Opera*, for example, begins from the introduction to invite the audience into this kind of participatory alliance by inviting their recognition of the conventions of opera and appreciating the subsequent inversion of those conventions that the play will accomplish. In fact, one of the difficulties of modern audiences watching this play is that, for the most part, audiences *cannot* participate in the way that the play demands because they are not equipped with a knowledge of eighteenth-century operatic conventions. This play is not one which a passive observer may merely observe. It requires the active application of specific social and literary knowledge. An eighteenth-century audience, however, could easily intuit the role they were to play from the cues in the text. These cues are obvious from the introduction of the play, which begins with the entrance of a Beggar

and a Player, conversing. The audience will not see these two characters again until the conclusion of the play; thus, the role of these characters is not a part of the action of the story itself. They serve, rather, to alert the audience to *their* role in the play as not only observers of the action on stage, but as participants in the burlesquing of operatic tradition. In the following speech, for example, the Beggar reminds the audience of specific operatic conventions, foregrounding the later inversion of those conventions. He says,

I have introduced the similes that are in all your celebrate operas; the Swallow, the Moth, the Bee, the Ship, the Flower, etc. 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.

(Introduction)

The audience is here given to understand that they will be required to note these conventions, as such recognition will be a crucial part of the success of the coming play. And already they are given to understand that these conventions will be subverted. First, the appearance of a

beggar explicating the conventions of Italian opera, which we've already seen was a favorite past time of the wealthy and aristocratic segment of eighteenth-century society, will alert the audience that this is a parody of that genre and that they should recognize it as such. Secondly, they've already seen the irony behind the beggar's assertion that this play contains neither prologue nor epilogue. While a traditional Prologue is a direct address to the audience, here the Beggar instead addresses a "player," supporting his claim that this is not an official Prologue, and emphasizing to the audience the absurdity of such restrictive rules and definitions. Furthermore, the Beggar's lines draw attention to the performance *as* performance—its playful self-consciousness. And his dialogue with a "player" further alerts the audience that this is theatre *about* theatre. Consequently, the audience is here given its cues as to how to respond to the upcoming performance. They will understand that this performance will require their recognition of certain theatrical conventions and the humorous undercutting of those conventions, and that they must apply this understanding in order for the play to be successful.

Chrononhotonthologos cues its audience in much the same direct fashion. In the Prologue, a player announces to the audience that theirs is a "comic muse," and one that

Struts in heroics, and in pompous verse

Does the minutest incidents rehearse;
 In Ridicules strict retrospect displays
 The poetasters of these modern days;
 Who with big bellowing bombast rend our ears,
 Which stript of sound, quite void of sense appears;

It may lack subtlety, but Carey's audience will be in no doubt as to their role in this performance. They know that this will be a "comic" reduction of "heroics." Like Gay's audience, the participants at Carey's play know that they, too, will be required to actively apply their knowledge of theatrical conventions so as to appreciate the ironic inversion of those conventions.

Furthermore, the prologue to Carey's play invites an even more riotous involvement than does Gay's. For example, the speaker here directly addresses the audience, addressing them as "you." And he couches the performance in terms more nearly resembling a carnival than a sedate piece of theatre: "We hope you will excuse the *wild excursion* of our *wanton* muse;/ Who out of *frolic* wears a *mimic mask*,/ And sets herself so *whimsical* a task" (italics added). He assures the audience that the performance is intended to please, but if it doesn't, it will at least be short. This carnivalesque description of the coming play coupled with the direct appeal to the audience's personal pleasure in it seems to invite a direct and unrestrained reaction to the performance

such as those we've already seen were common at the Haymarket Theatre. So from the opening of Carey's play, the audience is cued both to participate in the performance by applying their knowledge of the conventions of heroic drama, and by making their pleasure in the performance known by any ludic means.

The Tragedy of Tragedies opens with a more subtle appeal to the audience. The blatant satiric cues to the audience that characterized the opening scenes of *The Beggar's Opera* and *Chrononhotonthologos* are missing in Fielding's play (although certainly the title itself will alert participants that this is a burlesque). But Fielding's play lacks either the direct audience address of Carey's play, or the more indirect appeal of Gay's, that informed audiences of their role in the performance. For readers of the play, however, Fielding's extensive notes alert us as to the topics of satire in *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and our role as readers in recognizing and applying that satire. In the Preface, for example, the fictional scholar H. Scriblerus Secundus informs readers that in the past, the play has been received "with that reverent and silent attention which becometh an audience at a deep tragedy," with the exception of a few critics, "bad ones," who claim "more maliciously than ignorantly," that the play is "intended [as] a burlesque on the loftiest parts of tragedy, and designed to banish what we generally call fine things from the stage" (210). We further read that the fineness of the play is proven by its

parallelism to that of “the best of our English writers” (212), and that H. Scriblerus Secundus has carefully annotated those parallels in the play text. So for those of us approaching the play with text in hand, the satire is clear, even down to detailed references to specific playwrights and plays, elaborately and humorously listed in the footnotes.

For *viewers* of the play, however, the task is more complicated. Those who actually enter the liminal space of Fielding’s theatre must instead take their cues from the action of the play itself. Fortunately, these cues are given early and frequently. For example, at the beginning of Act I, scene ii, King Arthur commands his entire court to “let all men cry for joy,/ Till my whole Court be drowned with their tears;/ Nay, till they overflow my utmost land,/ And leave me nothing but the sea to rule” (II.ii.10-14). Fortunately for the modern reader, on whom otherwise the satire of these lines would be lost, H. Scriblerus Secundus refers us to several contemporary authors in whose plays very similarly absurd lines appear. These include the tragedies of *Sophonisba*, and *Mithridates*, by Nathaniel Lee, and *Cyrus the Great*, and *Anna Bullen* by John Banks. For an eighteenth-century audience attending Fielding’s play, however, these references would have to be recognized in order for the satire to be efficacious. The specificity of the satire in *The Tragedy of Tragedies* demands an even greater degree of awareness, and consequently of mental participation, from its audience than even the two plays

previously discussed. However, while modern audiences would fail to catch anything but the most obvious of the satire in *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, it is important to remember, as Jenny Uglow writes, just how important a part theatre played in the sometimes daily entertainment of its patrons: “they knew all the theatrical personalities and followed their scandals and family squabbles [. . .] they saw all the new shows—sometimes three or four times—and could recognize a caricature in a gesture or the twist of an eyebrow” (16). They would certainly have recognized at least a great number of the satiric jabs aimed at specific tragedies, and would then have taken their cues as to their role in the play—which, in the end, is the same as that of Gay’s and Carey’s audiences.

Certainly it is important to keep in mind that any audience is composed of individuals with individual reactions to the performance on stage. However, as Marvin Carlson writes, “The social organization of the theatre as created and experienced makes its institutional structure more apparent than that of the book; its communities, by the active choice of assembling to attend plays, are more apparent as groups to themselves and to others than are the more dispersed literary communities” (13). So although eighteenth-century audiences of satiric drama were certainly not homogenous in their reactions to the drama, as a group, they still shared a single, definable role in that drama. They

entered the theatres prepared to participate actively in the performance, they were cued by the text as to what role they were to “play,” and their participation then became a crucial part of the success of the play itself.

Chapter Three

Phase Two: Inversion

The 2000 season of London's National Theatre featured very prominently a new play by Nick Dear called *The Villain's Opera*, a modern remake of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. However, despite the National's enormous investment of money and time, not to mention their best directors, actors, and designers, this play was a nearly unprecedented flop. Scarcely a good review is to be found of the production at all. It was loud, surely, and it was graphic, but for all of that, it was boring. As one critic wrote, "For the most part, it's almost shockingly unshocking" ("*Villain's Opera*"). Its predecessor, however, could never be accused of the same. Unlike *The Villain's Opera*, *The Beggar's Opera* was startling and unexpected, and consequently wildly successful. Perhaps the disparity in the reception of these two quite similar plays lies in the different ways in which they engaged their audiences.

Chapter one discussed the way in which literary satire such as *The Beggar's Opera* acts as a mode of conservatism. This kind of satire isn't trying to change people's thinking or guide them to new and radical thought—it's not revolutionary. Rather, it works to protect the norms, to stop subversive ideas. And it accomplishes this aim through the inversion of known signs and symbols in an unfamiliar way to reverse (through ridicule) some culturally understood entity (e.g. other popular

forms of drama) that has begun to challenge traditional norms. Gay's play involved the audience by taking signs and symbols that the audience was very familiar with and turning them completely upside down, thus serving to emphasize the absurdity of those conventions. The problem with *The Villain's Opera* was that the audience didn't have the same group understanding of a specific set of dramatic norms that were being inverted. Consequently, while Dear's play contained obvious and recognizable political satire, without the satire on the dramatic conventions, it just wasn't startling or funny—only preachy and sometimes offensive. *The Beggar's Opera*, on the other hand, invites its audience to share in the ridicule of dramatic conventions with which the audience is intimately familiar.

This familiarity with the conventions of a society enables the second stage of a liminal performance, which Turner has termed "inversion." Previous to this stage, the participants have experienced "separation," a stepping-away from their positions in the regular work-a-day world and an acceptance of a liminal position, "separate and apart from" the rest of society (52). Once the participants have taken on this liminal role, however, they are ready to participate in the second stage—*inversion*. In this stage, Turner explains, the rules and conventions of the society with which the audience is familiar are defamiliarized, presented in an inverted or ironic way so as to draw participants'

attention to any flaws. The purpose of this chapter, then, will be to examine the codes and conventions familiar to eighteenth-century audiences that informed the reception of the satiric dramas of Gay, Fielding, and Carey. The subversion of those codes then invited the audience to participate in the overturning of “outlandish” drama such as Italian opera and heroic tragedy, and reaffirm the superiority of native, traditional genres.

With the exception of one or two plays (certainly *The Beggar's Opera*, if no others), the satiric plays of the eighteenth century have fallen into the dusty pile of literature now available only on microfiche and almost never read, much less produced. But Jenny Uglow points out that the very reason for their demise is also the reason that they were so wildly popular during their time: their topicality. These plays demanded an audience who was very familiar with the society, politics, and literature of their age. Because satiric drama is so topical, so fixed to a specific time period, modern readers will find it particularly important when examining those dramas, to look at the conditions, the codes and conventions, that the audience of that time would have taken into the play house with them. It is then possible to see the way in which those conventions were inverted in an attempt to convince audience members of the ridiculousness of the dramatic genres these satires targeted.

The Beggar's Opera

In 1714, England imported a German king to occupy the throne, and by doing so, also imported a fondness for an art form that had appeared only a few short years before on the English stage: Italian opera. As a favorite of the kings, Italian opera quickly became very popular for people of quality and their imitators. And since the aristocracy still made up a substantial portion of the theatre-going public, Italian opera consequently stole from more traditional dramatic performances a large portion of their audiences.

The anger over the usurpation of London audiences was exacerbated in the minds of England's home-grown playwrights by the fact that Italian opera was not, to them, a sensible, well written theatrical alternative. Yvonne Noble explains that Italian opera during this period was "dictated by a vast number of conventions (that this particular sort of aria be followed by that particular sort; that each singer immediately leave the stage after singing an aria; that the principal singers never open, but always close the acts; that the action be tragic but the ending comic; and so on through dozens)" (8). It is unsurprising, then, that English playwrights of the day despised the opera and that several of them very vocally reviled it. Addison, in the March 21, 1711 *Spectator* wrote,

We no longer understand the language of our own stage;
 insomuch that I have often been afraid, when I have seen our
 Italian performers chattering in the vehemence of action, that they
 have been calling us names, and abusing us among themselves;
 but I hope, since we do put such an entire confidence in them,
 they will not talk against us before our faces, though they may do
 it with the same safety as if it were behind our backs. (qtd. in
 Uhler 101)

As the popularity of Italian opera continued to increase, so too did the
 resentment of the native dramatists. Noble writes that “Inevitably,
 Italian opera came to serve [. . .] as an exemplary instance of all that was
 ‘outlandish’ and ‘unnatural’ in their age” (8). In the early 1720s, then,
 John Gay began discussing with his cohorts of the *Scriblerus Club* the
 idea for a play that would answer the pretensions of Italian opera.
 According to Dr. Johnson, Swift observed to Gay “what an odd pretty sort
 of a thing a Newgate Pastoral might make.” From this conversation *The
 Beggar’s Opera* was born. In 1728 it was first performed at Lincoln’s Inn
 Fields, and it was wildly successful. In his *Life of John Gay*, Johnson
 writes that *The Beggar’s Opera* was “written in ridicule of the musical
 Italian drama,” and Noble adds that it was “a *rejoinder* to the
 ‘outlandish’ art form and to all those who preferred it to the neglect of art
 of native growth” (10).

Considering the popularity of the genre at that time, it seems reasonable to assume that the audience for Gay's new play would have been familiar with the rules and conventions of Italian opera. One of the difficulties for modern readers is that much of the satiric humor of *The Beggar's Opera* rests on just such a familiarity. However, a brief explanation of those conventions should suffice to demonstrate how *The Beggar's Opera* overturned them, and thus acted, as Turner explains, to discourage audience members from supporting this innovative genre that threatened native English drama.

First, according to Charles Pearce, Italian opera always had six to eight primary characters, and this is certainly true of *The Beggar's Opera*. Discounting those characters without singing parts, the play has nine primary characters, three of whom sing only one aria a piece. The rest of the play's arias are all performed by Macheath, Polly, Lucy, Mr. and Mrs. Peachum, and Lockett. Furthermore, all Italian operas had to have two great ladies, with parts of equal weight. In the opening scene of the play, the Beggar assures us that our author has given careful thought to this requirement: "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" (Introduction). And he's right: Polly and Lucy share an almost equal number of arias—16 by Polly, 14 by Lucy. The ironic inversion of convention, of course, is that far from being the "great" and

“noble” ladies of Italian opera, Polly and Lucy are just what Macheath describes them as in the end of the play: his “doxies.” The daughters of a highwayman and a corrupt prison guard, the two are a far cry from the usual heroines of Italian opera.

But then, neither is Macheath the ordinary hero. Italian opera at this time was, of course, still being sung by Italian *castrati*, so that the primary male part was done in a false soprano. Macheath, however, is as contrastive of the Castrati as a hero can be. We are mostly unsurprised at the end of the play when four other women, in addition to Polly and Lucy, show up claiming that Macheath seduced them, for earlier in the play he has told us, “I must have women!” (II.iii). Noble suggests that Macheath’s virility is set up in direct counterpoint to the Italian *Castrati*: “In Macheath, vigorous, English, generous, and manly—*The Beggar’s Opera* implicitly appeals to its audience to reaffirm their allegiance to what is native, natural, life-giving, and good” (14). Despite the fact that Macheath is a thief and a cad, he is still undoubtedly set up to win our admiration. And by doing so, he serves to highlight the absurdity of admiring the very *unmanly* heroes of Italian opera. Not only does Gay subvert the conventional characters of Italian opera for comic effect (although certainly it is funny), but more importantly, he does so with the purpose of conserving traditional English drama and reaffirming the superiority of virile *English* actors and charming *English* actresses.

Another important way that Gay subverts the conventions of Italian opera is through his juxtaposition of native English ballads (often bawdy ones, at that) with operatic style. And this puts the readers (as opposed to the viewers) of Gay's play at a further disadvantage. First, in reading the play, the operatic sound of the music, which is so crucial to the satire of the play, is lost. Furthermore, modern readers, unfamiliar with the ballads with which Gay has replaced the arias and recitatives of Italian opera, miss the extreme satiric discord between the sentiments offered in these ballads and the formal manner of their delivery in the play. However, it is possible to trace the way in which Gay (ironically) followed many of the musical customs of the opera. For example, Bronson points out that in addition to the "arias" which each of the main characters sing, there are several duettos "in the proper contemporary operatic manner" (205). Polly and Mrs. Peachum sing one, Polly and Macheath sing three, and three are sung by Polly and Lucy. There is, furthermore, a chorus, but a chorus of harlots and thieves instead of angels, serving to further emphasize the absurdity of this convention.

Bronson also reminds readers that a crucial part of Italian opera was the ballets. This convention, too, *The Beggar's Opera* reduces to satire. Of the three dances in the play, the first is a Cotillion danced by prostitutes (*A dance à la ronde in the French manner*), the second is the dance of the prisoners in chains, and the third is the closing dance of

Macheath and his six wives and bastard children. These both imitate and reduce the elegant but overblown ballets of the operatic style.

Some of the smaller but still familiar conventions of the opera are satirized by Gay as well. *The Beggar* reminds the audience at the opening of the play, for example, that Italian opera always made use of dramatic similes: he claims, "I have introduced the similes that are in all your celebrated operas; the Swallow, the Moth, the Bee, the Ship, the Flower, etc." (Introduction). In this play, however, these similes become grotesque, ironic inversions of their predecessors. "Virgins," says Polly in one of her arias in act one, "are like the fair flower in its luster,"

Which in the garden enamels the ground,
Near it the bees in play flutter and cluster,
And gaudy butterflies frolic around:
But when once plucked 'tis no longer alluring,
To Covent Garden 'tis sent (as yet sweet),
There fades, and shrinks, and grows past all enduring
Rots, stinks, and dies, and is trod under feet. (I.vii)

The degeneration of the simile serves to emphasize the absurdity of the convention itself.

Other conventions of the Italian opera, including a poison scene (where Lucy attempts but fails to poison Polly) and a prison scene, appear in *The Beggar's Opera* as well, although of course with Gay's

signature incongruity. Peter Lewis writes that “prison scenes were a staple ingredient of both contemporary tragedy and Italian opera” (“Henry Carey’s” 137), the reason being, as Gay explains in his prologue, that the prison scene was one “which the Ladies always reckon charmingly pathetick.” The entire second half of *The Beggar’s Opera* takes place in Newgate prison, the irony, of course, being that Macheath, far from being the innocently imprisoned hero, has more than earned his numerous prison scenes.

Perhaps the strongest parody of Italian opera, however, is, as Lewis describes, “the obligatory happy ending in defiance of dramatic logic” (“Transformations” 144). At the end of the play, Macheath is being escorted to the gallows when the Beggar and the Player reenter the stage. “But, honest friend, I hope you don’t intend that Macheath shall be really executed,” the Player says. “Most certainly, sir,” the Beggar replies, “I was for doing strict poetical justice.” The Player protests, however, that poetical justice will make the play a tragedy, and explains that “the catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an opera must end happily.” Finally, the Beggar concurs, recognizing that “in this kind of drama, ‘tis no matter how absurdly things are brought about” (III.xvi).

In words very similar to Turner’s, Yvonne Noble explains that the purpose of Gay’s inversion of the recognized elements of Italian opera was to “elicit in the audience a deep sense of community” by inducing

“the solidarity that comes from an audience’s recognizing together a shared norm and then the incongruities of deviation from that norm” (11-12). Liminality, after all, demonstrates that “order is no substitute for disorder,” and asks participants to “reaffirm” the established rules and conventions of the society. Italian opera, with all of its absurdities, was a deviation from pure English drama, and *The Beggar’s Opera*, through its inversion of operatic conventions, asks its audience to recognize that deviation and reject it.

The Tragedy of Tragedies

When Fielding wrote his great burlesque *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, he was following in the tradition established by Gay. Fielding’s satire did not take as its target the Italian opera, though. He aimed, rather, at heroic tragedy. By the 1730s, the numbers of heroic tragedy had declined somewhat since its height at the end of the seventeenth century. However, Simon Varey tells us that the tragedies of the 1720s and 30s “were still often ‘heroic,’ devoid of much action, with a tendency to be bombastic, and liable to celebrate the virtues of noble patriots who strive to resolve the conflict of duty and love” (1). Dryden’s heroic dramas were still being produced, albeit with less frequency than two decades previous, and the very season in which Fielding published *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, at least three new heroic tragedies hit the stage at either Drury Lane or Lincoln’s Inn Fields: Nathaniel Lee’s *The Rival Queens*,

John Banks's *The Albion Queens*, and James Thomson's *Sophonisba*

(Dircks 7-8). In other words, heroic tragedy was a thriving genre, and one ripe for satire. In his own preface to *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, Fielding comments on these works of his contemporaries:

Here I congratulate my Cotemporary [*sic*] Writers, for their having enlarged the Sphere of Tragedy: The ancient tragedy seems to have had only two Effects on an Audience, *viz* it either awakened Terror and Compassion, or composed those and all other uneasy Sensations, by lulling the Audience in an agreeable Slumber. But to provoke the Mirth and Laughter of the Spectators, to join the Sock to the Buskin, is a Praise only due to Modern Tragedy.

Consequently, Fielding wrote a play that asked the audience to recognize the absurdity of the theatre they were frequenting and to change the sad curve that dramatic literature had taken. For a genre grown unbearably bombastic, the inversion of the conventions of heroic tragedy through satire was merely one step further in the creation of the ridiculous.

To examine the way in which Fielding undermined the conventions of heroic drama, audiences and readers need first to be familiar with those conventions. First, as every theatre attendee knew, a heroic tragedy had to have a tragic hero. The tragic hero was always virtuous, strong, and good, but was flawed by a single weakness, his *hubris*. In most ways, Fielding's Tom Thumb is the epitome of a tragic hero. He's

courageous, dashing, and handsome. But like any good tragic hero, he has a fatal flaw—his miniscule size. Peter Lewis writes, “In every way except physical size, Tom Thumb is the typical hero of heroic tragedy. He is a ‘man’ of unimpeachable honour; he is boastful, completely self-confident, able to conquer any enemy with little effort, including an army of giants, and prepared to put an immediate end to anyone who affronts him and his friends” (*Fielding’s Burlesque* 118). When Tom Thumb is introduced at the beginning of *The Tragedy of Tragedies*, the audience recognizes in the description of him, the signs of a tragic hero. Mr. Noodle first introduces him by saying

This day, O Mr. Doodle, is a Day
 Indeed, a Day we never saw before.
 The Mighty Thomas Thumb victorious comes;
 Millions of Giants crowd his Chariot Wheels,
 Giants! To whom the Giants in Guildhall
 Are Infant Dwarfs. They frown and foam and roar,
 While Thumb regardless of their Noise rides on.” (I.i.6-12)

The introduction of the tragic hero as a brave conqueror in war was a familiar convention to the eighteenth-century audience, as was the depiction of the hero as strong and imperturbable. The succeeding lines introducing Tom Thumb’s tragic flaw, however, serve to make such descriptions, when applied to Tom Thumb, ludicrous: “Small his Body

[is], so very small/ A Chairman's Leg is more than twice as large"

(I.i.28-9). Ridiculous! No tragic hero can be so miniscule! Fielding first alerts his audience to a convention of the drama with which they are very familiar, and then inverts that convention to make it appear laughable. But again, in this phase of the liminal experience the laughter and the play were intended to be productive, to challenge audience members to examine the decline that tragedy had taken and to correct it.

Fielding continues with his subversion of the traditional depiction of the tragic hero by describing the origins of Tom Thumb. While most tragic heroes are nobly born (Aristotle dictated, after all, that tragedy involve itself only with "greater than average men," to which directive English playwrights almost always adhered), Tom Thumb is reportedly born "a Pudding's offspring" (I.v.26), further diminishing his already less-than-heroic stature. And if his birth is somewhat less than splendid, his death is downright demeaning. The tragic end of our hero is not occasioned by a noble sword fight, or the treachery of a foe, but rather by a "Cow of larger than the usual Size," who "in a Moment swallow'd up *Tom Thumb*" (III.x.28, 30).

Following Tom Thumb's triumphal entrance onto the stage at the beginning of the play, the audience is introduced to another feature of heroic tragedy: the dilemma posed by an unattainable love. Dollalolla, the Queen, sees Tom Thumb marching into town, and falls immediately

in love with him. But she is no sweet and modest beauty like those the tragic hero usually falls in love with. On the contrary, the audience has just had described to them her “wrinkled face” and “blubber’d Cheeks” (I.ii.4, 6), and her voice “like twenty Screech-Owls” (I.v.18). Understandably then, Tom is not tempted by the Queen, for he is already in love with her daughter, the beautiful Huncamunca. The love complications become more and more complex as the play goes on. For while Tom loves Huncamunca, and Huncamunca loves Tom, she also happens to love Lord Grizzle, a courtier of her father’s. And while Queen Dollalolla loves Tom Thumb, she decides that she is also still in love with her husband, King Arthur. At the same time, the King assures us that he loves Dollalolla, but confesses that he can’t help also loving the Giant princess, Glumdalca, who, incidentally, loves Tom Thumb!

Furthermore, like any good heroic tragedy, an integral part of the plot is the characters’ inner struggle between satisfying their love (crazy and mixed up as it is) and satisfying their honor. Huncamunca, who is in love with two men, solves her dilemma “between love and honor and between lovers by deciding to marry both” (Rivero 7). As she tells Grizzle when he finds out that she has betrayed him by marrying Tom Thumb, “My ample Heart for more than one has Room, / A Maid like me, Heaven form’d at least for two, / I married him, and now I’ll marry you” (II.x.37-39).

Queen Dollalolla, however, solves her dilemma between love and honor in a different fashion. Her soliloquy is one of the most amusing in the play:

I love *Tom Thumb*—but must not tell him so;
 For what's a Woman, when her Virtue's gone?
 A Coat with a Hole in't—I can't live
 Without my Virtue, or without *Tom Thumb*.
 Then let me weigh them in two equal Scales,
 In this Scale put my Virtue, that *Tom Thumb*.
 Alas! *Tom Thumb* is heavier than my Virtue.
 But hold! —perhaps I may be left a Widow:
 [. . .] In that dear Hope, I will forget my Pain. (I.vi.3-12)

The visual image of the queen's virtue being weighed in actual scales against the miniscule form of Tom Thumb, with her virtue being the lighter, demonstrates just how negligible the queen's virtue really is. Furthermore, being "light" was the eighteenth-century slang equivalent of being "easy." So not only has the Queen here shown her lack of virtue, but her conclusion to the love/honor dilemma is to entertain the "dear Hope" that "perhaps I may be left a Widow." A solution that is decidedly unheroic!

Certainly the tradition of unattainable love is well established in time-honored English tragedy—one has merely to remember Desdemona

and Othello, or Hamlet and Ophelia to realize that the tradition of a doomed love in tragedy bears a respectable place (and the eighteenth-century writers certainly accorded Shakespeare their utmost respect). It is not the tradition itself, then, that is being challenged by Fielding in this play, but the absurd lengths to which contemporary dramatists had taken the tradition. Remember, liminality seeks not simply to do away with tradition, but in some circumstances, to reinforce it.

Just as Fielding undermines his audience's understanding of the tragic hero and heroic love, so he also inverts the traditional *language* of the heroic drama. One of the targets for this ridicule is the preponderance of overblown similes common in heroic tragedies. Gay had reduced the dramatic similes of Italian opera by applying them to low and degenerate things. Fielding takes a different tack, using instead over-blown, flamboyant similes to describe the traditional themes of love, honor, fame, etc. One of the most amusing of these is near the end of the play when the Ghost of Gaffer Thumb, Tom's father, appears to King Arthur to warn him of the coming insurrection. He says,

Thy subjects up in Arms, by *Grizzle* led,
 Will, ere the rosy finger'd Morn shall ope
 The Shutters of the Sky, before the Gate
 Of this thy Royal Palace, swarming spread:
 So have I seen the Bees in Clusters swarm,

So have I seen the Stars in frosty Nights,
 So have I seen the Sand in windy Days,
 So have I seen the Ghosts on Pluto's Shore,
 So have I seen the Flowers in Spring arise,
 So have I seen the Leaves in Autumn fall,
 So have I seen the Fruits in Summer smile,
 So have I seen the Snow in Winter frown. (III.ii.42-53)

To which tiring list the King replies, "Dost thou, beneath the Shape/ Of *Gaffer Thumb*, come hither to abuse me, / With Similies to keep me on the Rack?" (III.ii.54-56). And Fielding's audience, themselves having experienced the "rack" of overblown similes, is invited to laugh at the pretensions of the genre.

In addition to similes, Fielding also turns his considerable satiric skill on the use of heroic couplets in these tragedies. For example, the dialogue in the ridiculous scene where Tom Thumb slays the bailiff as he attempts to arrest Noodle for an unpaid bill to the tailor is all written in heroic couplets—even as our hero commits a decidedly unheroic action:

Noodle—Oh Sir! This Purpose of your Soul pursue.

Bailiff— Oh Sir! I have an Action against you [. . .]

Your Tailor put this Warrant in my Hands,

And I arrest you, Sir at his Commands.

Tom Thumb—Ha! Dogs! Arrest my Friend before my Face!

Think you *Tom Thumb* will suffer this Disgrace!

But let vain Cowards threaten by their Word.

Tom Thumb shall shew his Anger by his Sword.

Rather than the heroic actions that couplets usually accompany, we get instead the senseless, if amusing, murder of the stupid bailiff. As Dircks explains, “All of the characters utter crude sentiments in heroic language suggesting the real coarseness of much of the sentiment to be found in the heroic plays” (8).

It is not only the tragic hero, and the conventions of heroic love and heroic language that come in for ridicule in Fielding’s play. No convention of the heroic tragedy is left unmolested. For example, the introduction of supernatural and fantastical creatures such as the ghost of Gaffer Thumb, the giantess Glumdalca, not to mention the pudding-spawned pixie himself, are all additional caricatures of the increasingly gothic-like characters of eighteenth-century heroic tragedy. And even as he shares in the honest enjoyment and laughter of his audience, Fielding is simultaneously showing them the stupidity inherent in the “hackneyed conventions of an exhausted genre” (Rivero 75).

Chrononhotonthologos

A 1782 playbill for the Baltimore, Maryland theatre advertised the following:

For the Benefit of Mr. TILYARD.
 At the Theatre in Baltimore,
 On TUESDAY EVENING, the 31st of *December*, 1782,
 Will be prefented, the TRAGEDY of
H A M L E T
PRINCE OF DENMARK
 To which will be added, a FARCE, (never acted here) called
CHRONONHOTONTHOLOGOS
 Being the moft tragical Tragedy that ever was tragedized by any
 tragical Company of Tragedians.

I include this playbill for a couple of reasons. First, I want to show just how popular *Chrononhotonthologos* was during its time. It had a phenomenal run on the London stage, with only slightly fewer performances than Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies* or Gay's *Beggar's Opera*. That it was successfully presented in several American theatres indicates just how popular this little burlesque became. In fact, it is significant that, of all the British satires of the eighteenth century, *Chrononhotonthologos* was the most popular and frequently played in America, one of the truly liminal spaces of the eighteenth century. Clearly, there was something in this play that appealed to an audience who daily lived "on the threshold."

The second reason that I find this playbill interesting is the fact that *Chrononhotonthologos* is preceded by *Hamlet*, one of the greatest English tragedies, and one, Lewis writes, most often performed during the eighteenth century ("Henry Carey's" 115). Because of the popularity

of *Hamlet*, Carey's audiences would have recognized elements of that play, particularly the final death scene, in *Chrononhotonthologos*, "although they would have realized that Carey's burlesque fun was not at Shakespeare's expense but at that of those later dramatists who reduced such violent scenes to empty formulae" (115). It is interesting that the Baltimore Theatre would juxtapose one of the greatest tragedies ever written with a burlesque on the same. The effect on the audience must have been interesting to observe. The first performance of the evening would have satisfied the audience's expectations of tragedy. The audience would recognize in Hamlet all of the attributes of the tragic hero, and in Ophelia, the characteristics of the tragic heroine. The language of the performance, the love complication, the final death scene would all have fit the tragic tradition.

Immediately following this performance of Hamlet, the audience would have watched, probably with some consternation, although hopefully with a great deal of humor, Carey's play turning all of these conventions upside down. How absurd all of the bombastic tragedies of the eighteenth century must have looked after this billing, first by comparison to Shakespeare's supreme tragedy and then by the merciless satire of Carey's burlesque.

As a satire on heroic tragedy, *Chrononhotonthologos* has many similarities to Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies*. In the same way that Tom

Thumb became a ridiculous tragic hero, Chrononhotonthologos fits all of the requirements of a hero but in an absurd way. The play opens with Chrononhotonthologos, the King of Queermmania, being informed that his kingdom is being attacked by the Antipodeans with “armies on armies [. . .] in form stupendous/ Not like our earthly regions rank by rank, / But tier o’er tier, high pil’d from earth to heaven” (I.i.82-84). To this remarkable threat, the king replies calmly, “Were they wedg’d like golden ingots, / Ore pent so close as to admit no vacuum;/ One look from Chrononhotonthologos/ Shall scare them into nothing” (I.i.88-91). The play further tells of the king’s heroic nature upon his triumphant return from battle with the Antipodeans. The queen’s attendant Tatlanthe praises him to the queen as

Just now return’d from war;
 He rides like Mars in his triumphal car,
 Conquest precedes with laurels in his hand;
 Behind him Fame does on her tripod stand;
 Her golden trump shrill through the air she sounds,
 Which rends the earth, and thence to heaven rebounds,
 Trophies and spoils innumerable grace
 This triumph, which all triumphs does deface. (I.iv.13-20)

Chrononhotonthologos is brave, and strong, and valiant. But like Tom Thumb, Chrononhotonthologos also has a tragic flaw: he’s hopelessly

dim-witted. This is amply demonstrated to us in the beginning of the play when he defies Somnus, as his enemy, by claiming that he will nevermore close “these royal eyes,” and then commands that “henceforth let no man sleep, on pain of death” (I.i.68).

Perhaps more tragic even than his immense stupidity is Chrononhotonthologos’s apparent lack of either ability or interest in the performing of his husbandly duties. His queen, Fadladinida, confesses to Cupid her disappointment in her marriage: “Would I were a widow, as I am a wife/ [. . .] But I’m to my sorrow a maiden as bright, / As the dew that flies over the mulberry-tree” (I.vi.37-40). She further expresses her displeasure with the lack of marital productivity in the end of the play when she bemoans the death of Chrononhotonthologos, who made “a widow a virgin queen. / For, to my great misfortune, he, poor king, / Has left me so; I’n’t that a wretched thing?” (I.vii.70-73). By creating a hero whose tragic flaw is impotence, Carey brutally comments on the weak, impotent heroes of contemporary tragedy.

As I mentioned earlier, however, every good tragedy has to have an element of romance, and if Chrononhotonthologos can’t supply it, then it must be found elsewhere, in this case with his queen, Fadladinida. According to Peter Lewis, “if Chrononhotonthologos is more heroic than any hero, Fadladinida, whom Tatlanthe describes as ‘Angel, Queen, and Goddess, altogether’, is more heroine-like than any heroine” (“Henry

Carey's" 136). And like any good tragic heroine, she provides the story's needed romantic element, even if ironically. When Chrononhotonthologos carries home the captive King of the Antipodeans, Fadladinida falls immediately in love with him, with, as Lewis describes it, "unprecedented suddenness and completeness" (136). During her first scene of the play, she has not even seen the "topsy-turvy king, the gentleman that/ carries head where his heels should be" (I.iv.53-54). But by her second appearance, she is so in love that she would "die ten thousand deaths to set him free," enamored as she is with "his air, his shape, his mein, his every grace, / In what a charming attitude he stands," and "how prettily he foots it with his hands!" (I.iv.61-65). Here Carey satirizes the rapidity with which lovers in heroic tragedy fall so deeply in love they are willing to die or kill, a convention that had reached truly ridiculous proportions.

In the tradition of true heroic love, Fadladinida goes to even the most unspeakable places in search of her heart's desire. Upon finding her lover imprisoned in Queermmania's dungeon, Fadladinida cries, "Is this a place, oh, all ye gods above! / This a reception for the man I love? / See in what sweet tranquility he sleeps, / While nature's self at his confinement weeps" (I.vi.1-4). We've already seen the way in which Gay used prison scenes to ridicule that particular convention in Italian opera.

In this scene of *Chrononhotonthologos*, Carey mocks the same fondness in heroic tragedy.

Fadladinida, when her advances are not comprehended by the Antipodean King, invokes the aid of Venus and Cupid, who assure her that her quest for love will not be fruitless and that before the day is out she will be widowed and consequently free to enjoy the “two jolly young husbands” fate will hand her to give her “twenty fine babies, all lovely and fair” (I.vi.44-46). And indeed, when Chrononhotonthologos is slain by his general, his queen takes as husband the two courtiers Aldiborontiphoscophornio and Ringdum-Funnidos, completely forgetting, in very unheroic fashion, the King of the Antipodeans as quickly as she had at first fallen in love with him. In this way, Carey shows his audience, as Turner explains, that the alternative to the established tradition of tragedy—contemporary heroic tragedy—is almost painfully absurd.

In addition to the farcically flawed tragic hero and heroine, Carey provides theatergoers with an ending that is almost, but just humorously short of, a perfect heroic tragedy. Chrononhotonthologos is invited to the tent of his general Bombardinian to drink and to examine “two captive females, beauteous as the morn” (I.v.18). Chrononhotonthologos, however, as previously mentioned has no interest in the charms of the female gender and declares that he would rather dine. Bombardinian,

with unimpeachable hospitality, orders that “the table instantly be spread, / With all that art and nature can produce. / Traverse from pole to pole; sail round the globe, / Bring every eatable that can be eat;/ The king shall eat, though all mankind be starv’d” (I.vii.10-14). The pragmatic cook, however, sensibly and very unheroically replies, “I am afraid his majesty will be starv’d/ before I can round the world for a dinner— besides, where’s the money?” (I.vii.15-16). At which impertinence Chrononhotonthologos commands his guards to “seize the villain! Broil him, fry him, stew him;/ Ourselves shall eat him out of mere revenge” (I.vii.19-20). And then, not waiting for his guards to do the deed, Chrononhotonthologos draws his sword and stabs the cook through. He then turns on Bombardinian and castigates him for the insult offered by his servant. Bombardinian answers saucily, Chrononhotonthologos strikes him, and Bombardinian draws *his* sword and kills the king. He immediately sends for the doctor who, when he admits to Bombardinian that there is nothing he can do for the king to “join his body to his soul again” (I.vii.54), is also slain by Bombardinian. Bombardinian then decides to go to the next world to fetch back the soul of Chrononhotonthologos, and so kills himself. At the end of this confused and copious shedding of blood, the Queen and her attendants and some courtiers arrive on the scene, and Aldiborontiphoscophornio cries “O horrid! Horrible, and horridest horror! / Our King! Our general! Our

cook! Our doctor! / All dead! Stone dead! Irrevocably dead! O----h----,” after which “all groan, a tragedy groan” (I.vii.66-69). Lewis points out that though the death scene at the end of *Chrononhotonthologos* is not quite on the scale of Fielding’s *Tragedy of Tragedies*, “it is more than ample to make its satirical point about the fondness of English tragic dramatists, in spite of French neo-classical influence, for littering the stage with corpses at the end of the play” (“Henry Carey’s” 135).

Certainly the incredible popularity of these three plays is owed to their ability to entertain an audience and make them laugh. But as liminal performances, those which invert readily recognized symbols of the culture in an attempt to critique flaws in that culture, it is important to remember that their purpose is not only comic entertainment, but a very real functionality aimed at destroying those neouveau dramatic genres that their authors believed threatened English theatrical tradition.

As the participants in an activity that occurs within the liminal space are reagggregated into the work-a-day world, then, they carry with them this new understanding gained in the liminal space. The next chapter looks at some of the ways that, in fact, Italian opera and heroic tragedy were changed as the audiences of Gay, Fielding, and Carey left the theatres and took with them new understandings formed on the threshold.

Chapter Four

Phase Three: Reaggregation

Victor Turner writes that the third stage of a liminal experience is *incorporation or reaggregation*. This phase signals the return of the liminal participant to their “stable, well-defined position in the total society” (24). The participants are then prepared to initiate changes that will restabilize the culture (in this case, literary and theatrical culture), and return it to more traditional patterns. As Sarah Gilead explains, the effects of the liminal space “carry a transformative power both for the passenger and, potentially, for his culture as well” (183). But it is important to remember that liminal experiences act as agents of change only insofar as they correct deviations from traditional norms. Turner differentiates between those dramas (both formal and social), which initiate change or revolution and those which initiate a return to the traditional. Because of their essentially conservative aims, satiric dramas serve this negative change function, not initiating new forms (although they may inadvertently do this, as in the case of *The Beggar’s Opera* and the subsequent development of ballad operas), but rather *arresting* new forms which do not adhere to established norms and values.

The play texts themselves give evidence that this is the aim of the performance. At the conclusion of *Chrononhotonthologos*, for example, the player speaking the Epilogue declares,

*Criticks! on you, our Author does depend,
Be you his Champions, and his Cause defend;
You know his Drift, if wrongheads should misplace it;
I'm bid to say, Qui capit ille facit. (3-6).*

So if these authors are depending on audiences' willingness to champion their cause, how do they signal as much in the play script? In other words, how does the theatre experience itself encourage audiences, as they leave the theatre, to amend their theatre attendance to exclude the outlandish and degenerate genres of heroic tragedy and Italian opera?

For Fielding, it is once again through his reliance on textual notes and the audience's recognition of specific burlesque. In the final scene of the play, the King, surrounded by corpses, directs his final lines to the audience: "Kings, queens, and knaves throw one another down," he says, "Till the whole pack lies scattered and o'erthrown./ So all our pack upon the floor is cast,/ And all I boast is—that I fall the last." The stage directions then inform us that he dies. We saw in the last chapter how this final scene parodies the great death scenes that were typical of heroic tragedy. Fielding's footnotes further indicate the specific satirical objects of this final, absurdly macabre scene. The enormous death toll,

he informs readers, is modeled after two of Dryden's tragedies:

Cleomenes and *The Rival Ladies*. And the reason for the overwhelming success of this final scene is its application of Dryden's belief that either "custom hath so insinuated itself into our countrymen, or Nature hath so formed them to fierceness" that "they will scarcely [*sic*] suffer combats, and other objects of horror to be taken from them." (257). In other words, it is the degenerate tastes of English audiences that have led to such absurdity in tragic theatre. As Samuel Johnson wrote, after all, "The drama's laws the drama's patrons give. / For we that live to please must please to live" (82). So if the deterioration of tragic theatre is the audience's fault, it must follow that it is also the audience's responsibility to correct. To alert the audience to their continued role outside the theatres, then, Fielding relies on their knowledge of Dryden's work and the specific targets of satire that they provide in this final scene.

Gay and Carey, on the other hand, recruit audiences to "champion their causes" via the more traditional method of an epilogue. We've already seen how the player at the end of *Chrononhotonthologos* addresses the audience directly, asking them to side with the author in his intention to ridicule heroic tragedy. The audience thus leaves the theatre having been given their final cue as to the purpose of the performance and their role in it.

The epilogue to *The Beggar's Opera* functions in a slightly different way. Here, the player and the beggar who initially informed the audience that Italian opera was the primary object of satire in the prologue return to reinforce this idea. The beggar, who would have the play “carry a most excellent moral” by having the thieving, carousing Macheath hanged, capitulates to the player’s insistence that “an opera must end happily.” Thus the happy ending, wherein Macheath is reprieved, Polly is reunited with him, and Macheath and all his women perform the “Lumps of Pudding” dance, does not grow out of the action of the play—it is, in fact, separated from it and brought about only by the intervention of the beggar, himself a spectator of, not a participant in, the story. This framing of the main story of the play (both before and after the main action) by commentary from the beggar draws the attention of the audience to the nature of the performance itself. It is a distancing technique that was frequently employed by eighteenth-century playwrights in order to sum up the “moral” or message of the play. Gay’s beggar, unlike most speakers of a prologue or epilogue, does not directly address the audience. However, in his address to the player, the audience is cued that the “moral” of the story is being given. And while the beggar does not explicitly state that the audience should promptly leave and never watch Italian opera again, the use of the beggar’s commentary on the absurdity of opera to frame the play (with all of its

brutally funny inversion of operatic convention), serves to alert the audience that this is the moral nonetheless.

So how successful were they? If the purpose of these kinds of conservative, liminal dramas is to effect some sort of change in the literary culture, then a successful performance can perhaps be judged by the extent to which it actually did effect this change. To answer that, I will first examine the way that the genre of heroic tragedy was affected by Fielding's and Carey's satires. Of course, it is difficult to know how the specific audiences that attended *The Tragedy of Tragedies* during its phenomenal 40-day run or those who attended the slightly shorter run of *Chrononhotonthologos* reacted to the plays. They obviously liked the plays—these dramas ran longer than almost any other short satiric plays of the time. And some clues exist as to the effect that they had on audiences. D'Israeli, for example, commented that at the time of Carey's death, "the whole nation was echoing his verse, and crowded theatres were applauding his wit and humour" (qtd. in Oldfield 9). And V. C. Clinton-Baddeley has said that *Chrononhotonthologos* has had a greater impact on English burlesque than perhaps any other single play: "Sixty years after it was written people were [still] laughing" (71). Similarly, Fielding's *Tragedy of Tragedies* became such a well-known play that character names were being used as insults across England in much the same way as Swift's Yahoos. Even in this century they've not been

forgotten; Beatrix Potter, in 1904, used character names from Fielding's play in her story of *The Tale of Two Bad Mice* (Morrissey 9).

But perhaps the greatest testament to their influence on audiences was the subsequent waning of heroic tragedy. Heroic tragedy was undoubtedly already on the decline when Fielding and Carey were writing their burlesques, reflecting a more general trend in the theatres away from tragedy as a whole. "Let others be with Tragick Lawrel's Crwn'd" says Baker in his prologue to *Tunbridge-Walks*, "Where undistrub'd the Heroe struts around,/ And Empty Boxes Eccho to the Sound" (9). However, tragedy as a genre still constituted approximately one third of the London season's repertoire between the years 1720-30. And Robert D. Hume informs us that the two most popular types of these were 1) Heroic tragedies, followed by 2) Pseudo-classical tragedies. Of the twenty-two new tragedies staged in the four London theatres between the years 1728 and 1732, eight of them were heroic tragedies, including Barford's *The Virgin Queen*, Jeffrey's *Merope*, Walker's *The Fate of Villainy*, and Ralph's *The Earl of Essex* (290-91). Contrasted to this relatively high number are those of the years 1732-1738, the years just after Fielding's and Carey's plays, which see a marked decrease. Of the twelve new tragedies written during this period, only four of them were heroic tragedies. Hume writes that "Heroic intrigue tragedy lost its numerical dominance, and the four examples did not captivate the public" (298).

Jean Kern cautions against exaggerating the effect that Carey and Fielding had in “driving heroic tragedy off the stage” (139). However, she continues, the fact remains that the numbers of heroic tragedies did decrease notably consequent to *The Tragedy of Tragedies* and *Chrononhotonthologos*. A study done by the editors of *The London Stage 1660-1800*, shows that in contrast to the relatively high number of performances of heroic tragedy during the first few decades of the eighteenth century, between the years 1747 to 1776, heroic tragedy comprised only 3.7 percent of all tragedies performed. That means that there were only 109 performances of heroic tragedy during a period of nearly thirty years—less than any other kind of tragedy (London Stage pt 4 vol 1, clxii). Reflecting on this decline, Kern says that “it could be argued that Henry Fielding and Henry Carey in the 1730s were effective enough satirists to help mold taste” (139).

So what replaced heroic tragedy? If Turner is right, satire should serve to redirect participants’ attention away from new forms and return them to those forms with cultural history. The play-lists of the late 1730s to 1770s show that this is, in fact, true. According to the performance listings, what replaced heroic tragedy was Shakespearean tragedy. Shakespeare, who in most centuries after his own has represented for Englishmen the pinnacle of English drama and poetry, was a likely choice for those attempting to correct the increasingly

outlandish nature of tragedy. By burlesquing the extravagances of heroic tragedy, Carey and Fielding helped to return London theatre to a kind of tragedy more steeped in cultural tradition.

Perhaps the best example of the efficacy of these satires, however, was *The Beggar's Opera*. This play had an enormous influence on London society, and that impact was by no means limited to the humorous charges that it increased highway robbery by making thievery look appealing. More importantly, of course, (as well as more realistically) the play had a profound effect on the theatre. As Lewis Theobald, an otherwise unremarkable poet of the eighteenth century, lamented:

I sing of sad discords that happened of late
Of strange revolutions, but not of State,
How old England grew fond of old tunes of her own,
And her ballads went up and our operas went down (qtd. in Kidson
95).

The stunning success of *The Beggar's Opera* was positively disastrous for its satiric object, Italian opera. The play's success is attested to not only by the number of performances it enjoyed (63, during its initial run at Lincoln's Inn Fields), but also by the personal accounts that have come down to us. Boswell, who would later earn fame as Samuel Johnson's biographer, wrote that the draw of the *The Beggar's*

Opera was that “there is in it so much of real London life, so much brilliant wit, and such a variety of airs, which from early association of ideas, engage, soothe, and enliven the mind, that no performance which the theatre exhibits, delights me more” (qtd. in Kidson 97). The rest of the country agreed. Not only was *The Beggar’s Opera* staged in all four of the major London theatres in the years immediately following its début, but it was also performed in all the large towns of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland (Uhler).

Considering this wide popularity, it is unsurprising that the play had a devastating effect on Italian opera:

The Ladies carried about with them the favorite songs of it in fans, and houses were furnished with it in screens [. . .] the person who acted Polly, til then obscure, became all at once the favorite of the town [. . .] furthermore, it drove out of England, for that season the Italian opera, which had carried all before it for several years.

(Jonathon Swift, qtd. in Uhler 99)

Swift is speaking quite literally here when he says that *The Beggar’s Opera* drove out the Italian opera for an entire season. The Royal Academy of Music, which had done quite well during the two decades preceding *The Beggar’s Opera*, began to have financial difficulties during the 1727 season. With the debut of Gay’s play, the Academy’s downfall was assured. In a letter to Jonathon Swift in 1728, Gay wrote, “The

outlandish (as they now call it) opera has been so thin of late, that some have called *it* the Beggar's Opera, and if the run continues, I fear I shall have remonstrances drawn up against me by the Royal Academy" (87). Indeed, the Academy, which had been on shaky financial ground before *The Beggar's Opera*, was now nearly bankrupt. Gay continues his letter by saying, "there is a discourse about the town, that the directors of the Royal Academy of Music design to solicit against its [*The Beggar's Opera*] being played on the outlandish opera days" (88). Even if such an action had taken place, it probably would not have helped. The Royal Academy broke apart later that year, and Ariosto, one of the chief composers for the Academy, left England to return to Italy together with three of the most well-known performers who had served to make Italian opera so popular: Senesino, Cuzzoni, and Faustina. The following year there was no Italian opera performed at all, and Roger Fiske declares, "the lack of it was not unconnected with the nation's enthusiasm for *The Beggar's Opera*" (66).

The brutal effect of *The Beggar's Opera* on the Italian opera is poignantly illustrated by one of Hogarth's paintings entitled "The Enraged Musician." The painting depicts Castrucci, one of the leaders of the Italian Opera, hanging out of his window, violin in hand, attempting to stopper his ears from the ruckus in the street below him. Here, a woman holds a squalling infant, a dog yaps aggressively at the noise of a

knife grinder, two cats screech at one another on a rooftop, and children play right beneath the window. All of this noise seems to be driving the poor violinist crazy. In addition, there seems to be some sort of mock-musical parade proceeding down the street. A child is banging on a very large drum, a beggar is playing an oboe, an officer is blowing on a horn, and a ballad singer is singing at the top of her lungs, the ballads that she holds up for sale entitled "The Ladies Fall," perhaps intimating, says Kidson, the fall of the great divas of the Italian opera and their replacement by the simple English ballad singers. The bitterest touch of irony, however, is the playbill attached to the wall just outside Castrucci's window, advertising *The Beggar's Opera*, and on which we can read "Mr. Walker as Macheath, and Miss Fenton as Polly."



Figure 3.1: The Enraged Musician

Clearly, *The Beggar's Opera* affected the popularity of Italian opera in England. But perhaps the greatest testament to its influence on that genre was its impact on the most important of the operatic composers, George Friderik Handel. Handel arrived in England in 1710 after having earned much acclaim on the continent. Although he had not initially intended to settle in England, he was prevailed upon by Aaron Hill to compose a single opera while he was there. The overwhelming success of that opera induced him to stay in England, and after 1711, he became the principal composer of Italian opera in England. Pat Rogers points out that Gay was well acquainted with Handel, and had, in fact, worked with him on a translation which Handel later incorporated into one of his

operas. Whether the two had a falling out, as Rogers speculates may indeed be the case, or whether their friendship was never a fast enough one, or a personal enough one, to prevent Gay's burlesque, the fact remains that when *The Beggar's Opera* was produced, its overwhelming success was extremely detrimental to Handel's operatic career. The closing of the Italian opera subsequent to the production of Gay's play forced Handel back to Italy for a short time. There, he searched for new singers to replace those who had left with the Academy's fall the year before. When Handel returned to England in 1730, he continued to compose Italian opera for the stage, but these operas were not nearly as successful as his previous ones. In 1732, attempting to cater to the new tastes of London, he wrote his first English Oratorio, *Esther*. Maintaining many of the musical forms of opera, the English Oratorio (a genre invented by Handel himself) eliminates those conventions of the opera which its critics had found so absurd. Oratorio, for example, did not have the elaborate stage designs, the contrived rules of action (e.g. that the ending be happy, that the two sopranos have parts of equal weight, etc.), or the grandiose themes. Instead, oratorio dealt with biblical themes and was performed concert-style, in English, without action or ornamentation, allowing the purity and beauty of the music to be the primary focus. For the remainder of his career, Handel focused on

developing the English Oratorio, and some of his finest work comes out of this period, *The Messiah* being the most famous example.

Without the impetus provided by *The Beggar's Opera*, would Handel have turned, eventually, from Italian opera and begun writing oratorios, some of his finest works? Perhaps. But Yvonne Noble believes that one of the best witnesses to the success of *The Beggar's Opera* was that “it changed the course of music by helping turn Handel away from operas to oratorios” (1). Clearly, Gay's play pushed Handel to reconsider the tortuous conventions of opera, and turn, instead, to a more simple, native kind of performance. *The Beggar's Opera*, then, not only influenced the genre of Italian opera as a whole, but perhaps more importantly, allowed the opera's most accomplished composer to reconsider his musical career and consequently, write some of the greatest music in English history.

Victor Turner writes that liminal dramas are “ultimately eufunctional [contributing to the function of] even when seemingly ‘inversive’ for the working of the social structure” (54). In other words, liminality works, not to invert social norms, but correct and reinforce them. This is the very function that Carey's, Fielding's, and Gay's dramas performed—they helped to stop the tide of what they felt to be

bombastic, overblown dramatic developments, returning theatre to a simpler, more inherently *English* way.

Turner explains that symbols are intricately woven with all social processes, and that our deliberate combination of different symbols creates an unlimited number of dynamic semantic systems. These symbols, as they are used in “a *single* work of art” or more importantly, in “centuries of performance” are aimed at “producing effects on the psychological states and behavior of those exposed to them or obliged to use them for their communication with other human beings” (22). In a liminal space, symbols are used in a ritual of *reversal*, to communicate not the traditional meanings that have built up over the centuries, but rather their opposite (21). In the preceding chapters, I have shown the way satiric drama utilizes symbols, and their reversed values, to create a liminal space for audience members. Gilead has explained that “the liminal process creates a safe game-space for the putting-into-play of values or behaviors inimical to a given power structure” (184). But it is not always the intent of liminal experiences to subvert those power structures; frequently, they seek instead to bolster and uphold them.

As liminal dramas, then, literary, political, and social satire can all act as guardians of convention. Satire, especially, seeks to undermine subversive ideas and keep a society tranquil and even. In this way, satire aims to protect a society from revolutionary change. And although

in this thesis I have focused on literary satire, my intent has been to show the way in which dramatic satire in general creates a liminal experience for audience members in order to serve this conservative function. To show the way that dramatic satire works to stabilize a culture, I have described the ways three literary satires engage their audiences by following the three phases of liminality explained by Victor Turner—separation, inversion, and reaggregation.

In chapter two, I discussed the first stage of liminality, “separation.” I showed how an audience entering a theater becomes a part of a group with, as Wolfgang Iser describes it, a “horizon of expectation,” or an understanding of the conventions and traditions of the performances that usually occur in that time and culture. An audience entering the liminal space of a theatre production such as satiric drama, specifically, is allowed a greater degree of participation in the production. These participants, according to Turner, are expected to learn new associations for old signs and symbols and to carry that new understanding back into the culture, thereby strengthening and giving new life to the culture. As Gilead explains, “seeming to be outside the group, the liminal figure is actually its moral representative and, in fact, exists to serve the social structure from which he [or she] has been separated” (184).

In chapter three, then, I discussed the second stage of liminality, “inversion,” and explained what those signs and symbols were which an eighteenth-century audience would have readily recognized and which Gay, Fielding, and Carey subverted. The popularity of high culture dramatic forms such as Italian opera and heroic tragedy made the conventions of those genres familiar to their audiences, and made the reversal of those conventions amusing and poignant.

And finally, in chapter four, I looked at some of the changes that were occasioned by the plays of Gay, Fielding and Carey. If the intention of satire is to correct deviations from the accepted social norms, then we would expect these plays to have impacted the direction of English drama. Indeed, in this chapter I described some of the results of Gay’s, Fielding’s, and Carey’s plays—the decline in heroic tragedy, and the huge changes in Italian opera—that occurred as the audiences were reaggregated into society.

In the introduction to this thesis, I explained the way in which experiences that occur in the liminal space can either serve to reinforce social norms and traditional values, or to subvert and revolutionize the values. By examining the way in which a given genre engages its audience as they enter, participate in, and then leave the liminal space, we can see the way that different genres accomplish their conservative or revolutionary functions. We saw the way that satiric drama, because it

engages its audience very actively in the ridicule of subversive ideas, drawing on the audience's participation in that ridicule, and using conventions and symbols with which the audience is intimately familiar, functions successfully as a conservator of societal values. Tracing the audience's role through Turner's three stages, then, enables us to see the way in which satiric drama does indeed work toward the stability of the social structure by "Tell[ing] men freely of the foulest faults," making them "laugh at their vain deeds and vainer thoughts."

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