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SYNOPSIS

1 *Brecht's narration for a concert version of 'Die Dreigroschenoper'*

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN HINTON

You are about to hear an opera for beggars. Since this opera was intended to be as splendid as only beggars can imagine, and yet cheap enough for beggars to be able to watch, it is called the THREEPENNY OPERA.

No. 1 OVERTURE

London 1730: A fair in Soho. The beggars are begging, the thieves thieving, the whores whoring. A ballad singer sings the Ballad of Mac the Knife, the notorious bandit, who commits his countless misdeeds without ever being caught.

No. 2 THE BALLAD OF MAC THE KNIFE (DIE MORITAT VON MACKIE MESSER)

[Act I]

To combat the increasing callousness of mankind Jonathan Jeremiah Peachum, a man of business, has opened a shop where the poorest of the poor could acquire the sort of appearance that could still touch the hardest of hearts. For this reason he is called the king of the massed beggars of London. Hear now his Morning Hymn.

No. 3 PEACHUM'S MORNING HYMN (MORGENCHORAL DES PEACHUM)

Jonathan Peachum learns from his wife that his daughter Polly is having a curious relationship with a young man. Having gathered that his daughter's beloved is the notorious gang leader Mac the Knife in person, he tells his outraged wife.

No. 4 INSTEAD-OF SONG (ANSTATT DASS-SONG)

Five o'clock the next afternoon. Deep in the heart of Soho the bandit Mac the Knife is celebrating his marriage to Polly Peachum,

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daughter of the beggar king. We are in a stable fitted out with exclusive furnishings, which Mac the Knife's gang have stolen.

No. 5 WEDDING SONG
(HOCHZEITSLIED)

But Mac is not happy with the work of his gang. It's the work of apprentices, not of grown men. To clear the air and liven things up a little, Polly volunteers to sing a song.

No. 6 PIRATE JENNY
(SEERÄUBERJENNY)

At this point there appears London's most senior police commissioner, Brown. The bandits call him Tiger Brown. He is a good friend of Mac the Knife, whose evil deeds he neither sees nor hears. Tiger Brown has come to congratulate Mac the Knife on his wedding.

No. 7 CANNON SONG
(KANONEN-SONG)

Tiger Brown quickly takes his leave. He still has preparations to make for the coronation celebrations which are to take place the following day. Once the bandits have also left, the wedding night begins. Hear now Polly and Mac's *Liebeslied*.

No. 8 LOVE SONG
(LIEBESLIED)

Back in Peachum's outfitting shop for beggars. For Peachum, who knows how hard the world can be, the loss of his daughter spells utter ruin. Polly is received by her parents.

No. 9 BARBARA SONG

No. 10 FIRST THREEPENNY FINALE
(ERSTES DREIGROSCHENFINALE)

[Act II]

Jonathan Peachum has hit on a good idea. He wants to hand Mackie over to the sheriff. Mrs Peachum suspects that he is hiding out in Turnbridge with his whores. She wants to bribe the girls so that they give the bandit away. Polly, however, springs to Mac's defence and points out that the police commissioner is his best friend.

Polly informs Macheath of the danger, and advises him to flee.

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During his absence she will continue to run the business as captain of the gang. They take leave of each other.

No. 11a MELODRAMA
(MELODRAM)

No. 11b POLLY'S SONG
(POLLYS LIED)

[No. 12 THE BALLAD OF SEXUAL DEPENDENCY]
(DIE BALLADE VON DER SEXUELLEN HÖRIGKEIT)

The coronation bells had not yet died down. Instead of fleeing to Highgate Moor as intended, Mac the Knife is sitting with the whores of Turnbridge. It is Thursday evening. Mackie and the whore Jenny remember in a song the pleasant hours they have spent together.

No. 13 PIMPS' BALLAD
(ZUHÄLTERBALLADE)

While Mac was singing, Jenny stood at the window and gave a signal to the constable. Thus the famous Mac the Knife, betrayed by the whores, fell into the hands of the police and was put behind bars in the Old Bailey. Tiger Brown is very unhappy at the fact that he could have spared his friend the trouble.

MAC: Judge for yourselves, Gentlemen, if you will,
My life right now's a bloody pain,
When still young, I took the bitter pill,
Only he in comfort takes the strain.

No. 14 THE BALLAD OF THE EASY LIFE
(DIE BALLADE VOM ANGENEHMEN LEBEN)

Lucy and Polly meet in front of Mac's prison. Lucy is the daughter of police commissioner Brown; she, too, is secretly married to Mac the Knife.

No. 15 JEALOUSY DUET
(EIFERSUCHTSDUETT)

The quarrel quickly finds a conclusion. Mrs Peachum appears, clips Polly round the ear and drags her off. Lucy stands her ground.

Mac succeeds [with Lucy's help] in escaping from prison. He makes a beeline for the whores. When Peachum wishes to pay him a visit he finds not Mackie but police commissioner Brown. In order to frighten him about the consequences of his carelessness, Peachum

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tells the sheriff a story [about Queen Semiramis] with an obvious reference to the coronation celebrations taking place the next day.

Mac sings with [Mrs Peachum] the parable about what keeps man alive.

No. 16 SECOND THREEPENNY FINALE (ZWEITES DREIGROSCHENFINALE)

[Act III]

That same night Peachum prepares to set off. His intention is to disturb the coronation procession with a demonstration of misery and squalor. He delivers a speech to his beggars.

Police commissioner Brown arrests the beggar king. The latter, however, warns him about being overhasty.

No. 17 THE SONG OF THE INSUFFICIENCY OF HUMAN ENDEAVOUR (DAS LIED VON DER UNZULÄNGLICHKEIT MENSCHLICHEN STREBENS)

No. 18 SOLOMON SONG (SALOMON-SONG)

Peachum has the police commissioner in the palm of his hand. He blackmails him, thus forcing his release. Moreover, he again puts Brown on the trail of Macheath, whom the whores have betrayed for a second time. Mac is once more put in jail in chains; once more he tries, by means of bribery, to escape.

No. 19 CALL FROM THE GRAVE (RUF AUS DER GRUFT)

The bells of Westminster are ringing. It is just before six o'clock. All of Mac the Knife's acquaintances have appeared in the prison to bid him farewell as he is taken to the gallows. Beforehand Mackie begs everyone for forgiveness.

No. 20 EPITAPH (GRABSCHRIFT)

Unlike the course of events in real life, however, the Threepenny Opera has a happy end. The King's mounted messenger saves Mackie from the gallows. The gratification of all concerned is expressed in the following verses.

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No. 20a WALK TO THE GALLOWS
(GANG ZUM GALGEN)

Now, ladies and gentlemen, in our show
We should witness Mac's hanging,
For in the Christian world, as well you know,
Nothing comes from nothing.

But lest you might be tempted
To accuse us of some crass collusion
Mac will now be exempted
We offer instead an alternative conclusion.

Mercy, it's said, tempers justice
In opera, that's par for the course,
So let's have the theory in practice
And behold the King's envoy – on a horse.

No. 21 THIRD THREEPENNY FINALE
(DRITTES DREIGROSCHENFINALE)

CHORALE
(SCHLUSSGESANG)

Editorial note

The full synopsis normally expected in the Handbook series – an account, that is, of the music's contribution to the unfolding of the drama and the delineation of character – represents a mould of conventional coherence which *The Threepenny Opera* emphatically resists. The very impossibility of such a synopsis is, in fact, a key to the work's significance. In accordance with Brecht's theory of Epic Theatre, the musical and dramatic effects are not calculated to constitute an overall unified structure. As one of several discrete elements, the music neither serves nor makes the drama by carrying the action forward (except in the parodic recitative in the third finale). Rather, it stops the action in its tracks. To that extent it can be likened to Handelian *opera seria*. Unlike in Handel, however, the music does not contribute towards dramatic characterization in any general or substantial way. If the music unfolds on a large scale, it does so as an autonomous structure (as David Drew demonstrates in chapter 13). When singing, the protagonists 'adopt attitudes' rather than tell us anything about their true character or emotions, which strictly speaking they do not possess, at least in any conventional sense. The relationship between words and music is deliberately untautological and ambiguous: the words can say one thing, the music something

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else. Writing about the 'Zuhälterballade', Weill remarked: 'The charm of the piece rests precisely in the fact that a rather risqué text (not, by the way, as offensive as a lot of operetta texts) is set to music in a gentle, pleasant way' (cf. p. 188). The words put into the mouths of the singers are frequently in quotation marks, as it were. In the 'Barbarasong', for example, in which Polly 'gives her parents to understand that she has married the bandit Macheath', the scruff celebrated as the successful suitor can hardly pass for her nattily clad spouse (cf. p. 36). With its juxtaposition of narrative text, spoken dialogue and musical numbers, *The Threepenny Opera* is a montage, not an organic construction. For this reason it is uncommonly, if not intrinsically, susceptible to revision and rearrangement, as the account of the genesis in chapter 2 shows. It has even proved possible for characters to pilfer one another's material and create a new montage. At some point during the initial run of the Berlin première, for example, Lucy temporarily borrowed Polly's 'Barbarasong'; in his revised version of 1931 Brecht robbed Mrs Peachum of her lines in the second finale and gave them to Jenny instead; and Jenny's appropriation of 'Seeräuberjenny' (a practice started in G. W. Pabst's 1930 film) has become so habitual as to engender the widespread belief that she, rather than Polly, is the song's rightful owner.

Many of the narrator's passages in this hitherto unpublished concert version of *Die Dreigroschenoper* were lifted directly from the original stage work, where they also serve as an 'epic' summary of the action. In the 1928 libretto, which grew out of the original production, producers are instructed to project these connecting texts on to two large screens on either side of the stage, whereas in the 1931 'literary' edition, in which Brecht removed much of the stage business, no such instruction appears. Consequently, productions relying on this revised version of the work tend to assume that the connecting texts are to be spoken by a conférencier rather than appear as written captions in the manner of a silent film.

The present translation is abridged, containing as it does just the passages for narrator. The original document, which is held in the Bertolt Brecht Archive (BBA 1013), also reproduces the readily available texts of the musical numbers as well as slices of dialogue from the stage version. (The dialogue is interpolated at the following points: after no. 4, before nos. 6 and 7, before no. 9, in the middle of the narration before no. 11a, before nos. 13, 14 and 15, before the announcements of nos. 16 and 17, and before no. 20.) Although the typescript contains emendations in Brecht's hand, neither the extent

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of his involvement in its creation nor the typescript's date has yet been ascertained with any certainty. Nor is it clear what prompted it in the first place. Brecht may well have had in mind less a live concert performance than a gramophone recording, as with the short connecting texts he wrote in 1930 (published in Werner Hecht, ed., *Brechts Dreigroschenoper*, Frankfurt/Main, 1985, pp. 35f.). The addition of new, post-1945 texts after nos. 5 and 14 points to a late date, though certainly not later than 1956, the year of Brecht's death (the texts in question are 'Der neue Kanonensong' and 'Die Ballade vom angenehmen Leben der Hitlersatrapen', both of which are printed in *Brechts Dreigroschenoper*, cited above, and also as part of the appendix to Manheim and Willett's translation). Following the change Brecht made in 1931, Jenny (rather than Mrs Peachum) shares the second finale with Mac. At the same time there are signs that the text was initially based on the 1928 libretto rather than any later versions. Whereas the opening paragraph before no. 1 (retained for the 1930 gramophone narration) was cut in 1931 for the *Versuche* and in all subsequent editions, the following items, whose texts were not published until 1931, are conspicuous by their absence: no. 12 in its entirety, the second verse of no. 15, and a large part of Macheath's valedictory speech before No. 20. The date of the action, '1730', is a mystery (except for its proximity to Gay), since the première set the work in the nineteenth century and the printed editions give no date at all.

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HISTORY

2 *'Matters of intellectual property': the sources and genesis of 'Die Dreigroschenoper'*

STEPHEN HINTON

Introduction

Of one thing we can be certain: when *Die Dreigroschenoper* opened in Berlin at the Theater am Schiffbauerdamm on 31 August 1928, the audience was left in no doubt as to the work's multiple authorship. The playbill indicated quite clearly the handful of sources and authors on which this, one of the great conflations of theatrical history, had liberally drawn: '*Die Dreigroschenoper* (The Beggar's Opera). A play with music in one prelude and 8 scenes after the English of John Gay. (Interpolated ballads by François Villon and Rudyard Kipling.) Translation: Elisabeth Hauptmann. Adaptation: Brecht. Music: Kurt Weill.' (See plate 1.)

A similar description was used in the 1929 edition of *Reclams Opernführer* (ed. G. R. Kruse), except that Weill was named as the principal author, with Brecht appearing last in the credits – after Gay, Villon and Kipling – as author rather than adaptor. Short biographical notes on all four men were also provided. For the first printed libretto, described below, the interpolated ballads and their creators were omitted; Weill was responsible for the music, Brecht for the 'German adaptation', and Elisabeth Hauptmann for the translation. All subsequent editions of the text designate Brecht alone as author, excluding on their title page any reference to the sources (except *GBF*, cited below), and merely allot Hauptmann and Weill fine-print credits as 'collaborators' (*Mitarbeiter*).

It might seem unusually self-effacing of Brecht initially to have cast himself in the role of mere adaptor, and hence inappropriate, even churlish, for anyone to accuse him of an 'offence' he had openly admitted, namely plagiarism. Many hands were at work – that much was clear from the outset. Even so, the list of co-authors did not end with those cited above, which is why the charge of plagiarism was in fact levelled. Brecht had omitted to acknowledge the translator of

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Theater am Schiffbauerdamm

Direktion: Ernst Josef Aufricht

Die Dreigroschenoper

⟨The Beggars Opera⟩

Ein Stück mit Musik in einem Vorspiel und 8 Bildern nach dem Englischen des John Gay.
⟨Eingelegte Balladen von François Villon und Rudyard Kipling⟩

Übersetzung: Elisabeth Hauptmann
Bearbeitung: Brecht
Musik: Kurt Weill
Regie: Erich Engel
Bühnenbild: Caspar Neher
Musikalische Leitung: Theo Makeben
Kapelle: Lewis Ruth Band.

Personen:

Jonathan Peachum, Chef einer Bettlerplatte	Erich Ponto
Frau Peachum	Rosa Valetti
Polly, ihre Tochter	Roma Bahn
Macheath, Chef einer Platte von Straßenbanditen	Harald Paulsen
Brown, Polizeichef von London	Kurt Gerron
Lucy, seine Tochter	Kate Kühl
Trauerweidenwalter	Ernst Rotmund
Münzmatthias	Karl Hannemann
Hakenfingerjakob	Manfred Fürst
Sägerobert	Josef Bunzel
Jimmie	Werner Maschmeyer
Ede	Albert Venohr
Filch, einer von Peachums Bettlern	Naphtali Lehrmann
Smith, Konstabler	Ernst Busch
Huren	Kuffner, Jeckels, Helmke, Kliesch u. a.
Bettler	Schiskaja, Ritter, Heimsoth u. a.

Banditen, Huren, Bettler, Konstabler, Volk.
⟨Ort der Handlung: London.⟩
Eine kleine Pause nach dem 3. Bild.
Große Pause nach dem 6. Bild.
Die Walzen des Leierkastens wurden hergestellt in der Fabrik Bacigalupo.

1 Playbill of the Berlin première, Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, 31 August 1928

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the interpolated Villon ballads, K. L. Ammer (pseudonym for Klaus Klammer), provoking as a result the intervention of one of the Weimar Republic's chief theatre critics, Alfred Kerr. Kerr's chiding article, entitled 'Brecht's Copyright' and published in the *Berliner Tageblatt* on 3 May 1929, elicited from Brecht the notorious reply in which, having conceded that he 'unfortunately forgot to mention Ammer's name', he excused the oversight with reference to his 'fundamental laxity in matters of intellectual property'.[1] The exchange enjoyed the status of a minor public scandal, becoming the first of the many *causes célèbres The Threepenny Opera* has produced. The Viennese moralizer and aphorist Karl Kraus, for example, a sworn enemy of Kerr's, jumped to Brecht's defence, pronouncing that he had 'more originality in the little finger of the hand with which he took the twenty-five verses of Ammer's Villon translation than that Kerr who has found him out'.[2] Money – a likely reason for the oversight in the first place – was at stake. Initially ignorant of the illicit use of his intellectual property, Klammer managed in the end to secure an arrangement whereby he received 2½ per cent of all royalties from performances of *Die Dreigroschenoper* in the original German. Thanks to the work's phenomenal success, he eventually earned enough to purchase a small vineyard in the Viennese suburb of Grinzing, Austria's best-known wine-growing district, where he produced a wine which he christened 'Threepenny Tipple' (*Dreigroschentropfen*).[3]

That was not the only windfall Klammer enjoyed from the plagiarism scandal. Such was the demand for his volume of Villon translations that a reprint edition appeared in 1930. Brecht was invited to supply the foreword, which he did in the form of a sonnet, closing with a characteristically forthright tercet:

> Wo habt ihr Saures für drei Mark bekommen?
> Nehm jeder sich heraus, was er grad braucht!
> Ich selber hab mir was herausgenommen …
>
> (It's sour be cheap; you pay three marks for it
> And what a lucky dip the buyer gets!
> In my own case it yielded quite a bit …)[4]

More precisely: Brecht took over wholesale large chunks of Ammer's Villon translations in 'Ruf aus der Gruft' and 'Grabschrift'; more or less freely adapted them in the 'Zuhälterballade', 'Die Ballade vom angenehmen Leben' and the 'Salomon-Song'; and conceivably left traces of Villon's influence in 'Die Moritat von Mackie Messer'.[5]

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