

piece itself, there were certain reasons why it should have been popular in 1728. Highway robbery was a constant occurrence in the neighbourhood of London, and in 1725 the whole town had been convulsed by the exploits of Jack Sheppard, the prison-breaker. Such men, if they bore themselves bravely, became popular heroes, and Sheppard's progress to the scaffold was more like a coronation procession than an execution.

Then again, behind the frivolity of the "Beggar's Opera", there is an element of satire, only too welcome to Londoners under the rule of Sir Robert Walpole. Sir

Robert himself was present at the performance and applauded vigorously whenever any allusion might be supposed to point at himself. But he remembered Gay, and when the latter tried to put upon the stage the sequel to the "Beggars' Opera", "Polly", the Lord Chamberlain refused permission. Gay became a popular martyr, and his patroness, the Duchess of Queensberry, even got herself dismissed from Court for supporting him, but the authorities stood firm. However, the play sold well in book form. Gay died on December 4th, 1732, and was buried in Westminster Abbey.

During the nineteenth century the part of Polly was taken by male impersonators, but it was not until Playfair resolved to produce it at Hammersmith, shortly after the war, that the play came into its own again. The text was revised by Arnold Bennett. Frederic Austin arranged the music, and the decorations were undertaken by the late Claude Lovat Fraser. There was not much money for the production, and Fraser devised an ingenious and most successful "semi-permanent" set, a model of which is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum. He also designed the costumes, purposely making them a little earlier than Gay's own epoch, and introduced a brightness and a gaiety of colour which were at least partly responsible for the play's success.

It was received with immense enthusiasm. Hammersmith — rather a remote suburb — became a place of fashionable rendezvous. The songs were popular all over the country, and touring companies carried the play far and wide. A club was formed, the members of which had to have attended no less than thirty performances. It remains to be seen whether the peculiar flavour of Gay's masterpiece will be appreciated in Germany as it has been in England.



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