

# LONDON'S HISTORY THROUGH LITERATURE

Week 4. Georgian London



‘Through all the Employments of Life  
Each Neighbour abuses his Brother;  
Whore and Rogue they call Husband and Wife:  
All Professions be-rogue one another:  
The Priest calls the Lawyer a Cheat,  
The Lawyer be-knaves the Divine:  
And the Statesman, because he's so great,  
Thinks his Trade as honest as mine.’

- Peachum, in *The Beggar's Opera*



# Georgian London – key dates

- 1685: Coronation of James II (23 April), birth of John Gay (30 June)
- 1688-9: The Glorious Revolution  
(William III invades England, October 1688; James flees to France, December;  
coronation of William and Mary, February 1689; Bill of Rights, December 1689)
- 1694: Foundation of the Bank of England
- 1706-7: Acts of Union of England and Scotland create the UK
- 1714: Death of Queen Anne (1 August), and accession of George I of Hanover
- 1716: *Trivia* published by John Gay
- 1720: The South Sea Company Bubble and subsequent economic crash
- 1722: Robert Walpole becomes first de facto British Prime Minister
- 1724: execution of Jack Sheppard, and Jonathan Wild the following year
- 1728: *The Beggar's Opera* first performed (29 January), an immediate success

# Georgian London – key questions

1. How does John Gay portray Georgian London?
2. Who are its heroes, villains and social types?
3. How does Gay's perspective on London reflect its changing political and social profile?

# John Gay (1685-1732)

‘Life is a jest, and all things show it, I  
thought so once, and now I know it’.





# John Gay: bio

- Born in Barnstaple, north Devon, on 30 June 1685, to a socially prominent Dissenting family involved in trade with the West Indies
- Parents died before he was 10; raised by his uncle's family, and attends local grammar school
- Lacking money to go to university, he is apprenticed to a London silk draper in 1702, but breaks off in 1706 and returns home, of 'either the restraint or the servility of his occupation'
- After his uncle's death in 1707, and he returns to London as the amanuensis of author and literary entrepreneur Aaron Hill
- Member of the Martinus Scriblerus club, and leading figure in the London literary scenes, befriending Pope and Swift
- Spent much of his life around court, securing patronage
- Died in December 1732, buried in Westminster Abbey



# John Gay: key works

- *Wine, a Poem* (1708)
- *The Present State of Wit* (1711)
- *The Mohocks: A Tragi-Comical Farce* (1712)
- *Rural Sports: a Poem, inscribed to Mr. Pope* (1713)
- *The Wife of Bath: A Comedy* (1713)
- ***Trivia: or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*** (1716)
- *Three Hours After Marriage* (1717)
- *The Captives, and 'Newgate Garland'* (1724)
- *Fables* (1727)
- ***The Beggar's Opera*** (1728)
- *Polly: An Opera, being the second part of The Beggar's Opera* (1729)



# TRIVIA:

OR, THE

*ART of WALKING*

THE

STREETS of LONDON.

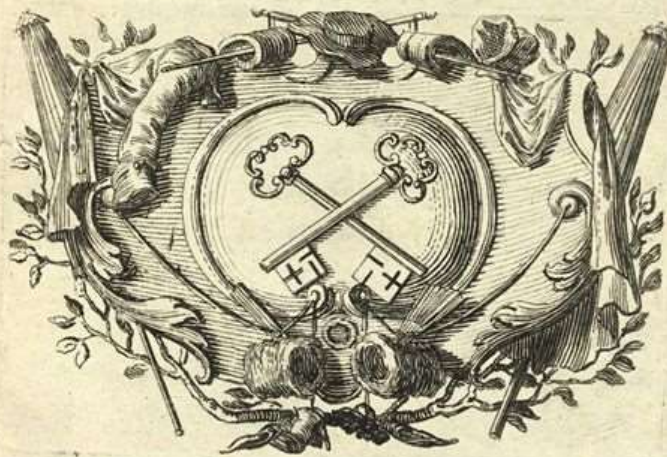
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By Mr. GAR.

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*Quo te Mæri pedes? An, quo via ducit, in Urbem?*  
Virg.

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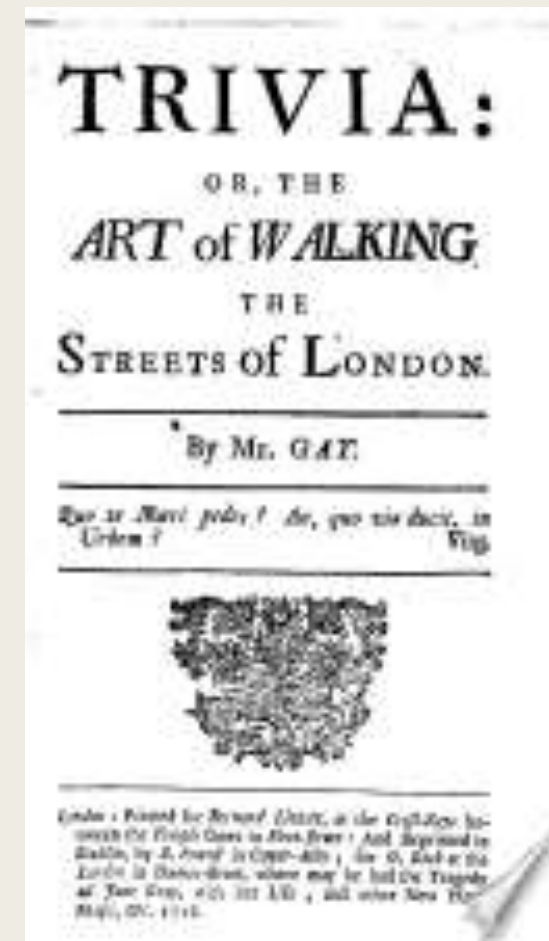
LONDON:

Printed for Bernard Lintott, at the Cross-Keys  
between the Temple Gates in Fleetstreet.



# Trivia

- *Trivia: or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*, started in 1714, completed in 1716
- ‘one of the most lively, funny, and thought-provoking statements about urban life’ (Clare Brant, *Walking the Streets*)
- ‘The sense in which the London streets of Trivia are both topographically real, and literary metaphors, give the poem an animation and vitality of reference which defiantly resists any simple reading’ (David Noakes, 1995)





LONDON,  
WESTMINSTER,  
and SOUTHWARK.

Part of Hyfington.

J. Stow.

To the Right Honourable  
 Sir **GEORGE THOROLD**  
 Knight & Baronet, Lord Mayor  
 of the City of LONDON.  
 This Plan is most  
 Humbly Dedicated.

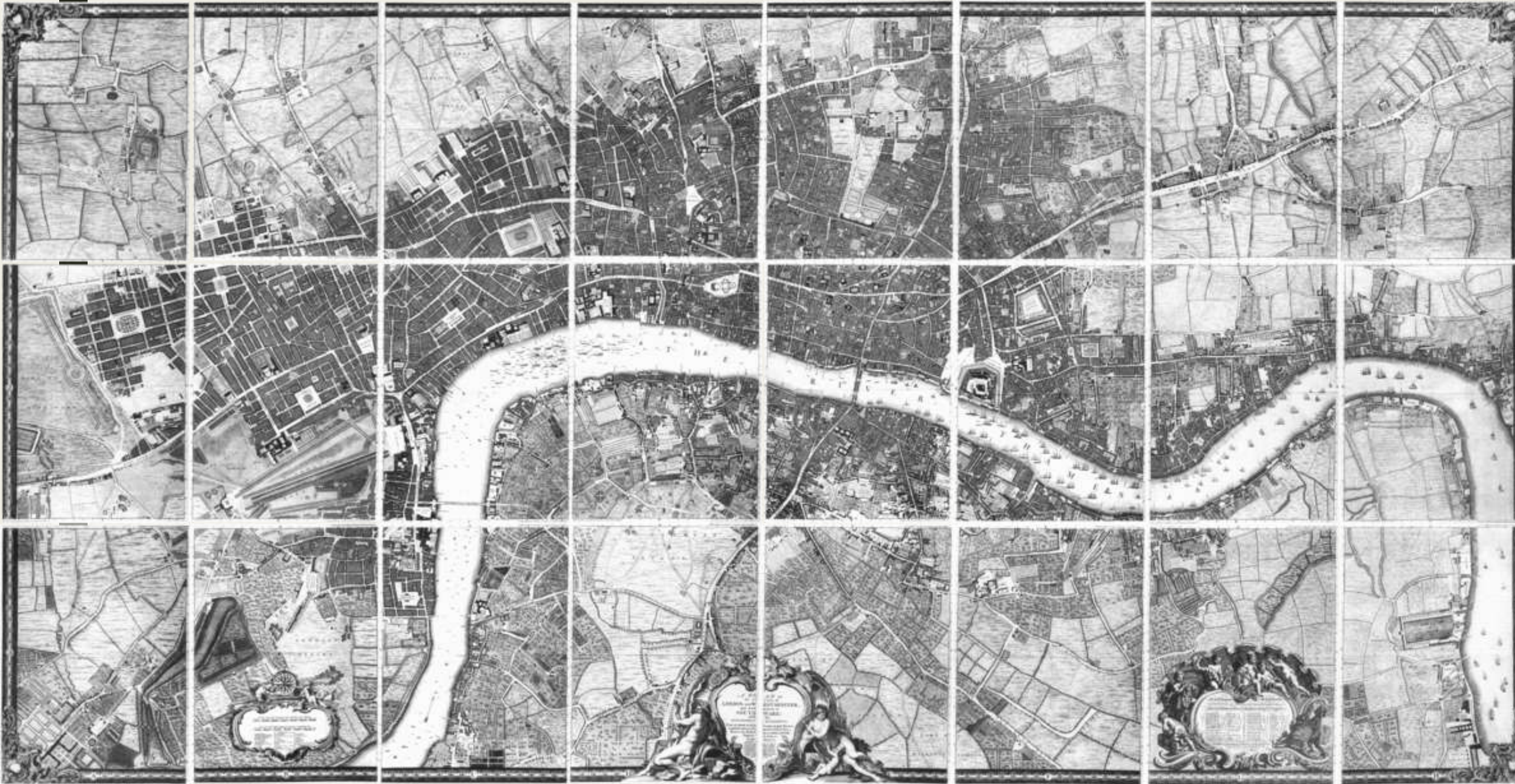
Cambridge











John Rocque, Map of London (1746, 24 sheets)

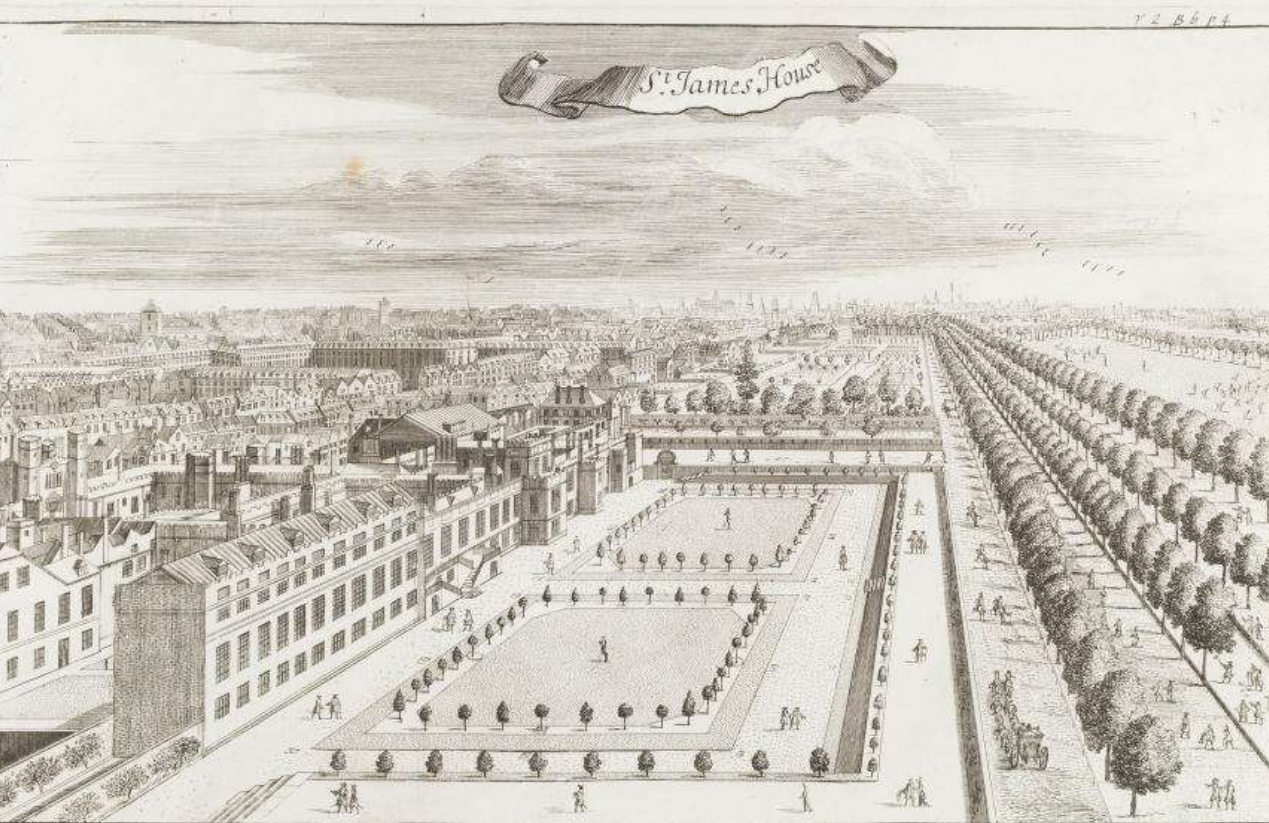


# Into Georgian London

- By the late 17<sup>th</sup> century London is Britain's biggest port, handling 69% total exports and 80% of imports
- London becomes the birthplace of modern banking, focused in the City, one now focused not on gold, but credit
- Bank of England founded in (1694), financed from a state lottery and public subscription scheme...
- Mirrored by the downfall of James II and Glorious Revolution (1689)
- The development of Restoration London and the West End reflected a new kind of political settlement: a biddable king financed by the City of London and its growing capitalist class, protected by a stable parliamentary system
- Anne I unites the kingdoms (1707), succeeded by George I (1714-27)...















Ricci, View of St James Park from the Mall, 1709-10

Population of Early Modern European cities (in thousands)

	1500	1550	1600	1650	1700	1750
London	50	120	200	375	490	675
Constantinople					700	
Paris		250	250	450	530	570
Naples		80	289	265	232	315
Marseilles		30	45	65	75	88
Lisbon		100			188	
Amsterdam					172	
Rome			102	121	142	158
Rouen	40	75	60	82	64	67
Seville			150			
Venice		158	139	120	138	149
Moscow					130	
Bordeaux	20	33	35	40	45	60
Milan			130	109	120	124
Palermo		80	105	100	100	107
Antwerp					66	43

Sources: T. Chandler and G. Fox, *3000 Years of Urban Growth* (New York, 1974), pp. 11-20; P. Benedict, 'French cities from the sixteenth century to the Revolution: An overview', in P. Benedict, ed., *Cities and Social Change in Early Modern France* (London, 1989), p. 24; R. Finlay and B. Shearer, 'Population growth and suburban expansion', in A. Beier and R. Finlay, eds, *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (London, 1986), p. 39; G. Felloni, 'Italy', in C. Wilson and G. Parker, eds, *An Introduction to the Sources of European Economic History* (London, 1977), pp. 5-6.

Number of cities with at least 10,000 inhabitants, by territory

	1500	1550	1600	1650	1700	1750
Scandinavia	1	1	2	2	2	3
England and Wales	5	4	6	8	11	21
Scotland	1	1	1	1	2	5
Ireland	0	0	0	1	3	9
Netherlands	11	12	19	19	20	18
Belgium	12	12	12	14	15	15
Germany	23	27	30	23	30	35
France	32	34	43	44	55	55
Switzerland	1	1	2	2	3	4
Italy	44	46	59	50	51	65
Spain	20	27	37	24	22	24
Portugal	1	4	5	5	5	5
Austria/Bohemia/Moravia	3	3	3	3	4	6
Poland	0	1	1	1	1	2

Source: J. de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500-1800* (London, 1984), p. 29.

Total population of all cities with at least 10,000 inhabitants (in thousands)

	1500	1550	1600	1650	1700	1750
Scandinavia	13	13	26	63	115	167
England and Wales	80	112	255	495	718	1,021
Scotland	13	13	30	35	53	119
Ireland	0	0	0	17	96	161
Netherlands	150	191	364	603	639	580
Belgium	295	375	301	415	486	432
Germany	385	534	662	528	714	956
France	688	814	1,114	1,438	1,747	1,970
Switzerland	10	12	25	22	39	60
Italy	1,302	1,498	1,973	1,577	1,761	2,159
Spain	414	639	923	672	673	767
Portugal	30	138	155	199	230	209
Austria/Bohemia/Moravia	60	67	90	100	180	294
Poland	0	10	15	20	15	36

Source: J. de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500-1800* (London, 1984), p. 30.

Urban population as a percentage of total population

	1500	1550	1600	1650	1700	1750
Scandinavia	0.9	0.8	1.4	2.4	4.0	4.6
England and Wales	3.1	3.5	5.8	8.8	13.3	16.7
Scotland	1.6	1.4	3.0	3.5	5.3	9.2
Ireland	0	0	0	0.9	3.4	5.0
Netherlands	15.8	15.3	24.3	31.7	33.6	30.5
Belgium	21.1	22.7	18.8	20.8	23.9	19.6
Germany	3.2	3.8	4.1	4.4	4.8	5.6
France	4.2	4.3	5.9	7.2	9.2	9.1
Switzerland	1.5	1.5	2.5	2.2	3.3	4.6
Italy	12.4	12.8	14.7	14.0	13.4	14.2
Spain	6.1	8.6	11.4	9.5	9.0	8.6
Portugal	3.0	11.5	14.1	16.6	11.5	9.1
Austria/Bohemia/Moravia	1.7	1.9	2.1	2.4	3.9	5.2
Poland	0	0.3	0.4	0.7	0.5	1.0

Source: J. de Vries, *European Urbanization 1500-1800* (London, 1984), p. 32.



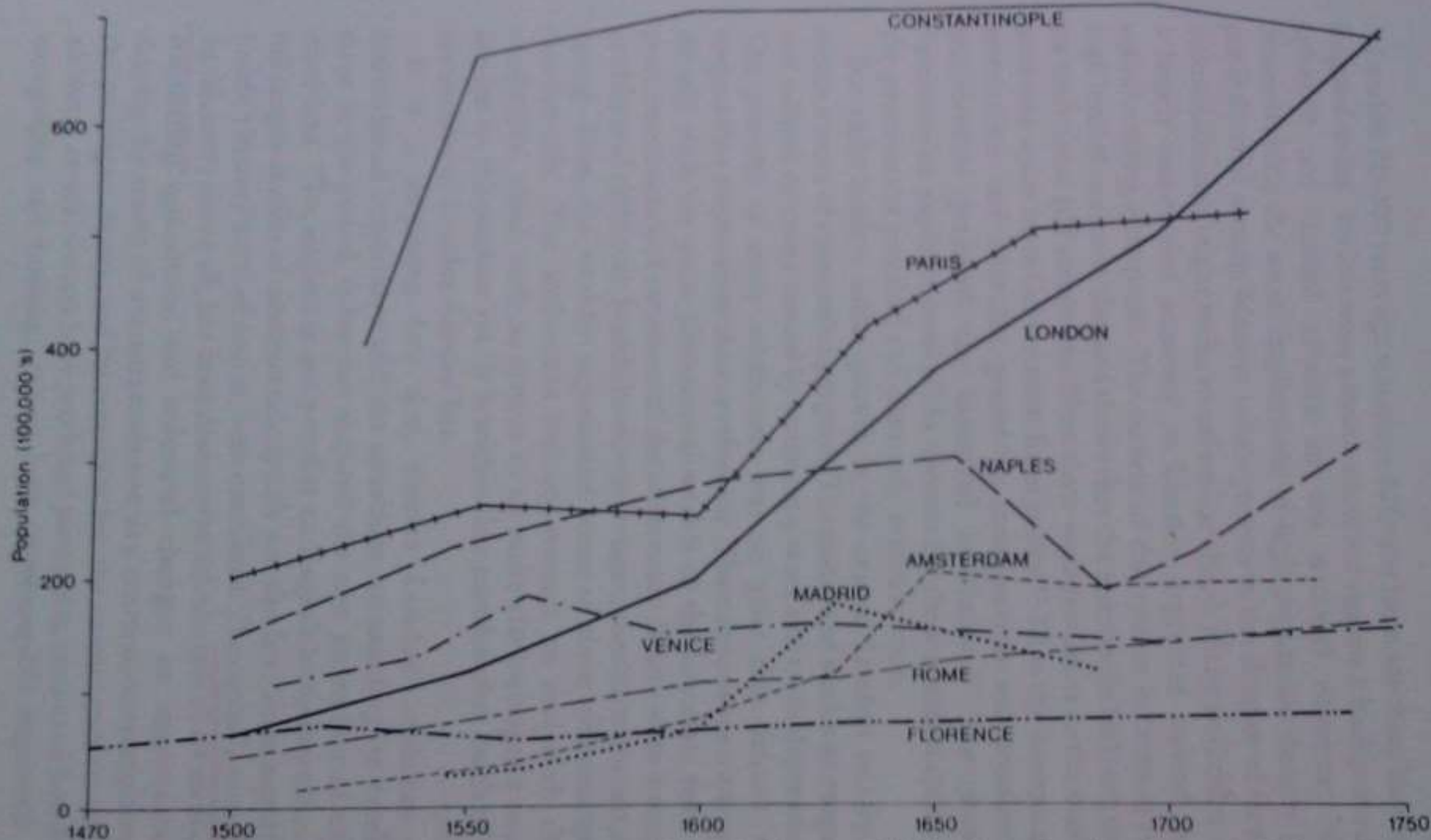


Fig. 1. European metropolitan population movements, 1470-1750. Sources: C. Tilly, Karen Fonde and Ann V. O'Shea, 'Statistics on the urbanization of Europe, 1500-1950' (unpublished typescript, 1972); E. Hélin, *La démographie de Liège aux XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Brussels 1963); T. Chandler and G. Fox, *3000 Years of Urban Growth* (London 1974). We are most grateful to Professor Tilly for permission to cite his unpublished figures. The London totals, 1550-1700, are from Table 5, p. 49, below.

# Georgian London's expansion

‘London as a city only, and as its walls and liberties line it out, might, indeed, be viewed in a small compass, but, when I speak of London, now in the modern acceptation, you expect I shall take in all that vast mass of buildings, reaching from Black-Wall in the east, to Tot-Hill Fields in the west ... to Islington north ... to Cavendish Square, and all the new buildings by, and beyond, Hanover Square, by which the city of London, for so it is still to be called, is extended to Hide Park Corner in the Brentford Road, and almost to Marylebone in the Acton Road, and how much farther it may spread, who knows?’

- Daniel Defoe, *A tour thro' the whole island of Great Britain* (1724)







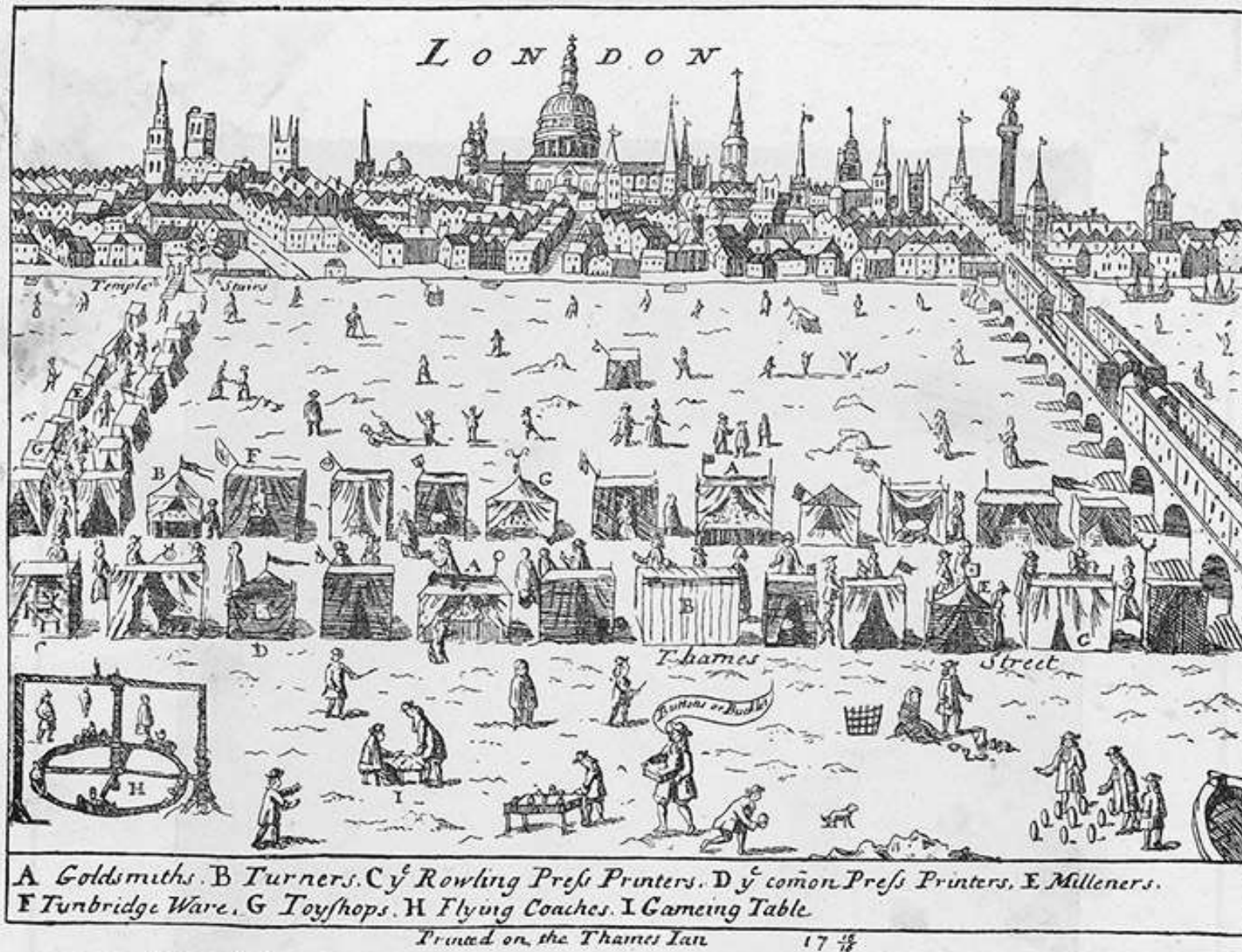
Pieter Angillis, Covent  
Garden (1726)





Hogarth, Four Times of the Day (1736)





View of a Frost Fair on the Thames, 1715

# Gay's London: The *Trivia*

- The birth of the *mob* – London had expanded to 575,000 in 1700, 11% of England's population
- Over 8000 migrating annually each year, mostly youths, recruited in the expanding manufacturing sectors, ports, docks, military, and domestic service
- Growing literacy: nationally it was 45% men, 25% women in 1700, and significantly higher in London
- While the wealthy could enjoy the new theatres, arcades, bookshops and operas...
- Workers lodged in densely packed suburbs, marked by open sewers, rubbish, disease and overcrowding, like those at St Giles, Seven Dials, and the area around Drury Lane
- Riot Act passed in 1715, after disorders broke out in 1710 and 1713 related to the Hanoverian succession





# Gay's London: The *Trivia*

- The poem gives a guide to walking the streets of this new London, a *tri-via* (three roads)
- Its tone is ironic and satirical, discussing how to walk safely and without getting dirty, with ironic recommendations of shoes, coats and canes
- The work is ostensibly anonymous, with a distant narrator
- People are generalised into social types, usually of occupation
- London is a place of flows, commodities and fashions
- A pell-mell of smells, alleys, by-ways, street scenes, dirt, aristocrats and night-walkers, a city of social contrasts



For ease and for dispatch, the morning's best;  
No tides of passengers the street molest.  
You'll see a draggled damsel, here and there,  
From Billingsgate her fishy traffic bear;  
On doors the sallow milk-maid chinks her gains;  
Ah! how unlike the milk-maid of the plains!  
Before proud gates attending asses bray,  
Or arrogate with solemn pace the way;  
These grave physicians with their milky cheer,  
The love-sick maid and dwindling beau repair;  
Here rows of drummers stand in martial file,  
And with their vellum thunder shake the pile,  
To greet the new-made bride. Are sounds like these  
The proper prelude to a state of peace?  
Now industry awakes her busy sons,  
Full charg'd with news the breathless hawker runs:  
Shops open, coaches roll, carts shake the ground,  
And all the streets with passing cries resound.  
If cloth'd in black, you tread the busy town

# Gay's London: The *Trivia*

- While not topographically correct, the three books of the *Trivia* give a view of Georgian London as a place of crowds and contrasts
- The first book highlights the new fashions and reflects on social status, as well as ironic reflections on the weather
- Book Two gives more advice on what (and who) to avoid while walking London during the day
- 'Asserting the wall' was to walk on the inside of the street, considered safest...
- Other risks are butchers, mud, frost, football, coaches, and at night, pickpockets, ballad-singers, coachmen, prostitutes and rakes...
- And getting lost, amid 'the narrow Alley's doubtful Maze, / Trys ev'ry winding Court and Street in vain'





‘Where *Covent-garden*’s famous Temple stands,  
That boasts the Work of *Jones*’ immortal Hands;  
Columns, with plain Magnificence, appear,  
And graceful Porches lead along the Square:  
Here oft’ my Course I bend, when lo! from far,  
I spy the Furies of the Foot-ball War’

‘Consider, Reader, what Fatigues I’ve known,  
The Toils, the Perils of the wintry Town;  
What Riots seen, what bustling Crouds I bor’d,  
How oft’ I cross’d where Carts and Coaches roar’d;  
Yet shall I bless my Labours, if Mankind  
Their future Safety from my Dangers find.’



A Brals Pott or an Iron Pott to mend  
*Rabiller les Poelles les Marmites & les Chaudrons*  
*Concia caldare candellieri e Padelle*

Mauron delin.

L'Empereur & Co. par privilège. Mauron delin.



Four for Six pence Mackrell  
*Maqueroux quatre pour Six Sols*  
*Quattro Sgombri p. sei Soldi*

L'Empereur & Co. par privilège.



Knives Combs or Inkhornes,  
*Couteaux Peignes Ecrivoires*  
*Calamari Pettenci e Cilielli.*

Mauron delin.

L'Empereur & Co. par privilège.

'A Brass Pot ... to mend', 'Four for six pence mackerell', and 'Knives combs or inkhorns', from Marcellus Laroon's series *The Cryes of London*, 1688





THE SQUIRE OF ALSATIA.

*As he appears in 1688 in London, from the*



*London Courtezan  
La Putain de Londres  
Corregiana di Londra*

*M. Lauren delin.*

*P. Tempert excud.  
Cum Privilegio*



Remember the Poor Prisoners  
*Ayez Souvenance des Pauvres Prisonniers  
Ricordatevi di far carita a Poveri Carcerati*

*M. Lauren delin.*

*P. Tempert excud.*

'The Squire of Alsatia'; 'London Courtezan'; and 'Remember the Poor Prisoners', from Marcellus Laroon's series *The Cryes of London*, 1688





Curds and whey seller, Cheapside, 1730



# Representing the poor

- Gay's *Trivia* fits within a cultural tradition of rogue literature
- Stereotypes of urban rogues, like those in Ned Ward, Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, or Defoe, tended to focus on older men
- 'This society of old bearded hypocrites, wooden legg'd implorers of charity, strolling clapperdungeons, limping dissemblers, sham-disabled seamen [etc.] hold their weekly meeting at a famous boozing ken in the midst of an old street' – Ned Ward
- Gay's 'Beggar' himself lives in the crowded back alleys of St Giles, and makes money by writing ballads
- There is no doubt that these stereotypes were – and would be – popular, but were they always reflective of reality?



# Representing the poor

- Tim Hitchcock and others criticises this stereotype of the deceptive, disabled beggar as an older urban male as not reflected in actual records of begging
- ... e.g. workhouse admissions or criminal punishment for begging, which tend to be mostly young adult women
- Poor relief in the 18<sup>th</sup> century developed along moral, stereotypical notions – the Corporation of the Poor re-established in 1698, the Westminster Hospital in 1716, and the foundling hospital in 1741
- By 1776 there were 86 workhouses within London, Westminster and Middlesex, housing 15,180 or about 2% of the population
- Records suggest that up to 2/3 were women...
- Margaret R. Hunt has criticised Gay's *Trivia* for its inherent revulsion of women, from the fashionably dressed 'neither by reason nor instinct', or the working women

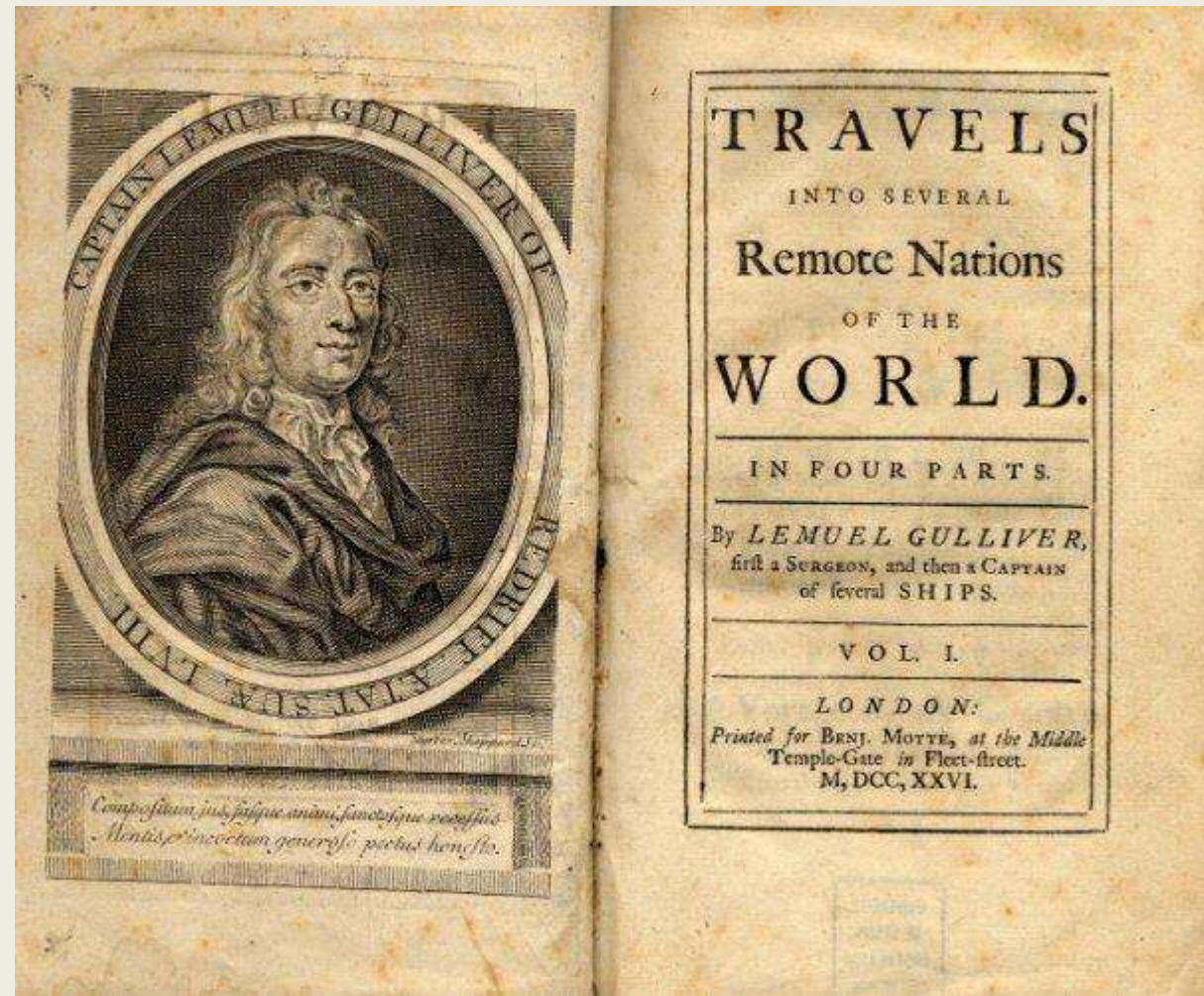




# Satire, in context

‘Sweepings from butchers’ stalls, dung, guts  
and blood,  
Drowned puppies, stinking sprats, all  
drenched in mud,  
Dead cats and turnip-tops come tumbling  
down the flood.’

- Jonathan Swift, *A Description of a City  
Shower* (1710)



# Satire, in context

- Gay's mocking of social types in both works reflects a running thread of satire, both in content and form
- Early works like *The Mohocks* or *The Present State of Wit* take aim at the pretensions of different social classes and types
- Mixing high and low culture, *Trivia*, *The Shepherd's Week* and *What d'ye call it* all use a recognisable classic form and subvert it through irony, particularly the vogue for Homer (Pope) and Virgil (Dryden)
- Jonathan Swift did this in *A Description of a City Shower*, which combines a mockery of a rainstorm and implications of the Flood with a storm in London







Anonymous, Interior of a London Coffee-house, 1668





Hogarth, 'A Midnight Modern Conversation' (1733)



# Penny Universities

- London scene: Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Arbuthnot and others
- New culture of the coffee shops: intellectual conversation and news
- A Jewish businessman named Jacob establishes the first coffee-house in 1650 called the Angel in Oxford; London's first is in 1652
- The new coffee shops charged a penny for admission and a cup of coffee
- Periodicals develop through the shops, like *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, as well as financial institutions like the London Stock Exchange at Jonathan's, or insurance at Lloyds
- 'All Englishmen are great news-mongers ... workmen habitually begin the day by going to coffee-rooms in order to read the latest news' – Cesar de Saussure, 1730s
- By 1714 there were 500 coffee shops in London
- And 207 inns, 447 taverns, 5875 beer houses and 8659 brandy shops...

# The SPECTATOR.

*Interdum speciosa locis, morataque recte  
Fabula nullius Veneris, sine pondere & Artes,  
Valdèis oblectat populum, meliusque miratur,  
Quàm versus impes rerum, nugæq; canicæ.* Hor.

Thursd., Jan. 7. 1711.

**I**T is the Custom of the Affectionate, if they see any general or written Paper upon the Street, to take it up and lay it aside carefully, as not knowing but it may contain some Piece of their Abuse. I sometimes have a touch of the Malice in me, that I cannot forbear looking into every Printed Paper, which enters in my way, under whatsoever deplorable Circumstances it may appear; for as no Moral Lesson, in the ordinary Fate and Vicissitude of Things, happens without its Works may, those are or others, be applied, as Men may otherwise meet with very uncommon Names in a Paper of Commerce. I have often my Paper more than once seen with the Writings of a Friend, and know a Friend of mine who, for these several Years, has converted the Elbow of a Man of Quality into a kind of Forge for his Clasp-knives. I remember, in particular, after having read over a Piece of an Excellent Author on a Victory, I met with several Instances of it upon the very Report of the day, which had been exposed in London and Chancery, and by the mean occasion included in a single Copy. I once met with a Page of Mr. Baxter's under a Christian's Eye. Whether or no the Public-Cash had made use of it through Carelessness, or Waggery, for the defence of that Superstitious Place, I know not; but, upon the Perusal of it, I considered it as good as lost to the Author's Use, that I thought the whole Book. I have often very much profited by these accidental Readings, and have sometimes found very curious Pieces that are taken out of Print, or lost to letters with in the Shops of our London Book-sellers. For this Reason, when my Friends send me a Paper of any Liberty, they are very much surprised to see, upon the View of Folio's, two long Black-bones standing up-

they are both of them filled with dense Condition and infinite Libraries. I might likewise mention a Paper like, from which I have received great Improvement; and a Fine Copy, which I would not exchange for all the Books in London. I see my Acquaintance, Temper, or rather impatient Attention of getting him at Lists of Writers, with my usual Ardour in Liberty; give me a good deal of Employment when I enter my House in the Evening; for I can't, for my Health, have a Room below I have discovered half of the Walls of it, and examined the several printed Papers which are usually past upon them. The last Piece that I met with upon this Country, gave me a most excellent Pleasure. My Reader will think I am not fitting, when I suppose that the Piece I am going to speak of was the old Ballad of the *Two Children in the Wood*, which is one of the Darling Songs of the Country People, and has been the Subject of much Drollery in these Parts of these days.

This Song is a plain simple Copy of Nature, the State of all the Images and Circumstances. The Tale of it is a very Trivial Story, and therefore gives the serious Reader, who would it is a Copy of Nature. There is that wonderful Simplicity in the Verse, and yet because the Sentiments are so great and universal, they are able to move the Heart of the most polite Reader with warm Meetings of Humanity and Compassion. The first part of the Song is of the nature of a *Prologue*, and the first of the Song would have reached upon, and the first of the Song told by the Divine Poet, for which Reason the whole Description has something in it very moving, and illustrating the Nature of it. I believe he was, he depicted it in such an elegant and noble, and po-



## THE TATLER.

VOLUME the SECOND.



L O N D O N.

Printed for Messrs. Longman, Doddsley, Law, Johnson, Nichols, Dilly, Robinson, Sewell, Richardson, Baldwin, Foulger, Rivington, Otridge & Son, B.S. J. White, Hookham & Carpenter, Wilkie, Scatcherd, Ogilvie & Son, Newbery, Edwards, Verner & Wood, Nunn, Pyle, Miller, Gidell & Davies, & L. L. L.





See here y<sup>e</sup> Causes why in London, ~ Trapping their Souls with Lotteries, Quackes ~ Leaving their strife Religious bustle, ~ Honour & Honesty are Crimes ~  
 So many Men are made undone ~ Tharcing from Blue Gardens down ~ Kneel down to play pitch & Raffle ~ That publicly are punished by ~  
 That Arts & honest Trading drop ~ To all Blue Aprons in the Town ~ Thus when the Shepherds are at play, ~ Self Interest and Wilany ~  
 To Swarm about y<sup>e</sup> Devils Shop ~ Here all Religions flock together ~ Their flocks must surely go astray ~ So much for Monys magick power ~  
 Who puts out B<sup>e</sup> Fortunes golden Haulcher ~ Like Tamers Wild Fowl of a Feather ~ The woeful cause y<sup>e</sup> in those Times ~ Guess at the Rest you find out more ~  
 price 1 Shilling

Hogarth, Emblematical Print on the South Sea Scheme, 1721

# The South Sea Company

- British joint stock company founded in 1711 as a Tory competitor to the Bank of England
- Company was promised a monopoly on all trade with the Spanish colonies of South America in exchange for taking on the national debt raised by the Spanish War of Succession (1701-14)
- Activities were heavily restricted by the Treaty of Utrecht (1713) and further conflict, and the Company instead began persuading the government, and later investors, to buy shares in the South Sea Company, which were conversions from National Debt
- In 1720, advertisements of lucrative South Sea Riches caused a huge bubble, with share prices rising from £128 (Jan) to £1050 (June)
- John Gay, like many others, invested all his savings into the Bubble and like many, was nearly bankrupt
- Subsequent investigations revealed bribery, corruption and deceit





# Robert Walpole

- Many lost life savings, from clergy and gentry to working Londoners
- Suicides were common, and public anger became directed against George I and his two mistresses, who were heavily involved in the South Sea Company
- 462 MPs and 112 peers were involved in the Company
- Faced with economic and political collapse, Robert Walpole emerges as a decisive figure, becoming Chancellor of the Exchequer, and rescuing leading members of the government from impeachment
- The estates of the directors were stripped as compensation
- MP of Castle Rising, Walpole's career over 1721-42 is considered to be longest prime minister in role
- A middle-way between Whigs and Tories, Walpole lowered taxes, increased exports, and gently increased the powers of parliament
- John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* is replete with Walpole-like figures...



# Punishment and property (Old Bailey Sessions, January 1715)

Whipped (7 offences)	Burnt in hand (13 offences)	Hanged (5 offences)
15 yds linsey-woolsey	25 yds drugget	silver tankard and silver spoon
100 lbs hemp	15 lbs whalebone	
1 silk handkerchief	3 holland smocks	'a large quantity of Cambricks'
groceries (1 quartern loaf, 2 lbs cheese, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb bacon, $\frac{1}{2}$ lb sugar)	2 cloth coats	600 lbs sugar
2 holland shirts	4 gold rings	4 pewter spoons and a copper furnace
1 huckaback tablecloth	1 gold ring	1 bed, 2 blankets and a rug
4 canes	3 diaper tablecloths	
	1 pair of shag breeches	
	1 feather bed and flaxen sheets	
	3 silver spoons and 1 silver mug	
	1 cloth coat	
	1 russet waistcoat	
	2 coach seats	

## Occupations of the English born outside London and hanged at Tyburn, 1703-1773

Occupation	Number	Percentage
Apprentices	153	26.4
Qualified artisans	188	32.4
Sailors	37	6.4
Soldiers	33	5.7
Country labourers	77	13.3
Servants	51	8.8
Unknown	41	7.0

From Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*



The IDLE PRENTICE Executed at Tyburn.



Proverbs Chap. I. Ver. 27, 28.

*If thou rejectest instruction, and despisest his counsel, when he speaketh, thou shalt say, I will not hear: when he saith, I will not obey: for I have despised his counsel, and will not obey his voice.*

# Crimes of property

- 'I am perfectly ignorant of the state of the war abroad ... but I know that we are in a state of war at home that is shocking. I mean, from the enormous profusion of housebreakers, highwaymen, and footpads; and, what is worse, from the savage barbarities of the two latter, who commit the most wanton cruelties ... one dare not stir out after dinner but well-armed' – Horace Walpole, 1782.
- By the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, overcrowding, poverty and social unrest was reflected in a high crime rate and growing anxieties about urban disorder, and the number of offences for which one could be hanged rose from 80 to 350
- But of the 1200 Londoners hanged in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, most were servants, seamstresses or the labouring poor
- Much crime involved mishandling of property, e.g. making off with leftovers of cloth, nails, planks, tea or sugar, or smuggling and piracy – see Peter Linebaugh
- What once topped up wages was, after the Bugging Act of 1749, criminalised, with many executions for theft, and more whipping or transportation





William Hogarth, The Bench (1758)





Above: James Thornhill, drawing of JS, 1723  
 Right: Poster bill for *Little Jack Sheppard*, 1855





# Jack Sheppard (1702-1724)

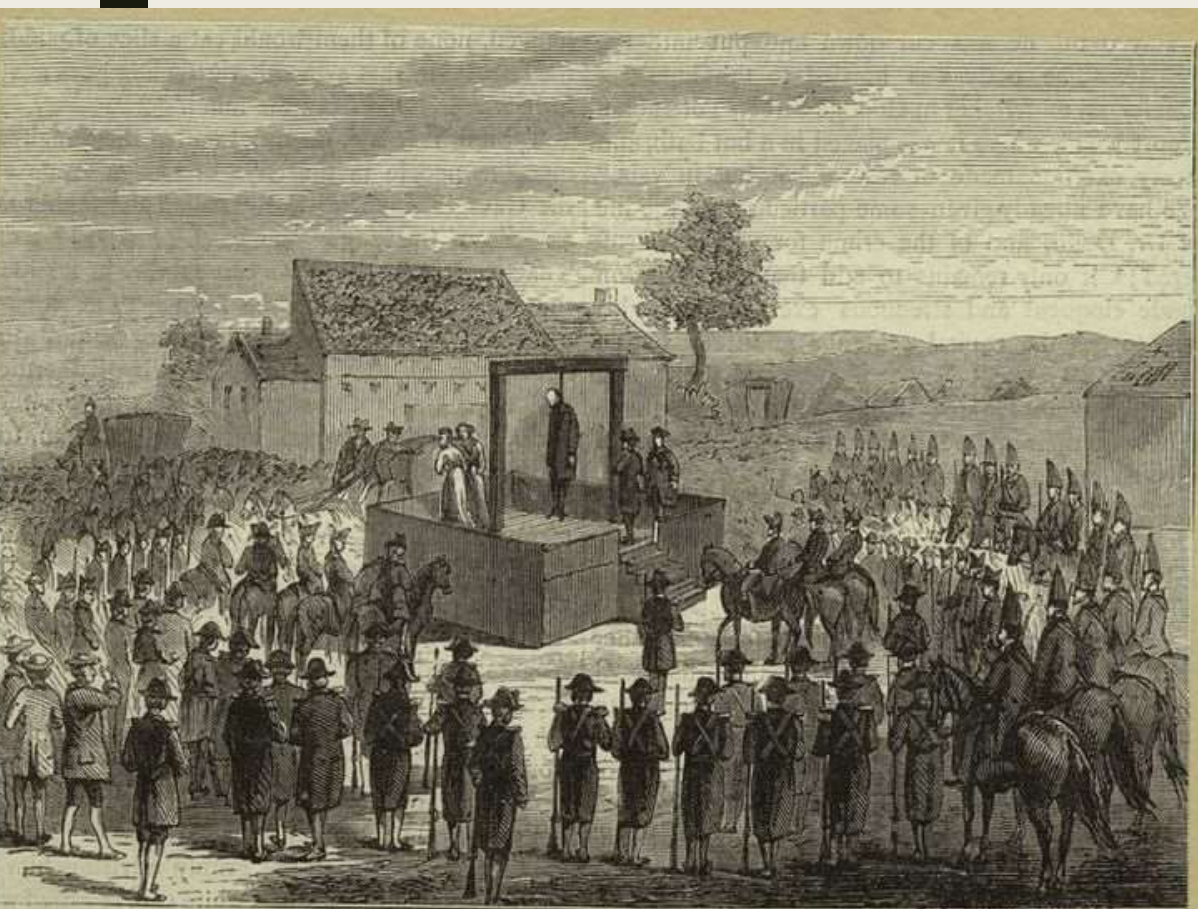
- While Newgate had a reputation for being unbreakable, in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Jack Sheppard became a well-loved celebrity for escaping it
- Born in 1702 and placed in the Bishopsgate Workhouse, after serving most of a carpenter's apprenticeship, he became a (not very effective) thief and was caught
- He first escaped St Giles' Roundhouse in 1724 after cutting open the roof, and after being caught three months later after pickpocketing in Leicester Fields, he was taken to the New Prison at Clerkenwell, and broke his fetters and escapes with 'Edgeworth Bess'
- Jonathan Wild captured him and he is placed in Newgate and sentenced to death, but manages to escape... twice, the latter time from the impenetrable 'Stone Castle' on the fifth floor, using a nail and blankets
- 'Jack the Lad' captures the London imagination – many sightings, and he continues to rob, and hires a coach to visit Newgate with prostitutes and drink in the taverns
- At his final execution, a third of Londoners turn out



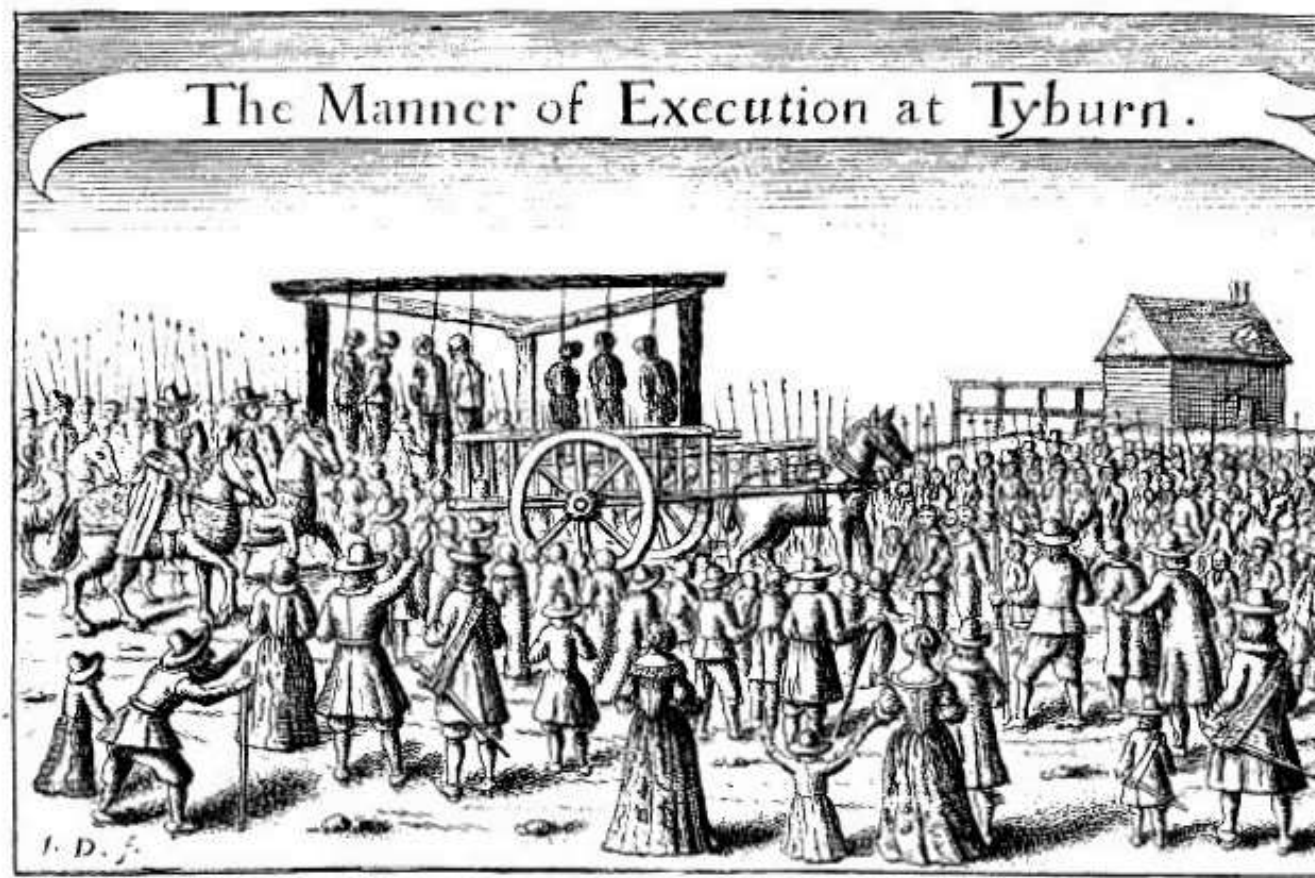


# Jonathan Wild (1682/3-1725)

- Professional 'thief-taker general', and centre of a large network of organised crime
- As Georgian London's population and economic power boomed, so did unemployment, military demobilisation and theft, and London lacked a centralised police
- Wild thrived through aiding both sides, fencing stolen goods, or gaining rewards for their 'recovery' while feeding wanted thieves to authorities who were either rivals or had out-served their use
- 'Double cross' – at least 60 thieves executed
- At first popular with public and press, Wild is undone after pursuing Jack Sheppard, and being injured by his accomplice, Blueskin Blake
- He is later on trial for fencing and aiding a jailbreak at the same time as the Lord Chancellor Thomas Parker, Earl of Macclesfield, for taking £100k bribes
- The public imagination came to despise these corrupt authority figures – a resentment Gay utilises in *The Beggar's Opera* in relation to Walpole



EXECUTION OF LORD FERRERS AT TYBURN. (From an Old Print of the Period.)



The Manner of Execution at Tyburn.



# THE BEGGARS OPERA



*Brittons attend — view this harmonious Stage  
And listen to those notes which charm the age  
Thus shall your tastes in Sounds & Sense be shown  
And Beggars Opras ever be your own*



# The Beggar's Opera: Themes

- Social satire: a beggar's opera
- Rich and poor intermingling, fluidity of social types
- Fluidity of crime, punishment and justice
- Satire of opera, a culturally elite entertainment, for the criminal underworld
- Innocent country heroine, Polly, a Newgate pastoral
- Links to other works, like George Lillo's *The London Merchant*, and Ned Ward's *The London Spy*, which elevated London street-life and the world of apprentices, prostitutes and criminals to fascination, be it operatic comedy or tragedy





*J. Hayman del.*

*C. Goussier sculp.*

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WRITTEN by Mr. GAR.

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# The Beggar's Opera: Plot

- Polly Peachum has secretly married the charismatic highwayman Macheath
- Her parents, professional thief-takers and stolen good handlers, discover this after she is betrayed to her parents by Filch, their servant. Worried Macheath will turn them over for money, and keen to get a reward, they attempt to have him arrested or 'peached'
- At the end of Act One, Macheath escapes from the house, but he is later betrayed in a tavern by one of his favourite prostitutes, Jenny Diver, and taken to Newgate
- There, Macheath is confronted by Lucy Lockit, the prison-keeper's daughter and father of his child. When Polly enters, Macheath claims she is mad, Peachum takes his daughter away, and Lucy steals her father's keys, with Macheath making a second escape
- In Act Three, Macheath is betrayed again by Diana Trapes and is arrested. Lucy tries to poison Polly. Both plead to their fathers for Macheath's reprieve, but he is convicted on the evidence of his gang-mate, Jemmy Twitcher
- As Macheath awaits execution, four more of his 'wives' turn up with a child
- Macheath claims he is ready to die (!), but the Player interrupts and demands that the play's author, the Beggar, reprieve Macheath and give the audience a happy ending



# The Beggar's Opera: Plot

- Peachum, like Jonathan Wild, is a thief-taker, protecting criminals like Black Moll and Betty Sly, while weighing up Wat Dreary and Slippery Sam, and offering up Tom Gagg, a 'lazy Dog'
- Peachum's initial speech makes the argument of both *The Beggar's Opera* and *Polly*, of emotional relationships turned into commercial transactions, and that everyone in all walks of life acts out of economic self-interest
- While Macheath embodies the heroic gang-leader, he is often found in hiding and usually lies to other characters
- Gay's ambivalence about the Peachums and Lockits is not reflected in the character of Polly, a loyal, naïve and sincere heroine
- 'Nay, my Dear, I have no Reason to doubt you, for I find in the Romance you lent me, none of the great Heroes were ever false in Love'

# Ballad Operas

- Term retrospectively used to describe Gay's innovation: spoken dialogues with newly written songs to familiar tunes, often based on street ballads, folk tunes or current plays
- Over 100 were published or staged in the two decades after *The Beggar's Opera*
- Common themes of comedy , opera, country dance, pirate tale, lowlife settings, romantic triangles
- A sequel, *Polly*, featuring the same characters transported as punishment to the West Indies, continues to explore social types and contrasts amid colonialism
- Rehearsals are banned by Walpole's government in 1729, and while Gay makes a fortune (around £1,200) in selling subscriptions to the printed work, it goes unperformed til 1777



