

THE THREEPENNY OPERA

RESOURCE MATERIALS

By Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill

English translation of the dialogue by Robert David MacDonald

English translation of the lyrics by Jeremy Sams

*Original German text based on Elisabeth Hauptmann's German
Translation of John Gay's THE BEGGAR'S OPERA*

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The Threepenny Opera - Synopsis

Prologue

At a fair in Soho, London, a ballad singer sings about a scandalous criminal called Mac the Knife. After the song has ended a man emerges from a crowd of prostitutes. Low-Dive Jenny, one of the women, identifies him as Mac the Knife.

Act 1

Scene 1

The scene takes place in Peachum's outfitting shop for beggars, which sells begging licenses and begging costumes that aim to provoke sympathy. Peachum sings a 'Morning Hymn' about 'sinful employment' and states that God's judgement should not be taken lightly. A beggar named Filch arrives seeking Peachum's services and pleads that he helps him for free. However Peachum makes him pay for a license, and he continues to show Filch his 'five basic types of misery' showcase – the five models represent different beggars who have been harmed by society.

Mrs Peachum, who has arrived home slightly drunk, argues with Peachum over the whereabouts of their daughter, Polly. Peachum quizzes her on the man who has been visiting their daughter. Mrs Peachum mentions that the gentleman wears white gloves; from this detail Peachum guesses that it is Mac the Knife, and they worry she has been to see him as she isn't in her room. They sing a song, 'No They Can't', about how children don't know what is good for them, fall in love, then get into trouble.

Scene 2

In an empty stable Mac and Polly are to celebrate their wedding - despite Polly's objections to the venue. Mac's gang arrive with

stolen furniture for the occasion. One remarks that an old gentleman got hurt in the process of stealing the furniture, which upsets Polly further. They all sit down for a stolen wedding feast, during which Mac repeatedly comments on his gang's bad manners. Some of them sing a 'Wedding Song for the Less Well-Off', which is pessimistic about marriage. Polly then sings a song called 'Pirate Jenny', about a girl who after being badly mistreated as a glass washer plots extreme revenge on humankind, particularly men. The police arrive but the gang relax after realising that Constable Brown and Mac are old friends from their army days, which they sing a song about. The scene ends with Polly and Mac declaring love for one another.

Scene 3

Back at Peachum's outfitting shop for beggars, Polly returns home and Mr and Mrs Peachum learn of their daughter's marriage. She sings a song to help her parents understand why she did it. Mrs Peachum faints and suggests divorce, but it is no use - Polly declares she is in love. An interruption of five beggars occurs, and Peachum sees to them: one of them complains about the bad quality of his leg stump that Peachum provided. Her parents hatch a plan to get Mac arrested, however Polly tells them that he is very close friends with Constable Brown, and they will not be able to catch him. The three of them sing a song, 'Concerning the Insecurity of the Human Condition', highlighting that many people are poor.

Act 2

Scene 4

Polly tells Mac that he must escape. She worries that he will be arrested as her father has reported him to the police. Mac

doesn't believe that Brown will arrest him, but Polly proves it with the twenty charges Brown presented against him. Peachum has blackmailed Brown, saying if he doesn't arrest Mac then he will humiliate him at the Queen's coronation. Mac leaves a distraught Polly to run his business while he goes away. Polly pleads Mac to be faithful to her while they are apart. The criminal gang are informed Polly is in charge, Matthew, one of the gang members, challenges her authority immediately but she confronts him and the gang is impressed. 'The Ballad of Sexual Obsession' is sung in an interlude about how all human behaviour reverts back to basic animal desires. Meanwhile Mrs Peachum tells Low-Dive Jenny to keep an eye out for Mac the Knife and that if she turns him in she will earn herself ten shillings.

Scene 5

In a brothel in Turnbridge, Crooked Jake, one of Mac's gang, tells the women that Mac won't be turning up as he is on the run. However Mac does appear saying he won't let his issues get in the way of his usual Thursday plans at the brothel. Jenny reads Mac's warrant and goes to report his appearance for her reward. Constable Smith arrives with Mrs Peachum, while Mac sings 'Ballad of Immoral Earnings' inside with Jenny. They reminisce about their criminal and dysfunctional past together. Smith interrupts and attempts to arrest Mac; he jumps out of the window to flee but lands in front of Mrs Peachum and the other constables instead.

Scene 6

Mac is brought into the Old Bailey (prison) in chains. Constable Brown feels guilty and pleads with Mac that he is sorry. Mac ignores Brown's apologies, a trick he apparently learnt from the bible, making him feel even worse. In the cell Mac pays Smith not to have handcuffs put on him. Mac reflects on his situation

with the 'Ballad of Good Living'. His hunger for an exciting, criminal life leads him to the conclusion that 'one must live well to know what living is', and he doesn't regret how he has lived 'well'.

A woman called Lucy arrives, furious at Mac for marrying Polly. Polly arrives and Lucy shouts at them both. The women sing 'The Jealousy Duet' and are hostile towards each other. Lucy announces she is pregnant by Mac and Polly is induced to tears. Mrs Peachum turns up and forces Polly to leave. Left alone, Mac tells Lucy that he loves her not Polly and she helps him escape. Peachum arrives seeking the forty pound reward for Mac's capture. Learning of his escape Peachum threatens to disrupt the Coronation and embarrass Brown. At the end of the scene the 'Second Threepenny Finale' is sung about how humankind is defined by 'bestial acts' rather than morality.

Act 3

Scene 7

Peachum and his beggars prepare to disrupt the Queen's Coronation. Jenny wants her reward for imprisoning Mac, but Mrs Peachum tells her that he escaped and has gone missing. Jenny feels wronged and consequently guilty that she gave him up to them. Yet Jenny thoughtlessly gives an indication of his present whereabouts with another prostitute called Suky Tawdry and Peachum swiftly sends Filch to the police with this information. In light of this, Mrs Peachum sings a verse of the 'Ballad of Sexual Obsession'. The Peachums agree to pay Jenny as a reward after the coronation.

Peachum gives orders to his mass crowd of beggars to march, but is stopped by Brown who comes to arrest them. Peachum confronts Brown about Mac, and blames his escape on their inappropriate friendship. Peachum sings 'The Song of the

Insufficiency of Human Endeavour' about the waste of human energy into the faith of existence, and tells Brown that his plan to arrest beggars is futile because there are thousands of them. Brown agrees to arrest Mac again and hang him by 6am. At the end of the scene Jenny sings the 'Solomon Song' that warns against admirable qualities such as cleverness and bravery, as these only end up turning against their holders, ultimately ending in death.

Scene 8

Polly visits Lucy to apologise for her behaviour when they argued the previous day. They both talk of loving Mac 'too much' and Polly tells her story of how they met only twelve days ago. They admit they don't know where he is, that they've both been stood up him. Lucy also confesses that she isn't actually pregnant. Mrs Peachum enters and tells them that Mac is being hanged and gives Polly a widow's dress to wear.

Scene 9

Many people are gathering to witness Mac's hanging. The constable worries this will attract more attention than the Queen's coronation. The rest of the scene is set in Mac's death cell; throughout the scene Mac keeps telling the time, giving a sense of his impending fate. Mac attempts to bribe Smith with money to let him escape, and Smith agrees on a thousand pounds. He sings a song titled 'Call from the Grave' feverishly but he doesn't give up yet. Matthew and Jake from Mac's gang arrive at the cell, but admit they will not be able to give him the money. Polly visits and though business has thrived while he was away, the money is not readily available and she breaks down. Brown appears and Mac brings up business they have recently done together, trying to raise money from previous transactions. Brown is affronted by this and refuses.

Mac's time is almost up, and people come to visit him including the Peachums, Polly, Lucy, the whores, some of his gang and Brown. He begs for pardon and forgiveness in song. As he is put on the platform for execution it is announced that he has been granted a royal pardon and is made a knight. This happy ending to the opera was predicted by Peachum only moments before. Peachum leads a final song about injustice, in spite of the seemingly joyful ending. Rather unsettlingly, the bells of Westminster ring out once more after the unjust turn of events.

Meet the Characters in *The Threepenny Opera*

Macheath 'Mack the Knife' is the protagonist and antihero of the play. He is a charismatic and often dangerous gangster who steals and murders. Macheath is able to get away with his crimes due to his friendship with Brown, the corrupt chief of police who he met as a soldier in the Indian army. Although Macheath is a hardened criminal, his aspirations lie outside of the criminal world. He is ambitious, selfish and sly and is not afraid to betray others in order to benefit himself. His respect for women is non-existent as he is a womaniser and adulterer. At the end of the play Macheath has not changed his views and shows no remorse for his actions. He is still the same person that he is at the beginning and does not seem to have learned a moral lesson. Despite his unheroic actions, Macheath is handsome, funny, charming and appealing. By combining Macheath's loveable traits with his atrocious actions Brecht is challenging the common perception of what a hero is, and who a hero can be.

Polly Peachum is initially seen as a young naïve girl, a contrast to her selfish and bitter parents. She is initially shocked and upset by Macheath's criminal behaviour, however in her love for him she learns to overcome this. By the end of the play she is a hardened and strong woman, and even takes on the leadership of Macheath's gang whilst he is in hiding.

Mrs Celia Peachum, like her husband Peachum, is entirely self-interested and bitter. She doesn't care about her daughter's happiness as she is entirely absorbed with making money. She is a tough woman and isn't afraid of expressing her views on other people's business, views which are often negative or offensive. She is uncompromising and determined

to get what she wants even if this involves stepping over other people.

Jonathon Jeramiah Peachum is the antagonist of the play and is against Macheath. He is the proprietor of 'The Beggar's Friend' a business in which he 'helps' the beggars to earn extra pickings from which he takes a profit. Peachum is a greedy and selfish business man with his own interests at heart, everything he does is to aid his business and make more money. He hates the fact Macheath has married his daughter Polly as it poses a threat to the business and therefore Peachum himself.

Peachum is cynical and uncompromising throughout the play, although he does admit defeat at the end when the Queen frees Macheath. Interestingly, Peachum displays many of the traditional morals an audience would not expect from a villain such as obeying the law and reading the bible, although the reason for this is only because he believes it will make his business more viable. Again, Brecht is questioning what we expect from a traditional villain, and raising the issue of what makes someone evil.

Other Characters:

- Narrator
- Jackie 'Tiger' Brown (Macheath's friend and corrupt chief of police)
- Kimball (The reverend who marries Polly and Macheath)
- Smith (A constable at the jail)
- Filch (A beggar who Peachum enlists to help him)

Macheath's Gang:

- Matt 'Matt the Mint'
- Jake 'Crook-Fingered Jake'

- Robert 'Chain Saw Bob'
- Walt 'Weeping-Willow Walter'
- Ned
- Jimmy

The Whores:

- Ginny Jenny
- Lucy
- Suky Tawdy
- Nelly
- Dolly
- Vixen



Introduction to Brecht and Epic Theatre

Bertolt Brecht 1898 – 1956

Born in Augsburg 1898, and growing up in a world dominated by War and the growth of fascism, Bertolt Brecht revolutionised theatre with his view that theatre should educate, not just entertain. Heavily influenced by Marxism, Piscator, and unhappy at the state of the world around him Brecht sought to challenge his audiences through Epic, Didactic and Dialectical theatre. *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* was one of many plays written whilst Brecht was in exile in America. As one of the people on Hitler's "hit list" for writing material that did not support the Nazi ethos, he had to flee Europe as the Nazis's power spread. He left Germany in 1933, arrived in America in 1941 and returned to Europe in 1947 after having to appear before the HUAC for his communist associations. In 1949 he founded his famous theatre company, the Berliner Ensemble in the German Democratic Republic, along with his wife Helene Weigel. Brecht died in 1956 having written over fifty plays and screen plays.

"I love him so much I will die of it" Brecht and Margarete Steffin

Margarete (Grete) Steffin is best known as collaborator and mistress of Bertolt Brecht. Margarete grew up in a working class home in Germany but was noted in school



for her outstanding literary ability. However her father refused to let her continue her education so she left school at 14 and started work for a telephone company. Undeterred she continued lessons at evening classes. Her mother had a n interest in theatre, particularly political theatre so this may have been an early influence that later led her towards agitprop theatre, the Fichte speaking chorus and the Red Revue and eventually Theater am Schiffbauerdamm

In 1931 she joined the Marxist Workers School, took diction lessons from Helene Weigel and was introduced to Brecht. She stated to work for Theater am Schiffbauerdamm, and began an intense relationship with Brecht that was going to last for the rest of her life. In 1932 she played the role of a servant in *Die Mutter* with Helene Weigel in the title role.

Devoted to Brecht she became one of his mistresses but also worked for the Brecht family collaborating on, and editing scripts. Scripts included *Galileo*, *The Good Person of Szechuan* and *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui*. *Arturo Ui* was most likely the last one she collaborated on as it was written whilst she and the Brecht family were living in Finland awaiting visas to America. Unfortunately the tuberculosis that had been diagnosed in 1931 got the better of her and she died in 1941 whilst Brecht, Weigel and Berlau (Brecht's other mistress) moved to America.

Steffin wrote prose and poetry of her own although none of this was published during her lifetime. It is hard to identify exactly how much of Brecht's work Steffin was actually responsible for but at least she was credited for some of it, unlike Berlau who also wrote for Brecht but remained unappreciated.

Brecht struggled after the death of Steffin.

“My general is fallen
My soldier is fallen

My pupil has left
My teacher has left

My nurse is gone
My nursling is gone.”

Brecht in America

A bad beginning

“I saw Brecht. He was just as dirty and unshaven as ever, but somehow much nicer and rather pathetic.... He wants to work with me badly, and the way he talks about it sounds very reasonable – but you know how long that lasts.” Kurt Weill writing to his wife Lotte Lenya from Hollywood, 1 October 1942 – letter at the Kurt Weill foundation in New York.

Having completed the writing of *Arturo Ui* in Finland he took it to America expecting it to be a hit. However, Brecht did not settle well in America. He settled initially in 1941 in Southern California and found it very depressing. His financial struggle at this time may have had a lot to do with his discontent, as might the mourning for two close friends. Steffin had died of TB on their journey, and the other friend, Walter Benjamin, had committed suicide rather than being handed over to the Gestapo. He had visited America in 1935 and proved himself unpopular shouting and swearing in rehearsals and terrorising directors and actors to the extent that he was thrown out of rehearsals. He was now back, 6 years later, a refugee with nowhere else to go. Existing on approximately \$120 a month Brecht and his family were living off gifts from friends and colleagues as he struggled to produce work for a country that

did not recognise his genius. John Simon in his article *A Marxist amongst the capitalists* suggests that Brecht had few friends, and Eric Bentley in a letter to the New York Times in 2005 commented that no one "hung out" with Brecht, although this did not stop him attracting women! He refused to work with many leading directors and often sabotaged his own productions and stopped many translations from reaching print.

Never a communist?

Brecht is well known for his Marxist and communist viewpoints. However when called to the The House Committee on Un-American Activities on 30 October 1947 he continually denied that he was a member of, or had ever been a member of the communist party. The vice chairman Karl Mundt thanked Brecht for cooperating and the chairman, J. Parnell Thomas, informed Brecht he was a "good example" to witnesses.

Brecht had to answer to many questions relating to his views on Marxism and communism. He informed the court that the views expressed within the plays related to fascism and the Nazi regime within Germany. During his investigation he answered questions whilst smoking a pipe. Whilst denying all allegations with the excuse that the translations were incorrect and causing entertainment within the courtroom, Brecht appeared to cause chaos within the hearing and HUAC eventually gave up. A transcript of the interrogation is available by clicking on the following link:

[http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_\(1947-10-30\)_transcript](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_(1947-10-30)_transcript)

The final questions were based around a poem entitled *Forward we're not forgotten*. "Did you write that Mr Brecht?" the HUAC Chief Investigator, Robert E Striping, asked, having

read the translation of the poem. “No” replied Brecht “I wrote a German poem but that is very different from this” This was followed by courtroom laughter!

Brecht left the courtroom, and also left America!

According to James K Lyon, whilst in America Brecht “suffered more financial deprivation, greater intellectual and emotional isolation, and more resounding failure and indifference toward his genius than he had known for years or would know again in his life time”.

He arrived penniless and left wealthy. He arrived “on the run” and left in a similar manner. He endured the death of two of his closest friends and the death of a son. However, Brecht also wrote some of his most well known plays – *Mother Courage, the visions of Simone Machad, the Good Person of Seczhwan, Schweyk in the Second World War* as well as *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. A genius in exile, Brecht left America in 1947 and never returned.

Brecht and his views on theatre

As with all theorists and directors Brecht's ideas evolved and expanded over time. The aim of this introduction is to familiarise you with Brecht's main theories.

Epic Theatre and Verfremdungseffekte

Brecht had two aims:

1. To present a story with social implications in such a way as to encourage the individuals in the audience to pursue those implications
2. To present it as well, and as enjoyably, as possible.

Brecht believed that Theatre should be a place where audience could critically approach problems, look for solutions, and act upon their decisions. He believed that audience members should have a sense of social responsibility and also a sense of fun.

He believed that too often audience members would become so emotionally involved with the story or characters presented onstage that they would not be able to identify, analyse and search for solutions to the characters' dilemmas, and they would leave the theatre having missed the point of the piece.

So he devised ways of drawing the audiences' attention to the fact they were watching a play. His main method was the use of Epic theatre and Verfremdungseffekte (loosely translated as The Alienation or Distancing Effect): Epic Theatre was a form of theatre that was episodic with each scene being a separate story, that could be told in any order, with a chorus or narrator interrupting and linking the scenes. The term Verfremdungseffekte, as with many of Brecht's techniques, developed over the years. However this term loosely covered

Brecht's intention of distancing the audience from what they were watching on stage so that it was unfamiliar to them, and so they could critically watch and make a judgment rather than absorbing themselves in the plot.

So how did Brecht achieve his Distancing effect?

Brecht wanted each scene to be a story or statement within itself, a scene that would stand alone. His plays were made up of many such scenes, often with choruses, songs, poems or commentary in between. Brecht also liked to juxtapose scenes to cause the audience to think, and he would use comedy to emphasise the tragedy of the situation.

Influenced by film and the work of Charlie Chaplin he used signs and placards. The audience would be told what was about to happen in the scene so they could observe the scene critically as it was demonstrated before them. Brecht did not use elaborate scenery. His scenery was designed to look as if it would simply last for the performance – again this reminded the audience that they were watching a play. Brecht also used choruses and songs to comment on the action. Everything was designed to make the audience think, comment and become more socially critical. Brecht wanted the audience to leave the theatre wanting to change things. For example, instead of leaving the theatre saying “What a sad story”, he wanted them to leave saying “The structure of society that caused the character to be in that situation was unfair. Things have got to change and we have to start the process!”

Actors were required to demonstrate characters rather than “becoming” them. They were to SHOW what the character did to help the audience make a judgment. That way they could also present an attitude to the character and the situation (Gestus) and keep at an emotional distance from the character.

Brecht advised actors “The actor should refrain from living himself into the part prematurely in any way, and should go on functioning as long as possible as a reader (which does not mean a reader-aloud). An important step is memorising one’s first impressions... Before memorising the words he must memorise what he felt astounded at and where he felt impelled to contradict. For these are dynamic forces that he must preserve in creating his performance” (*Brecht’s theory of theatrical performance*)

Dialectical theatre

Life is full of contradictions and choices. As Brecht’s work and ideas evolved, Brecht believed he was moving away from an epic theatre towards a dialectical theatre – a theatre revealing contradictions. As Elizabeth Wright comments in *Postmodern Brecht* “It is human beings who produce contradictions and hence the world must be subject to criticism and change”.

Instead of ignoring contradictions, Brecht wanted the actor to expose the contradictions and choices that characters had to make within his plays.

For example Betty Dulfleet has been widowed by Ui’s gang and has told Ui they will be friends over her “cold, dead, rotting body” but in order to stay alive she now has to publicly support them “I do encourage you to place your trust in Mr Ui, as I myself have done...”

Brecht’s use of music

Brecht believed that music made “poetic theatre” possible. At first Brecht wrote the music himself and was used as background to comedy, projections and battles,



but soon had a value in its own right. Poetry was put to music by Brecht's guitar. It was often performed in Cabaret style. Songs were sung verse by verse during visible scene changes. The songs were without regular beats, stresses or bars. The rhythm was meant to follow that of the words –the metrics lay in the verse whose shape and sense were not to be distorted by being sung.

Brecht started to work alongside musicians and composers, and by 1928 in Threepenny opera (music by Kurt Weill) there was a separation of music from other elements of entertainment:

<https://www.hdtracks.com/index.php?file=etal&id=3502>

1. Orchestra visible on stage
2. Change of lighting for the singing of songs
3. Orchestra lit up, titles and numbers of songs projected onto screen
4. Actors changed their positions before songs began

Music involvement began to evolve as Brecht wrote more plays; the musical items were of a reflective and moralising nature, songs had a purpose to inform, and modern music was applied to songs (not traditional music). He wanted the music to stimulate thought and he wanted his songs to be gestic – communicating not only the meaning of the words but the attitude of the singer. He wanted his ballads to be socially critical, often with ironic references to conventional music.

BRECHT HAD TWO AIMS:

- **To present a story with social implications in such a way as to encourage the individuals in the audience to investigate those implications.**
- **To present high quality, entertaining theatre, ‘Nothing needs less justification than pleasure’.**

Brecht believed that theatre should be a place where the audience could recognise existing social problems, analyse, be critical, seek solutions and take action. He thought it right and possible that an audience should be entertained and also experience a sense of social responsibility. He was passionately against the type of melodrama of his day; where a theatre audience was encouraged to be passive. Brecht wanted his audience to be engaged, thoughtful and active.

Brecht was ambitious in writing theory and devising techniques which would make an audience attentive to the fact they were watching a play. His principle method was the use of Epic Theatre and ‘Verfremdungseffekte’ (loosely translated as ‘The Alienation’ or ‘Distancing Effect’). Epic Theatre in form was episodic, with each scene being a separate story that could be told in any order, with a chorus or narrator interrupting and linking the scenes. The intention being to distance the audience from what they were watching on stage so that it became unfamiliar to them, in order that they watch the play critically and make judgments, rather than being absorbed in the plot.

In Brecht’s Epic Theatre, each scene is a story or statement within itself; a scene that can stand alone. Many of his plays have this epic form, often with choruses, songs, poems or commentary in between. Most scenes are titled (and

productions used signs and placards), to separate them as an individual story; for example *The Flight into the Northern Mountains*, *The Story of the Judge*. Brecht juxtaposed scenes to cause the audience to think, e.g. the story of Grusha stops at the point that she is arrested by the 'Iron Shirts'. Brecht then transports us to the tale of Azdak. This is another alienating device; as the audience begin to get emotionally involved with Grusha's plight, Brecht changes the story! The audience are told what is about to happen in the scene so they can observe the scene critically as it is demonstrated before them. Brecht did not use elaborate scenery, again to remind the audience that they were watching a play. Brecht wanted audiences to leave saying 'The structure of society that caused the character to be in that situation was unfair. Things have got to change and we have to start the process!'

According to Brecht's earlier theoretical writing, actors were required to demonstrate characters rather than 'becoming' them. They were to show their character's actions, to help the audience make a judgment. With the actors having some emotional distance from their characters, they could present an attitude to the character and the situation ('Gestus' technique). Brecht advised that: 'The actor should refrain from living himself into the part prematurely in any way, and should go on functioning as long as possible as a reader. An important step is memorising one's first impressions... Before memorising the words he must memorise what he felt astounded at and where he felt impelled to contradict. For these are dynamic forces that he must preserve in creating his performance'

Brecht's Theory of Theatrical Performance

Brecht wasn't against using emotion within Theatre, but he didn't want the audience to experience the same emotions as the character at the same time. However, despite Brecht's theories on the 'V-Effect', it is hard to remain unaffected by the plight of a young girl as she chooses between her lover and a child.

Questions

- **Do you think it's possible, and valuable, to be deeply engaged watching a play, whilst remaining emotionally detached from the characters?**
- **Can you think of any other playwrights that have used Epic Theatre as a theatrical device?**

Dialectical Theatre

Brecht's ideas evolved and expanded over time. As his work and ideas developed, Brecht believed he was moving away from an Epic Theatre towards a Dialectical Theatre; a theatre revealing contradictions and choices. As Elizabeth Wright comments in *Post Modern Brecht* 'It is human beings who produce contradictions and hence the world must be subject to criticism and change'.

Rather than ignore them, Brecht wanted the actor to explore the contradictions and choices characters have to make. In *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, the more Grusha protects the child's life, the more she endangers her own. Grusha is both a hero and a thief. Azdak appears a fool, but he is in fact like Shakespeare's fools – he speaks the truth and could be seen as one of the wisest characters in the play. Lavrenti lives under his wife's rule, but is prepared to behave in an overbearing way

to his own sister. Both the actor and audience need to observe these contradictions and ask where they come from.

Questions

- **What contradictions do you see in our society?**
- **How might some law abiding people feel forced to break the law?**
- **What would you do for the greater good?**

PRACTICAL EXERCISES

Physicalising an emotion

- In groups of six, choose three characters from a particular scene in *The Threepenny Opera*.
- Identify each character's feeling (the predominant, or a dominant one within the scene), for example do they feel anger? Fear? Love? Three of the six actors should be cast as the characters, with the other three playing their feelings. What sounds and physical shapes demonstrate these feelings?
- Don't be afraid to be quite abstract.
- The three characters all have a simple set task to complete, for example, packing and un-packing suitcases. They are aware that these physicalised emotions are following them and trying to interrupt their task; yet they must try to carry on with their set task.
- How hard is it to ignore or repress strong emotions within you?
- Do the characters in the play manage to suppress their feelings?

Group story-telling

- In groups of about 5, sit in a circle. Each person in turn creates a sentence of a story. The sentences must follow and make some sense – no matter how fantastical! To begin with, give your story a title, for example: '*The Deep Dark Wood*', or '*Adventures in the New World!*' Once you have created the story, act it out exactly as it was told, creating the scenes and images within the story.

Circle of Power

- The group stand in a circle
- One person stands in the centre and embodies an object, living thing or concept. They make the statement: *'I am more powerful than you because I am...'* For example *'...I am a wasp'*, or *'...I am a knife'*, or *'...I am electricity'*
- Someone else enters the circle and challenges their position of power by stating they are something else more powerful. If the first person in the circle is convinced they step back into the circle and the challenges continue.
- If the 2 people in the circle do have consensus on who/what is more powerful and therefore who should step back into the circle, the whole group should reach consensus or take a vote.
- And so the game continues, until it reaches it's conclusion; a power that can't be challenged.

There may be group consensus on this or the game may highlight the various perspectives in the group and is an opportunity to discuss differing view points.

- Try this game choosing characters or themes relating to *The Threepenny Opera*.

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Useful links

Google compendium of different sites including translations, biographies, essays, discussion forum etc.

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Credits

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