

Archive Project
Theatre History II

The archive project is a chance for the class to encounter historical research in a different, more hands-on way. The purpose of the archive project is twofold. It is certainly designed to give the students a deeper engagement with 18th century theatre and opera, taking advantage of the Ames Library's unique collection centered around John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*. But on another basic level, it is designed to model what historians "do" in their work: the exploratory nature of archival research, the strangeness of working with documents and texts that are hundreds of years old, the searching through piles of information to uncover and connect the details that allow us to make specific practices and ideas vivid and comprehensible in modern terms.

Project Plan:

Students will be divided into five groups for this project. The instructor will constitute the groups, with some attention paid to requests students make based on their interests. Each group will have a different general topic that they will pursue in the archive. The task is to find out what is in the archive that relates to that topic, and to piece together information the archival materials reveal. At the end of the project, each group will make an oral presentation to the rest of the class about what resources they found and what they were able to extrapolate from those resources.

The basic schedule for the archive project is as follows:

Archive Project

- 1/27 18th Century Theatre (meet in classroom)
Reading: Chapter 9 pp. 221-241; *Beggar's Opera*
- 1/29 First archive visit, overview of how to work in archive
Assignment: **Exam Questions on Ch. 9**
- 2/3 Day in Archive to work on research (meet in archive)
Reading: Chapter 11
- 2/5 Discuss 18th century Theatre Technology, Acting Treatises, Opera (meet in class)
Assignment: **Exam Questions on Ch. 11; Report preliminary observations from archive**
- 2/10 Day in Archive to work on research (meet in archive)
- 2/12 Presentations in Archive (meet in archive)
Assignment: **Research Presentations**

On the first day, we will do an overview of the 18th century and an in-depth discussion of *The Beggar's Opera* script so that we feel thoroughly grounded in the general sources for our work. On January 29, we will receive our orientation to the archive from University Archivist Anke Voss-Hubbard. In the next two weeks, there will be two class periods dedicated to working in the archive, and one class period for general discussion and preliminary reports on what you are finding in the archive. On February 12, all groups will make their final presentations.

At the presentation, each group should turn in:

- A bibliography of the sources they reference in the presentation
- An outline of the presentation
- Any visual aids/handouts used in the presentation

The different research topics are as follows (if you have a strong preference for which topic or topics you would most like to work on, please make your request to me on or before the second

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class meeting. I will consider the request as I work out the group composition, though for reasons of balance, not all requests will be directly honored).

- I. Staging Practices (connected with *The Beggar's Opera*, similar types of popular theatre, and 18th century theatre in general)
- II. Comparative editions of *The Beggar's Opera* (the archive has almost every single edition of *The Beggar's Opera* ever published!!!)
- III. John Gay in cultural context (politics, other writers, the arts, social ideas, philosophy)
- IV. Influence of *The Beggar's Opera* (and *Polly*, the sequel) on other forms, especially the development of music drama (called melo-drama in many sources and related to, though not exactly the same as, 19th century melodrama)
- V. John Gay's other works (fables, poems, and other theatre)