

“Who has not trembled at the Mohocks' name?”:
Narratives of Control and Resistance in the Press
in Early Eighteenth-Century London

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Abstract

The Mohocks were a rake gang that terrorized the streets of eighteenth-century London in the spring of 1712, but their reputation was the result of a panic propagated by newspapers and pamphlets. The presentation of the rakes is influenced by competing agendas; the agenda can be one of control and cohesion, where the criminal is an adversarial source of social disruption that unifies society through opposition to it. This agenda is countered by a rejection and mockery of the control narrative, where fear-mongering is ridiculed as a tool of authorities who are morally equivalent to the criminals they condemn. The print production surrounding the Mohocks, as well as John Gay's plays, *The Mohocks* and *The Beggar's Opera*, show that the agendas of authority and rebellion often appear side by side. The texts examined here express a liberal yearning for personal freedom as well as a conservative desire for security.

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Textual Notes

In my own text I use the word “Mohock” to refer to the gang of rakes as depicted in the London press of 1712, reserving the exonym “Mohawk” for reference to the Kanien'gehaga First Nations group. Spelling in quotations from original sources remains unchanged.

Common practice in London started the civil new year on March 25. Thus March 24 of 1712 might be recorded as 1711. I have made an effort to modernize these dates and where location of a source might be obfuscated by this change (such as in the archives of the *London Gazette* where issues are dated by the year that is printed in the source), I have recorded both years.

In places where modern spelling and usage differ from what appears in my sources I have silently retained the punctuation and spelling of the original.

Introduction

In the spring of 1712 a new terror held the streets of London in its grip. It wasn't a plague, or a fire, or even an invasion from the Continent. It was a gang of rakes, terrifyingly violent yet possessed of wealth and status. Daniel Defoe announced the arrival of “a new Gang of Rakes and Scowerers who have lately *taken the Field*, as we may call it, against Mankind, and who are, very deservedly, *whoever gave them that Name*, call'd Mohocks” (613). The gang loomed large in the public imagination; vicious and violent, motivated by a love of mayhem, and above the law due to their wealth and status, the Mohock Club claimed the nighttime streets of the city and made them a place to be feared. The media frenzy that surrounded the gang was extreme; the pens of Grub Street flowed with stories of the terrifying offences of this rapacious band of men who Defoe claimed were the “Offspring of Hell” (617), and, for a brief time, the Mohocks became the subject of what amounted to an eighteenth-century terror alert. But was the Mohock Club truly, as the author of a one-penny pamphlet claimed, “the Gog and Magog mention'd in the Revelations”? Jonathan Swift discussed the gang in his *Journal to Stella* and was afraid of them, hinting at a shadowy political conspiracy behind the so-called Mohock Club. Satirists ridiculed and lampooned the entire affair, targeting the publishers who printed shocking tales of street violence, the credulous public eager to read the thrilling tales of the gang's depredations, and even the rakes themselves as a kind of drunken circus of noble scions full of mischief.

The idea that the Mohocks were an organized club is historically unproven, but a disciplined criminal gang that performed unholy rites was more exciting for the newspaper-reading public than ascribing the events to a few drunk law students. Anne Johnson, Lady Strafford, writes of the Mohocks that “they call themselves by som hard name that I can nethere

speak nor spell” (*Wentworth Papers* 277), noting that their name is self-ascribed. Peter Lewis points out that “Scowrers (or Scourers) was the usual name for the wild aristocratic gangs who entertained themselves with vandalism, but in 1711 the term Mohocks came into vogue following the visit to England by four kings of that North American Indian tribe, who were alleged to be particularly fierce and ferocious” (“Another Look” 791, n1). Lewis' assessment here of the royal visit is a bit simplistic, but highlights the reason that the rakes of 1712 became associated with a name that was important for its connection with colonial otherness. I will examine the connection between the London Mohocks of 1712 and the royal visit of the “Four Kings” in Chapter One. Lewis refers to the precedent of rake gangs in London prior to the Mohocks, and the *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines scourer as “[o]ne who made a practice of roistering through the streets at night, beating the watch, breaking windows, etc.” (“scourer” n1, def. 2) and offers attestations from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. Scouring can mean “[t]o thrust (a sword, knife) in a person's body” (*OED Online* “scour” v2, def. 1d) (Graves 395-421). According to one pamphlet, the Mohocks, in one night, “attack'd the Watch in *Devreux-Court* and *Essex-Street*, made them scower; they also slit two Persons Noses, and cut a Woman on the Arm with a Penknife that she is Lam'd. They likewise rowl'd a Woman in a Tub down *Snow-hill*, that was going to Market, set other Women on their Heads, misusing them in a barbarous manner” (*The Town Rakes: or, the Frolicks of the Mohocks or Hawkubites*).

This thesis is about the portrayal of these gangs in the media in London of 1712. I begin with a concept of the representations and uses of gang violence, all too familiar in our present-day media culture. What drew me to study this particular topic was my surprise at its long history (“They had gangs? They had media?”). My first encounter with the Mohocks came while reading

John Gay's *Trivia; or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London*. It is while walking at night that we meet the libertines who have turned from enlightened (or at least light-hearted) hedonists into more sinister figures:

Now is the Time that Rakes their Revells keep;

Kindlers of Riot, enemies of Sleep.

His scatter'd Pence the flying *Nicker* flings,

And with the Copper Show'r the Casement rings.

Who has not heard the *Scowrer's* Midnight Fame?

Who has not trembled at the *Mohock's* Name? (321-326)

Gay is speaking of London's criminal classes, but in particular of rakes, affluent ne'er do wells who call hedonism, violence and vandalism their "frolicks." Who were the Mohocks Gay referred to, and why were they so frightening? How did a criminal gang come to have such a name? What role did such a gang play in the culture of early eighteenth-century London? Once again I was intrigued by the number of points at which the London of three centuries ago connected to the present with its coffee shops, tabloid journalism and criminal gangs. And Gay had given me a clue that I was not to understand for some time; it was not the rake gang itself but their name, their reputation and imagined construction that gained a hold on public interest in London.

My initial explorations turned up only a few sources of academic writing on the Mohocks. Historians Daniel Statt and Neil Guthrie had both examined the case of the Mohocks in significant detail and reading their articles brought me to an understanding that the gang seemed to be something of a chimera, a largely imaginary creature that had nonetheless taken

hold of the popular imagination in London. There was, as Jonathan Swift writes, “No truth, or very little, in the whole story.” I was able to find few other places where the Mohocks were discussed. What became clear was that some illuminating information could come from writers contemporary to the spring of 1712, a time we might call the Mohock Spring. With this understanding in mind I began to look for primary sources to help me understand the Mohock affair and what it implied.

The time period during which the Mohocks were most active, or at least most actively discussed, was relatively short, confined to a few months in the spring of 1712. The sources which contained the most information were the ephemeral print productions of an active media. Initially I was happy to find *any* reference to the gang. As my research continued I was able to add some collections of eighteenth century newspapers to my reading list and found brief mentions of the gang there as well. Initially I paid less attention to those few satirical essays of the *Spectator* which discussed the Mohocks, partially because I was interested in more “serious” commentators. After reading Statt and Guthrie I must confess to some disappointment. It seemed that the Mohocks were largely a fantasy created in the imagination of the writers and public who commented on them. It seemed there was no story here. However, I came to realize that there *was* a story to be found in the Mohock spring, but it was not the one I had initially (and fruitlessly) been searching for. It was only once I had abandoned the idea that I was going to uncover some secret truth about the Mohock club that I was able to find a focus. Though none of the primary texts I looked at provided conclusive evidence of a politically motivated and violent group of ungentlemanly rakes, they all provided stories and counter-narratives that *were* political, and highly concerned with English conceptions of civility and proper behaviour.

The actual existence of the Mohocks is less important than the traces they leave in the public discourse of eighteenth century London. There is a story behind the confusion; in fact the story *is* the confusion. Why do so many people say such different things about the Mohocks? Newspapers present the idea of a criminal gang at work in the streets, and tell of the efforts of Queen Anne's officials in apprehending the Mohocks. Broadsides and pamphlets offer absolutely outrageous tales of Mohock crimes and hint at an upper-class membership for the gang. Daniel Defoe and Jonathan Swift express outrage and fear, and occasionally doubt, but largely support the idea that a gang of violent rakes was roaming the streets of London after dark. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele filled the pages of *The Spectator* with hilarious essays satirizing the credulous public, the fear-mongering media and even the rakes themselves. And John Gay, my initial informer, had written a satirical play about the Mohocks and the London watch that he published even before the Mohock Spring had turned to summer.

What emerges then is the creation of the Mohocks as a site of conflict, rather than as an event in time. The gang was used by both Whig and Tory parties as a means to accuse their opponents of underhandedness or incompetence, and as a means to recruit the opinions of Londoners under the aegis of official state protection. Satirists such as Gay, Steele, and Addison used the affair to question the role and validity of current legal practice, as well as to raise concerns about “proper” conduct and civil society. The writing that exists about the gang intersects at the point that the imagined gang is constructed; in effect, that site can be viewed through a variety of lenses.

Throughout the Mohock narrative one finds terms that evoke a sense of otherness, from the “barbarities” mentioned in Queen Anne's royal proclamation against the Mohocks, to the

“well-dispos'd savages” of the *Spectator's* satirical essays. The name of the gang was, of course, borrowed from the well-known visit of the so-called “Four Kings of Canada” in 1710, a visit which captured public interest and, most importantly, public imagination. Ostensibly a state visit from the royals of potential allies in North America, the appearance of high-status First Nations people in London heralded a surge of interest in the British colonial holdings across the Atlantic. The “Mohawk Kings” were celebrated and made public appearances throughout London, drawing great crowds of spectators. Reactions seemed generally to be positive, though print media from the visit expresses colonial prejudice. The visitors were well-liked because they were tall, of striking appearance, and appreciated English ale more than French wine. Two years later the name was given to the gang of rakes with a set of ambivalent connotations. The name spoke to a belief that the Mohawk First People were fierce warriors, dangerous and exotic. Thanks to the royal visit, the name also carried a distinct suggestion of nobility and political power. It is not difficult to imagine a group of youths taking the name for their club as part of a desire to be distinguished as “fellows of fire,” in much the same vein as the contemporary Assassins or numerous other fraternities that play on notions of mysterious power and potential violence.

The nuanced connotations of the Mohock name translated into significant uncertainty and vacillation on the part of followers of the Mohock narrative that began to appear in the spring of 1712. Jonathan Swift doubted the truth of the stories on grounds of dubious journalism, yet expressed fear that the Mohock's violence was directed against him. Ultimately he advanced a theory that the Mohocks were the “coercive state apparatus” of a Jacobite plot to destabilize Queen Anne's government and assassinate her ministers. Daniel Defoe raged against the nihilism and violence of the rakes and advocated vigilante justice in curbing the threat, yet he found

himself implicated in print as a part of the Mohock conspiracy. Others recounted tales of Mohocks heard in conversation, or suggested their own encounters with the gang. The Mohocks were a topic of the circular cycle of gossip and popular print, each medium reinforcing and adding to the other, until the narrative was ultimately completely obscured. The narrative became so open and adaptable that it could be, and was, used for a variety of purposes.

The sources I examined in the thesis can be viewed perhaps as a wagon wheel, with the Mohock narrative at the centre and a variety of narrative spokes leading into and out of that centre to an orbit around but never intersecting completely with the centre. This understanding of the circularity of discourses came to me later, as I considered what I had discovered in the process of researching and writing this thesis, as a means of conceptualizing the way narrative circulates around the Mohock spectacle. As the historians upon which I rely have found, there is little in the way of a real event at the centre of these orbiting narratives, but the multiple narratives create something there at the contested site.

While Grub Street pens scribbled scandal and suggestive stories for sale, the clubs and coffee houses of the city served as a forum for both discussion and reinforcement of public opinion. Bryant Lillywhite suggests that “[t]he writers of news-sheets frequented the coffee-houses to gain their material, whilst the news-sheets themselves, often supplied free to a house were displayed for the benefit of its patrons" (18), and Jürgen Habermas also notes that the news became the talk of the day in public spaces, which then became integrated into the news and conversations of the next (42). Eighteenth-century London provides a historical base for the beginnings of a public discourse and investigation of the authority of print. Terry Eagleton points out that “the modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of the liberal,

bourgeois public sphere in the early eighteenth century” (10). Tales of crime and criminals hold a prominent place in the media of eighteenth-century London, where public opinion arose and coalesced around popular trials, criminals, and lawmakers. Criminals such as Jack Sheppard are portrayed as popular anti-heroes, while members of the watch are maligned as cowardly and incompetent (McLynn, 20; Statt 192-3). Eighteenth-century London saw an explosion in the production and consumption of media, and the echoes of that explosion are still evident three hundred years later. In some ways little has changed. The production of media was, and is, driven by political or economic agendas as often as objectivity. Habermas notes that, even as early as the eighteenth century, general public opinion “could scarcely be separated from the instrument of this opinion, the press” (93).

In this thesis I demonstrate that the language used to describe the Mohocks and other criminals in both public and private texts is influenced by competing agendas. The texts contribute to a narrative of fear that is willingly embraced in order to satisfy an agenda that depends both upon the source of production (writers and publishers) and the reading (or play-going) audience. The agenda can be one of control and cohesion, where the criminal is an adversarial source of social disruption that unifies society through opposition to it. A recognition of this agenda of oppression by the reading audience leads either to a rejection and mockery of the control narrative or to a desire to read the criminal narrative as one of liberation, where fear-mongering is ridiculed as a tool of authorities who are morally equivalent to the criminals they condemn. In the latter case the criminal's resistance to legal justice serves as a protest against moral injustice. The print production surrounding the Mohocks, as well as John Gay's plays, *The Mohocks* and *The Beggar's Opera*, show that the agendas of authority and rebellion often appear

side by side, sometimes within a single text; the texts I examine express a liberal yearning for personal freedom as well as a conservative desire for security. This thesis will add to the relatively small amount of research on the Mohocks of 1712 London, as the almost completely invisible centre of a public discourse about crime, justice, politics (all those things humanity regularly concerns itself with) and fear. The method of studying a particular emergence, such as the Mohock scare, by looking at the narratives that circulate around it, is one that is applicable in a number of research areas beyond the ephemeral print of early eighteenth-century London.

The scrutiny of both modern historians and eighteenth-century satirists has revealed some truths about the Mohock panic of 1712. Details of the gang's violence is well-documented in the newspapers of the day, and in second-hand reports of gossip and rumour, but few facts appear elsewhere. This does not entirely dismiss the events as untrue; the process of law-enforcement at the time could certainly have failed to produce many convictions despite real criminal activity. Yet the language of the newspaper's reports and the sentiments of the public interest in the affair stretch the credulity of any reader. Daniel Statt points out that some contemporary writers recognized this and claimed the gang were “chimeras of an overheated public imagination nourished by sensational press reports and political opportunism” (179). Neil Guthrie notes that rake gangs like the Mohocks “often became the target of political propagandists or the subject of the historical equivalent of modern tabloid journalism, wherein 'righteous' indignation is often hypocritical and sensational, or the 'fact' is manufactured for political purposes” (33). Though opinions on the affair were polarized, an examination of legal records reveals what facts are available.

For the factual history of the Mohocks I rely on the work of historians such as Thornton

Shirley Graves (1923), Robert J. Allen (1933), Daniel Statt (1995), and Neil Guthrie (1996) who have entered into the debate on the authenticity of the Mohocks based on their examinations of historical records. Guthrie and Statt have both examined available legal documents to determine what those official records have to say about the events of the Mohock panic. Statt offers the following account of one of the major incidents of assault, which occurred on March 11, 1712, and provides a concise example of the limited verifiable information about the Mohock gang and their interactions with London law enforcement:

Between one and two o'clock at night, a riot and assault was made on a watchman, one John Bouch, in Essex Street off the Strand. Some of the attackers had escaped, but not all, and several informations on oath identified the following: Edward Richard Montague, Lord Hinchinbroke; Sir Mark Cole, baronet; Thomas Fanshawe; Thomas Sydenham, gentleman; Captain John Reading; Captain Robert Beard; Robert Squibb of Lincoln's Inn, gentleman; and Hugh Jones, servant to Sir Mark Cole. Hinchinbroke had been arrested and thrown in the Round House for the night. Beard, Sydenham and Jones had escaped from the scene, but were pursued and apprehended. They were delivered into the custody of John Salt, high constable of the Westminster division, to be brought before a Justice of the Peace. Salt, however, discharged all three prisoners, for which malfeasance he was removed from his office. Court records indicate that all the accused were arrested and imprisoned, including the three that had been discharged by Salt, and that all were released on bail on 12 and 13 March.

(187-8)

Statt also records some details of the subsequent trial, pointing out that “[t]he court, at the same session in which it was meting out penalties of a day in the pillory and whipping at the tail of a cart to women and men who had committed petty property offences, fined Cole, Reading, Squibb and Jones three shillings and four pence each for the assault and riot” (190); the amount of the fine would have been barely significant to the men it was levied against. Guthrie has examined documents from the Ernest Lewis Gay collection in the Houghton Library at Harvard and finds some inconsistencies which suggest that, even in the official records, “the full story is still not disclosed” (43). Without a definitive answer available in the historical chronicle the Mohocks can still be studied productively through an examination of the narrative that exists, the narrative supplied in writings about the Mohocks. For such an examination, the truth of the Mohocks' existence is less relevant than the fact that a Mohock narrative exists at all.

The terms used to describe the Mohocks were varied; they were described as a gang in Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella* (511), a club (somewhat akin to the Hell Fire Club) (Allen 106), and rakes; I use all of these terms interchangeably when referring to them. They were also sometimes called “Hawkubites” as in the anonymous pamphlet “The Town Rakes” and, in sources later than 1712, they are associated with the more generic terms for young, wealthy and riotous men which include “bucks,” and “bloods.” Daniel Statt points out that the Mohocks (and other violent rakes) are distinct from the broader category of libertine:

If the rake is seen as a subtype within a general taxonomy of libertinism, then rakery reveals the aggressive, the violent, the destructive quality of libertinism, and perhaps by inference the element of violence in aristocratic cultural norms. The rake may be taken to represent the dark side of the libertine archetype,

typically bereft of the wit, refinement, style and sense to which the libertine could at least putatively lay claim. (181)

The Mohock club that appears in the media of 1712 London was made up of the violent sort of rakes and it is only peripherally and satirically that its members were considered enlightened (Statt; Mackie; Veisz). The variety of terms applied to the gang points to fact that they are an elusive group, difficult to categorize or even historically substantiate. The Mohocks exist within a continuum of irregular narratives of rake violence; they are neither the first nor last such group to excite the interest of Londoners. Graves examines the Roaring Boys, Hectors and other ancestors of the Mohock club, and Guthrie notes that “present-day Oxford dining societies like the Bullingdon Club and the Assassins indicate that things have not changed a great deal since the heyday of the Roaring Boys in the reign of Elizabeth I” (33). Despite their significant presence in print the Mohocks are not unique or unprecedented, yet they captured the public imagination and their name endured long after the fear of them had dissipated from London.

In Chapter One of this thesis I look at the ephemeral print sources that document the gang's notoriety and suggest the public's perception of them. In this I am aligning myself with Ian Bell, who suggests that evaluation of eighteenth century print culture should “cover everything written or printed ... enthusiastically incorporating unorthodox texts” (2). The focus of such media is generally narrow, and very much of its time. A newspaper or pamphlet supplies information of momentary significance; its form is impermanent. London newspapers were published and read regularly. Michael Harris points out that “London offered a market of unique scale and coherence, and the printers, freed from official restraint, began at once to exploit the considerable demand for news and related forms of cheap reading matter. By 1712 about twenty

single-leaf papers were regularly published in the capital each week” (19). Newspapers depended upon readership for their survival, both for income from sales and to attract advertisers; pamphlets, though irregularly published, were also financially dependent on a reading audience that would pay for them and increase the appeal for advertisers. Harris notes that “the London press relied on the income derived from a variable combination of sales and advertising” (55). The exaggeration evident in reports of Mohock violence is sensational and reveals a bias towards entertainment rather than an interest in factual reporting of crime in the city. As a commercial enterprise, it would have been in the best interests of the publishers to print stories they knew would sell issues; politically the papers could benefit from supporting either the governing regime or the opposition. As Harris suggests, “Whether in power or out, politicians saw the press as a crucial instrument” (101). Though they cannot be relied upon as historical fact, the articles about the Mohocks do confirm that the gang was the subject of a great deal of public interest and concern.

The category of ephemera can also contain other forms of communication; I look at Jonathan Swift's *Journal to Stella* as epistolary ephemera that offers an example of how the Mohocks were perceived and how that perception could change over a brief period of time. Letters from Anne Johnson to her husband the Earl of Strafford provide some insights into how the Mohocks were perceived and how information about them was transmitted in forms other than printed pamphlets and newspapers. These writers express their concerns about what they see as an outbreak of violent crime on London's streets. The public perception of crisis informs the official government response, provided in a royal proclamation intended to address the specific concerns of street violence in the spring of 1712. The political aspects of the Mohock scare are

particularly important because of the political instability of the period and the strong rivalry between the Whig and Tory parties. Indeed, Swift and others advanced the notion that the Mohocks were part of a political plot, while others simply blamed their opponents for failing to keep order. Resistance to the politically-motivated narrative led to satirical responses.

My reading of newspapers and pamphlets for hyperbole and fear-mongering is enlightened by examining the immediate critical responses of the satirists and the skeptics. Chapter Two focuses on the satirical responses to the Mohock scare, and reveals a great deal of suspicion towards the version of the narrative that was printed. I include an analysis of articles from Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's *Spectator*, which was a print journal that sought “to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality,” raising its readership “out of that desperate State of Vice and Folly into which the Age is fallen” (44). The *Spectator's* commentary on the Mohocks and the media that surrounds them is satirical, pointing out the tendency of the press to exaggerate details, and gently mocking the willingness of the public to accept an overblown narrative. The real rakes that might have been the source of the panic are chided for behaviour unbecoming their positions as members of an elite class.

The satiric commentary in *The Spectator* and similar sources on the Mohock gang can be seen as a response to a public perception of the gang as a grave threat to the safety and security of the city of London. The stories printed in newspapers that took the gang more seriously contribute to the evidence that people were afraid of, and publicly discussing, the Mohock Club. Some extant sources are ambiguous, such as the pamphlet “An Argument Proving from History, Reason, and Scripture, That the Present Mohocks and Hawkubites Are the Gog and Magog mention'd in the Revelations, And therefore That this vain and transitory World will shortly be

brought to its final Dissolution” (Houghton fMS Eng 1039) that suggests the appearance of the Mohocks heralds the Biblical end-times. Though the pamphlet is an exaggerated satire its reception by the London public is uncertain. For the most part this public perception must be inferred from the character of sources like Gay's play and surviving newspapers. However, some other sources are available. Jonathan Swift is likely the most notable of these, and he made several entries in his *Journal to Stella* that indicate not only a public interest in the Mohocks but also his own fear of the gang. It is possible to infer from his writing, as well as similar but infrequent and scattered sources, that the fear engendered by the Mohocks was a very real part of life for Londoners, at least briefly. The Mohocks were certainly a subject of discussion and gossip amongst the city's citizens. Swift's own attitude is ambivalent: though inclined to see the plethora of Mohock stories as suspect, he was not so cavalier as to disregard the threat they posed to himself and others on the streets of the city after dark. Satirical responses elide the fearful response with humour, and question the narrative's viability.

In Chapter Two I also look at John Gay's first play, *The Mohocks*, as a satire of the affair. In this play Gay mocks all aspects of the affair, and includes the watch among the targets of his satire. The watch is ineffective in dealing with the criminals in the play, and the members of the watch were often seen the same way by Londoners. The character of law enforcement was undergoing changes but was still at a significant remove from even the nascent organization of Fielding's Bow Street Runners who would appear in the middle of the century. As J. M. Beattie suggests in *Policing and Punishment in London 1660-1750*, the perception that the watch was old, cowardly and incompetent was more a case of tradition than fact (79). Gay's portrayal of the incompetent watch suggests that there was significant public dissatisfaction of the sort articulated

a decade earlier in *Hanging, Not Punishment Enough*, “a document that expressed ... the fear of violence in a society largely without protection” (Beattie 22). Londoners viewed the watch as largely impotent. Any suggestion that the watch was unable to deal with the Mohock threat directly criticized the authority responsible for the protection of peace on London's streets; describing the legal system as ineffective is a marker of resistance to the suggestion that the Mohocks are an enemy opposed to the state. In truth the rakes were a part of the middle and upper classes and were socially closer to the government than poorer criminals.

Though the Mohocks-in-print were active for a very brief time in the spring of 1712, mentions of the gang and their name persist long after, even to the present (Stephenson). One factor that contributed to their longevity is the political motives that were ascribed to them, such as the conspiracy suggested by Swift, and the counter arguments against those motives. I devote Chapter Three to a broader examination of how images in popular accounts of the Mohocks were adopted by and expanded upon by John Gay in his treatments of law and criminality in *The Mohocks* and *The Beggar's Opera*. Some years after the Mohock crisis had passed, John Gay wrote *The Beggar's Opera* which builds on some of the work he began with *The Mohocks*. Lewis notes that aspects of the earlier play are “especially anticipatory of the ironic inversions” (“Another Look” 793) which are essential to the satire of *The Beggar's Opera*. Jeremy Black notes that “on the stage ... the middling orders watched both themselves and caricatures that reflected their anxieties and drives being depicted” (112). Both of Gay's plays indicate a public interest in crime and criminals that goes beyond their role as an antithesis to civilized society. The popularity of the sympathetic criminals and corrupt officials in *The Beggar's Opera* suggests that desire that drove the public interest was more subversive than coercive. People wanted to see

justice but were highly aware that criminals, being those who broke the established laws, were not necessarily bad people, and that those who held power were also in a position to abuse it. The play questions the rights of class and power, and the uncritical condemnation of criminality. It is also very much a savvy embellishment of the “taste of the town,” with characters and settings guaranteed to be popular given the interests of London's public. The success of *The Beggar's Opera* highlights the ability of criminal narratives to entertain their audiences; if a text amuses the reading or play-going public, its agenda is likely to be more successful.

As suggested by the popularity of Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* and stories of the real-life characters and events it is based on, the public ambivalence towards crime and criminality comes from a mix of fear and fascination. Fear arises from the threat that criminals could pose, both to body and property. On the other hand doubt is expressed about whether the legal apparatus that punishes criminals and determines criminality is not suspect itself. The popularity and positive reception of characters in *The Beggar's Opera* such as Macheath, as well as the vilification of Peachum, suggests a complicated balance between the ideal of justice that is required for a peaceful, civilized society, and the reality of abuses of power and official corruption. In *The Beggar's Opera* the criminals are mostly good and the officials are mostly bad. In *The Mohocks* the officials are only incompetent, or at least too hasty, but the rakes are actually figures of wealth and status who call themselves gentlemen. In the semi-fictional narrative that played out in the streets of London the rakes that were a criminal threat were also the gentlemen of the next generation, acting out a corrupt and abusive role in a public theatre that was only too happy to see young gentlemen and wealthy youths as dangerous criminals. The fact that the reputation of the Mohocks grew beyond what can be reasonably assumed as historical truth is evidence of the

public's desire to be entertained by narratives that offered up reality as caricature. Blurred boundaries in criminal narratives between criminality and authority speak to the public's desire to see evil-doers, rather than wrong-doers, punished.

The Mohock scare is a complicated event to examine. While the stories Londoners told each other during the spring of 1712 may have been lacking truth, the force of those stories was certainly real and affective. A few incidents, not necessarily even unusual or unprecedented, grew in the telling and became all manner of threats to the people of London. While further research may illuminate the Mohocks and their kind more clearly, or, as some historians suggest, destroy them altogether, the multiple narratives constructed around them are worthy of examination and criticism as any text is. A lack of historical “facts” is too weak a reason not to engage with the underlying narratives, be they mythic or mundane. An examination of the available sources related to the Mohocks and the public perception of criminality reveals the competing agendas that play out in print and the arena of public opinion.

Chapter 1 – Ephemeral Panic

The name of the Mohock gang can be found scattered through the ephemeral print of eighteenth-century London. Newspapers, pamphlets and private correspondence are all sources for records of the intense interest in the gang that arose in 1712. The print sources indicate an ambivalence to the Mohocks' brief reign of terror; J. Wright in Fleet Street obviously sought to capitalize on the popularity of the theme and printed spurious accounts of Mohock attacks in “The Town Rakes.” The title of an anonymously printed pamphlet claims to be “A True List of the Names of the Mohocks or Hawkubites,” which Guthrie finds to be “[a]lmost certainly fictional” (38). These pamphlets cater to the buyers of what the author of “Who Plot Best; The Whigs or the Tories” called “a Half pennyworth of Scandal” (16). Such pamphlets offered a great deal of rumour, hearsay and macabre details but little information of substance. As Andrea McKenzie notes in “Making Crime Pay,” the choice to exaggerate or embellish news was a conscious one based on the demands of the competitive printing business:

the writers and publishers of criminal literature consciously or subconsciously justified their work in ambiguous and open-ended terms, as though in order to attract the largest readership possible. In such a competitive market, they were obliged not merely to anticipate the desires and attitudes of the consumer, but also to respond to and attempt to predict the likely next move of competing publications. (240)

Several of the sources I examine that refer to the Mohocks rely substantially on unverified or unverifiable supposition. What the pamphlets provided for their readers was a fearsome vision of the Mohocks as nocturnal predators who hunted on the streets of London, a vision that likely

owed more to imagination than fact. Daniel Defoe took the Mohocks seriously enough to include them in his *Review*, and they became his theme for a few issues until he found himself implicated in the gang's activities. The gang portrayed in these pamphlets and papers is a group of violent sociopaths, an enemy of law-abiding society. This perception is reinforced by publications that promote fear and a sense of an external threat; they imply that security is to be found in the civilized society that Queen Anne's government shepherds. Responses to this narrative are varied, from wholesale acceptance to doubt and resistance to authoritarian manipulation.

Sources of information about the Mohocks that originate with the government were less apt than the pamphleteers to describe the specific crimes of the Mohocks, but were eager to describe the rakes as a clear danger to order and law. The *London Gazette* (an official newspaper of the British government) printed a royal proclamation on March 17 letting the public know that Queen Anne was concerned with the attacks and making efforts to keep the streets of London safe for her subjects. Papers such as the *British Mercury* of April 21 reiterated that official response, reminding readers that the apprehension of Mohocks was in the public interest and a matter of security. These public documents attend to the agenda of oppression that locates the criminals as outsiders and suggests that people should unite against them under a banner of authority and legal justice.

More private communications such as Swift's *Journal to Stella* can be viewed as a reaction to both the narrative of panic and fear promoted in the public press and to the narrative that developed through oral transmission. The Mohocks provoked a strong response from the media and, as a result, undoubtedly became a subject of conversation. Lady Strafford, wife to the Earl of Wentworth, briefly mentions the gang in the letters, collected by James Cartwright in *The*

Wentworth Papers, almost as a source of entertainment while Jonathan Swift vacillates among fear, disbelief, and cavalier disdain in his *Journal to Stella*. Both frequently use language that alludes to verbal conversation, indicating that the Mohocks are being discussed in the social circles to which these writers belong. In this arena of oral transmission the uncertainty enabled by the lack of verifiable facts in the print media leads to a dichotomous response; the narrative is perceived as one where either anything may be true or where nothing is true. In this chapter I will examine some of these sources that discuss the Mohocks. I will point out how the various writers either advance the agenda of oppression or react to it with apprehension, titillation, or disbelief. Most of the sources I examine here accept the narrative of a dangerous street gang of rakes; high levels of violence that were attributed to the gang in print engendered reactions of fear while the reaction of high level authorities lends the narrative some initial credibility and positions the Mohocks as a serious threat.

Public concerns about street violence and gangs were not new in 1712. In his article “Some Pre-Mohock Clansmen,” Thornton Shirley Graves traces the Mohocks’ ancestors as far back as the sixteenth century, demonstrating that various forms of gangs and outbreaks of street violence were a cyclical occurrence. Beattie mentions a royal proclamation from 1690 “addressed to the problems of burglary, robbery, and murder during a panic about the increases in such offences” (133) and notes “[t]he experience of the street violence of the 1720s” (190) as an influence on legal reforms. What makes the Mohocks unusual then is not the fact that they were a rake gang committing violence on the streets of London, but that they received such a strong reaction from the public press and from private citizens. This reaction was bolstered by the involvement of both Tory and Whig supporters who each sought to turn the most recent crisis to

their advantage. The political climate was unstable; the Tories had gained power only two years before and were destined to be ousted two years later. It is not surprising that each party sought to use the Mohock crisis to discredit their opponents. The Tory party was eager to prove that its management was benign and had already begun to address concerns about crime the year before the Mohock scare.

A letter dated October 22 of 1711, issued by royal command and directed to Lord Chancellor Simon Harcourt,¹ is an exhortation to the watch, constables and other officers of the law to be vigilant in carrying out their duties. The letter is a reminder that Queen Anne has already:

issued out several Proclamations, strictly enjoying and requiring all Our Officers and Ministers to execute with the utmost diligence and Vigour those good and wholesome Laws which have from time to time been made for the preventing and punishing of Vice, Prophaness and Immorality. And Whereas to Our great grief We are informed, that Notwithstanding those Our repeated Commands, those Laws have not been duly executed according to Our earnest desire and just expectation. (*Copy of an order for the suppression of "Profaness and Immorality"* Houghton fMS 1039; my transcription)

The letter explicitly attaches value judgements to the law. The laws are styled "good and wholesome," terminology that speaks to a coercive moral code where value judgements are explicit. The letter clearly stipulates that the laws have value to the civil society and well-being of London and points out that there have been several previous reminders to uphold those "good

¹ The *Praxis almae curiae cancellariae*, a 1695 publication by William Brown, notes: "To the Chancellor appertaineth the Constituting of Justices of the Peace" (7), suggesting that legal matters were Simon Harcourt's responsibility.

and wholesome Laws” which are fundamental to the power of the crown. The 1706 edition of *A Help to National Reformation* records the text of a “Proclamation for Preventing and Punishing Immorality and Prophaneness” and includes language similar to the letter of October 1711; Queen Anne declares that the laws “have not been executed according to Our just Expectation and Command,” suggesting that control is an ongoing concern for the government. Vice, rather than violence, is the focus of this proclamation, as well as of the later letter from October 1711, but the language indicates that if vice spreads other sins will follow. The book also includes “An Abstract of the Penal-Laws against Prophaneness and Immorality”² which outlines punishments for a list of offences that includes prophanation of the Lord's day, drunkenness, swearing and cursing, blasphemy, lewd and disorderly practices, and gaming (87-97). The overwhelming concern outlined here has to do with moral offences, derived from a desire “to discourage and suppress all Vice, Prophaneness, Debauchery, and Immorality, which are so highly displeasing to God, so great a Reproach to Our Religion and Government” (*A Help to National Reformation*, n.p.; ECCO image 6). The hierarchy of authority articulated in this passage is clear; the laws of the government derive from religion, which is the expression of divine law. The laws are not intended to serve the people in power; they are intended to serve God and so, by implication, are above reproach.

The proclamation also outlines the relationship between government and subjects. It explains that the vices “have so fatal a Tendency to the Corruption of many of Our loving Subjects” (n.p.; ECCO image 6). The subjects are not asked for love; it is required. Such language serves as a reminder that the people must love the queen. This love implies a

2 A note in this section refers to “His Majesty's Gracious and Pious Proclamations,” suggesting that this section of the book has been reprinted from an earlier source, at least prior to 1702 when Queen Anne ascended the throne.

relationship of a caring parent to a naive and impressionable child, constantly at risk of corruption by the vices of the world. Though her subjects are “otherwise Religiously and Virtuously disposed,” there is a suggestion that, without the care and laws of the government, the people would fall prey to temptation.

The language of both the October 1711 letter and the proclamation in *A Help to National Reformation* is stern and strongly suggests negligence on the part of the officers in charge of maintaining law and order, subtly distancing the Queen from any public perception of failure on the part of law enforcement. The letter is vaguely threatening, and the proclamation more so, suggesting that vice, “(if not timely remedied) may justly draw down the Divine Vengeance on Us and Our Kingdoms” and reminding readers that it is “the Blessing and Goodness of Almighty God (by whom Kings and Queens Reign and on which We entirely rely)” (n.p.; ECCO image 6). The appeal to a higher authority in God implies that the Queen's laws are unassailable and suggests that the Queen rules at the behest only of God. The message to the public is clear: only through strict obedience to the authority of the Queen and her government can her subjects hope to be secure. On a more temporal level, Guthrie points out that the October letter “does suggest that the Tories wished to be seen as upholders of law and order” (45) but a public perception of the watch and constables as incompetent tends to resist this distancing and equates the failure of officers of the government with failure of the will of the government.

The tone of royal disappointment in the letter from October is clear and indicates a preoccupation with a longer history of criminal trouble on the streets. It is likely that the Mohock panic that lay some months in the future was merely a culmination of sentiment that had been growing for some time. It indicates that disturbances were not uncommon, implying that the

press focused on the Mohocks was an expression of a growing public sentiment (and an official response to that sentiment) rather than a response to a sudden and dramatic rise in crime. The brief explosion of Mohock reports was not the result of a new and unusual threat on the streets of London. Rather it was an expression of an ongoing civic issue that was occasionally brought to the forefront of public debate and concern. In a time of political uncertainty a common enemy is a useful tool of control for politicians to exploit in the press; in this case the rakes personify the abstract concepts of debauchery and immorality that the proclamation warns against.

The letter places blame on “all Constables, Headboroughs, and all other officers whatsoever.” Beattie points out that the watch “was frequently criticized when crime, begging, or other disorders in the streets appeared to be on the increase” (174). When public concern grew to the point that disorders became a royal concern, the easiest scapegoat was apparently the watch and the constables who oversaw them. John Gay caricatures the watch as cowardly and completely ineffectual in *The Mohocks*, suggesting that they were not equal to the task of keeping order on the streets. I will discuss Gay's treatment of the watch as ineffective agents of authority more fully in Chapter Two.

Another royal proclamation “For the Suppressing of Riots, and the Discovery of such as have been Guilty of the late Barbarities within the Cities of *London* and *Westminster*, and Parts adjacent” was issued as a single sheet on March 17, 1712 (“By the Queen, a proclamation for the suppressing of riots” Houghton fMS Eng 1039; *London Gazette* no. 4979) and is an expression of the royal response to the Mohock panic on the streets of London. It suggests to readers that street crime had reached an unacceptable level but that public safety was being taken very seriously by the queen and her officers. The proclamation lets Londoners know that the queen

has “tak[en] Notice of the Great and Unusual Riots and Barbarities, which have lately been Committed in the Night-time in the open Streets.” The issue in question is described in terms of savagery, suggesting that anarchy has descended on the city in the form of an invading horde of rioting barbarians, street crime having gone far beyond quiet pick-pockets in alleys. The perpetrators of the crimes are described in terms equally dire, as “Numbers of Evil-dispos'd Persons” who inflict “great Terror [on] Her Majesties said Subjects” going so far as to assault the watch and constables as well as ordinary citizens. So enormous are these crimes, according to the proclamation, that they cause the “Displeasure of Almighty God,” a serious charge. The proclamation arrives a few days after the panic seems to have gotten unmanageable, when information about the Mohocks was readily available, but contradictory and exaggerated. The proclamation is careful to point out that it is only “by reason of their Numbers, and by Favour of the Night, [that the offenders] have escaped from Justice,” publicly rendering the law enforcement officers blameless despite the tone of more private communications such as the October 22 letter. By using this sort of language the government is seeking to deflect concerns that if its agents are incompetent then the government is also incompetent.

Although the communications originating with the government do not refer to the rake gang as Mohocks, the name was already in use by March 8, when Jonathan Swift refers to the gang in *Journal to Stella* (508-9). The language used to describe the rakes refers frequently to savagery and barbarity, words which carry associations with British perceptions of Native Americans. As mentioned previously, the name applied to the rake gang was inspired by a highly political and public visit to England. The visitors, as Eric Hinderaker explains in “The 'Four Indian Kings' and the Imaginative Construction of the First British Empire,” were “four Native

Americans with ties to the Iroquois confederacy [who] traveled as a kind of diplomatic entourage to London in 1710” (487). Hinderaker's circumlocution is purposeful; though contemporaries referred to the visitors as simply the “Four Kings,” the visitors were not all major figures in their own political worlds. Instead, in an effort to gain support for colonial efforts, the organizers of the visit “found supporters where they could and then shamelessly falsified their credentials” (490). In truth the four were not particularly powerful within, or even necessarily representative of, the nations they were associated with. Hinderaker points out that they comprised “a miscellaneous collection of young and relatively powerless anglophiles, among whom four of the five tribes of the Iroquois confederacy went unrepresented” (491). However, in a way that is similar to their street gang namesakes, the true narrative of the visitors (see Hinderaker) is less important to this study than how they were interpreted in the public sphere.

The 1710 visit was met with a great deal of interest from Londoners. In a tour marked by pageantry and spectacle, the “Four Kings” attracted curious crowds wherever they went in the city. Hinderaker notes that “Londoners of every description joined the kings, staking a personal claim to the visit and interpreting its significance for themselves” (497). One can imagine an eighteen-year-old Viscount Hinchinbroke (later implicated in the Mohock crimes) mixing with apprentices and Grub Street writers in the crowds that took in the appearances of the “Four Kings” around London. Hinderaker notes that the visitors lodged “in the thriving West End neighborhood being developed and patronized by the city's wealthiest gentlemen, close to the seat of government and the principal centers of entertainment and culture” (497), which would have placed them in the sort of areas affluent youths and rakes might frequent.

Part of the interest of the London population can be supposed to derive from the novelty

of seeing exotic visitors from far countries, but these four visitors were also called kings. Londoners revisited previous notions of what the people of North America were. Hinderaker points out that the royal titles the visitors bore were crucial to how they were received, above any fascination with exotic otherness the tribal representatives may have held for Londoners:

For all of these appearances, it was not enough to be Indians: the essential characteristic of the four Indian kings in these contexts was that they be kings. They were treated as agents of state power and as potential allies and clients of the crown, roles Native Americans had never before been asked to play for an English audience. Though the fact that they were Indians added a vital element of interest and novelty to the state business they conducted, their patrons worked hard to shrink the social distance between English royal and noble figures and the supposed monarchs from the New World. (494)

The tribal envoys not only held the fascination of otherness, they also carried the allure of power. The monarchy essentially created them as royalty and British subjects responded by interpreting the visitors as savages and nobility at the same time.

The response in the press was immediate and abundant, with a variety of reading options available to go along with what must have been a major coffee-house conversation topic. Hinderaker notes that, “[a] voluminous street literature soon capitalized on the popular interest in the four kings,” writings composed of “hastily assembled geographic and ethnographic descriptions of Iroquoia culled from sensationalized and corrupted readings of a jumble of older accounts” (Hinderaker 499-500; Bond; Garratt). Faced with the need to respond to the visit, writers and publishers padded, exaggerated, and fabricated to make saleable copy for the London

print market. There was a demand for information and, as the emissaries' regularly reprinted official speech was relatively short, added material could make a more attractive publication.

The language used to describe the delegates was varied, but their reception was generally positive. Richmond P. Bond remarks that the “four men from the Mohawk apparently demeaned themselves with quiet dignity and without a foolish gesture. No word was offered in derogation of their manner, no term of contempt for their manners” (16). A contemporary publication, *The Four Kings of Canada*, included the visitors' address to Queen Anne but also offered a collection of general information about the men and their homeland. The author takes no offence at their appearance, and writes that “they are well form'd, being of a Stature neither too high nor too low, but all within an Inch or two of six Foot” (6), and is pleased to note that “they seem to relish our fine pale Ales before the best *French* Wines from *Burgundy* or *Champaign*” (7). Their manner is noted favourably, and the author suggests that they “do not know what it is to cocker and make much of themselves” (7), implying that, although they are nobility, they exhibit a surprising humility. However, when the author discusses the people and lands of Canada more generally, the text is less benevolent.

Throughout the text the tribal peoples of Canada are frequently called savages and occasionally barbarians. The author notes that “they were more barbarous and cruel formerly, 'till acquainted with the *Europeans*, and were great Eaters of human Flesh as formerly the Heathen *Irish* were” (10) and states unequivocally that “they are brutal in all their Inclinations” (17). Though the actual visit was positively received, an undercurrent of prejudice has not faded. Hinderaker notes that “the new view of Indians as legitimate agents of state power jostled uncomfortably with the older idea that Indians were simple and savage” (488). Though the visit

by the Mohock leaders had been generally positively received, there remained for some people a tendency to associate the tribal cultures with savagery. Daniel Defoe is particularly obnoxious in his discussion of the Mohawk people:

[T]he *Mohock*, or *Mowhawks*, are, or rather were, *for they are Extinct now, or very near it*, a small Nation of *Savages* in the Woods on the back of our two Colonies of *New England* and *New York*, the same from whence our four pretended *Indian* Kings came lately of their own Fools Errand; they were always esteem'd as the most Desperate, and most Cruel of the Natives of *North-America*; and it was a particular Barbarity singular to them, that when they took any Prisoners, either of the *English* or other Natives, they always *Scalp'd them* as they call it, *viz.* pared the Skin and Hair off from the Crown of their Heads, and so left the Body to lie and Languish without any pity, till it died. (613)

The image is clear; Defoe imagines a people too uncivilized to exist in the society of his world, believing their existence too mean to be perpetuated much longer. He is critical of the state visit that made the tribal name a part of Londoners' vocabulary, and is correctly dismissive of the idea that the visitors were leaders of any consequence. However, he reduces the character of an entire culture to the practice of scalping. Other Londoners may have shared Defoe's dire view of the tribe; for Defoe the name was an excellent symbol of unabashed savagery and he would go on to use it liberally in association with other cultural groups (617).

The conception of the Mohawk people by Londoners such as Defoe was highly limited and coloured by the perception of First Nations people as a sometime obstacle to colonial efforts in North America. Though the fact of their diplomatic visit in 1710 suggests that Defoe's

negative views were not universal, the Mohawk people were sometimes reduced in the popular imagination to vicious killers, savages with whom no reasonable discourse could be expected. The willingness of the press and public to associate their name with the rake gangs of 1712 and later suggests that the Mohawks were still viewed as outsiders, an exotic other to which undesirable behaviour was easily attributable. When the crown sought allies in North America, as in 1710, the First Nations people were viewed more positively. While advancing its agenda of control overseas, the British government was more likely to characterize them as savages to suppress or as children to shepherd.

Though it is not precisely clear how the Mohock name became associated with the rakes of 1712, there is a definite possibility that the name was indeed chosen by a group of libertines for its savage connotations. In *The Four Kings of Canada* the author recounts practices of indulgent feasts and notes that “they kept wanton Festivals, where the Men and Women mingl'd together promiscuously, and play'd most abominable lewd Pranks” (19), behaviour that calls to mind the well-known behaviour of libertines in the pursuit of pleasure (Allen 119-124). The writer also talks of tribal preparations for war, and notes that “they commonly enter singing boasting Songs, as, *I am going to War; I will revenge the Death of such a Kinsman; I'll slay and burn, and bring away Slaves; I will eat Men*, and such like Expressions” (19), which brings to mind the mock fight-song of the Mohocks, “The Huzza,” discussed further in Chapter 2. It is not difficult to see the appeal that might be exerted on young men eager to attach themselves with a name that carried such significant associations. As Joseph Roach explains in *Cities of the Dead*, although “[t]he actual existence of the 'Mohock Club' is uncertain, ... the very fact of its discursive life as a [sic] imaginary instrument of violence and political reprisal demonstrates that

the Iroquois alliance had a symbolic impact that reached beyond diplomatic circles into the popular imagination of the 'Free-born'" (163). Whether the name was self-ascribed or not, the appellation was quickly set in 1712 when the Mohock panic arose over rake violence. Though official sources such as Queen Anne's proclamations had not named the rakes, the press was prepared to make the association explicit.

In the *London Gazette* number 4993, published April 19, a report is printed indicating that "several Persons, against whom there is Sufficient Evidence, are now under Prosecution." However there is no sense that the threat is over; the article lists the details of several assaults occurring throughout February and March and calls for further efforts from Londoners, "the Authors and Abettors of the Facts hereafter mentioned, being not yet discovered." Two days later number 325 of *The British Mercury* offers a précis of the official response in the *Gazette*:

In the Gazette of the 19th, all Persons are requir'd to give in their Evidence against the Rioters lately making such a Noise under the Name of Mohocks, pursuant to her Majesty's Proclamation of the 17th of March last; particularly in the Discovery of the Authors and Abettors of Violencies done against William Eden in Covent-Garden, Feb. Elizabeth Fisher in the Strand, Feb. 17. Mary Girdler, 23. Ebenezer Magee, March, John Sells 10. Elizabeth Miller, 14. Catherine Moore 15. Mary Anne Kelby, 16. Robert Ellis, 20. Isaac Warner, William Colegrave, and the Lady Eliz. Savage, Grace Joice, 27. (2)

Concern about violent assaults has clearly been in the public sphere for more than two months before the April 21 publishing date of this article. The identities of the Mohocks were uncertain and the dates provided in this article suggest that any assault from the middle of February

onward tended to be associated with the gang. Though the royal proclamation and the letter to Simon Harcourt refer to “evil-dispos'd Persons” and “disorderly practices” neither of these official documents actually names the rakes or even clearly states that the crimes are the result of a single group. The *Mercury* adds the Mohock name to the official word to explicitly connect the street violence that has caused royal concern to the current focus of the media panic. The government's reluctance to use the Mohock name suggests how great the uncertainty was surrounding the gang and their activities. By acknowledging the violence but refusing to name names the government could avoid charges of either gullibility or of tacitly encouraging the narrative of street crime and fear that appeared in the press. Though the existence of the Mohocks was hard to prove, street crime would have been hard to *disprove*, given that several assaults were documented. Perhaps in a move to forestall widespread panic the government stops short of claiming that an organized rake gang is terrorizing the streets; the criminals the government refers to here are not necessarily aristocratic or upper class. Referring only to criminal acts and not the class of the criminals is an attempt to deflect the sort of attention to corrupt and abusive officials that the *Beggar's Opera* would so successfully bring to bear years later.

The March 17 proclamation is evidence of the government's interest in the Mohocks, rather than evidence of the club's existence. Neil Guthrie argues that there is little direct evidence to support the widely-held belief in the organization of rakes and that there appeared to be little increase in street violence during the (brief) period when the club was supposed to have been active. He highlights the political concerns that may have been present, suggesting that “one is left with the impression that widespread Mohock activity was hard to prove or did not exist

anyway, and that the justices of the peace were still doing their best to supply anything to support an official preconception of crisis” (45). The streets of London suddenly appeared dangerous; the sense of alarm was sufficient to provoke an official reaction and pressured the justice system to be complicit in its continuation. Guthrie's examination favours official records over journalistic and literary material, which he finds unreliable. “Some of these accounts,” he suggests, “are untrustworthy because they were prompted by hysteria rather than by rational analysis; others should be viewed with skepticism because they are obviously works of political propaganda, whether for the Tories or for the Whigs—both sides unrestrained by any concern for impartiality, let alone truth” (48). The advent of the Mohocks was an exceptional opportunity for each side in the political arena of London to advance their causes and cement control by discrediting rivals.

By reading the Mohock affair as a socially produced text, Guthrie locates the underlying sentiments that increased public concern. He points out that “official and popular responses to the Mohock scare suggest a general perception of crisis with respect to public order, and the feeling of instability would have been heightened by the possibility of Jacobite plots and dynastic uncertainty in the final years of the childless Queen Anne” (48). It is certainly true that the Mohocks were directly associated with political conspiracy, an extreme expression of the public sentiments Guthrie suggests played a part in amplifying the crisis. It is not necessarily surprising, given the political climate, that such theories were advanced. Gordon S. Wood suggests that “[m]ore than any other period of English history, the century or so following the Restoration was the great era of conspiratorial fears and imagined intrigues” (407). With the help of an active press, the reputation of the imagined Mohocks grew by association with the political world; the actions ascribed to them and the political context in which they appeared both contributed to the

fear they engendered.

As to the terrifying (and often ridiculous) crimes with which the Mohocks were associated, Guthrie finds little to support those claims, noting that “if there had been incidents of rolling people down hills in barrels and boring out eyes, then surely the returns of the constables and the report of the justices of the peace would give such details—but they do not” (49). Guthrie finds that the reality behind the Mohock crisis is much less exceptional than what appeared in the press. He points to a history of public fascination with “salacious stories about dissolute aristocrats, which are as much a staple of modern tabloid journalism as they were of its early eighteenth-century equivalent,” and notes that “what strikes one about the Mohock scare is its air of modernity in combining a yellow press, bitter political rivalries, rich kids gone wrong, and public fears of a rising tide of crime” (49). This insight clearly suggests that little has changed, from public fascination with the adventures and escapades of the current crop of pop stars to the officially supported culture of fear derived from the threat of terrorism.

The royal proclamation of March 17 is an official declaration of a response to what the people of the city may have perceived as a serious situation; the language of it enhances the idea that the threat is grave, while implying that an official reaction and plan for dealing with the problem is in place. However, the document includes wording which reminds Queen Anne's subjects that the responsibility for a civil society also lies with them, “Requiring and Commanding all Her Loving Subjects Whatsoever, That they use their utmost Endeavours to Discover to One of Her Majesties Justices of the Peace the Person and Persons who have or shall hereafter Offend in the manner aforesaid, to the end they may be Apprehended and Proceeded

against according to Law.” This wording relates directly to some of the changes to law enforcement that were taking place in the early part of the eighteenth century, regarding the long-standing laws that householders were responsible for taking the office of constable as their civic duty, laws “under which every male housekeeper (except the elderly and very poor, since they might easily be intimidated) was ordered to take a turn to police his community" (Beattie 114). These laws had been in place for several centuries. The system of constables and night watch was changing, a change which reflected a move away from law enforcement as a civic duty towards the professional police force that the Fieldings would begin some forty years later.

The royal proclamation is evidence of the official response which was likely occasioned by growing public concerns and complaints. Some evidence of how the people of London were feeling about the Mohocks and their supposed crime wave appears in number 309 of *The British Mercury*, where is printed the following item:

One Mr. M--d of Greys Inn, cutting a Gentleman that justled him, over the Face, was pursu'd by the Mob as a Mohock, and had been destroy'd by them, had not the Constable convey'd him away in a Coach before a Magistrate. Yesterday Morning were taken six of the Mohocks and bound over, having before they were taken, been well beaten by the Watch. (2)

Since the Mohocks were thought to be rakes, young gentlemen of at least moderate wealth, and possibly associated with the Inns of Court (Statt 186-7), and Mr M—d's ready violent response to a perceived slight is that trademark wound of the Mohocks, a cut on the face, it is hardly surprising that he was associated immediately with the gang that had been in the papers in the previous few days. The mob responds with sudden and violent anger when the opportunity to

exact retribution presents itself.

Though this sort of “mob justice” might be surprising in present-day London, Robert Shoemaker suggests that “[i]t is the spontaneous participation of passersby and spectators that is remarkable about early eighteenth-century rioting in London” (“The London 'Mob' in the Early Eighteenth Century” 281), implying that such incidents were less unusual in 1712. Mob participation in legal matters makes more sense with the knowledge that a great deal of law enforcement was still carried out by ordinary citizens, who were either victims seeking redress or appointed officers. Shoemaker points out that “individuals could arrest anyone whom they suspected of having committed a felony or having dangerously hurt a man and bring the suspect before a constable or a justice of the peace” (287) which would account at least for the willingness of the crowd to be involved. The crowd also likely knew, or at least felt, that they were on the right side of the law and would not be called to account for their actions. Shoemaker notes that “[r]iots in which suspected criminals were punished by crowds . . . rarely appear in the court records” (294). Here then was a ready opportunity for the crowd to assert some control and strike against the rakes who, according to the media, had been making the night-time streets into a forbidding space. The press was involved in creating the climate of fear that might inspire the mob to react so violently; Defoe explicitly advocates vigilante violence to combat Mohock violence, as discussed in Chapter Two.

Clearly the mob was already familiar with the Mohocks and the sort of information that appears in the remainder of the article, knowing that the Mohocks were abroad as recently as the day before. In this case the supposed Mohock is outnumbered, a significant difference from the usual stories relating to that gang. Generally the Mohocks were supposed to have outnumbered

anyone they assaulted and so were able to molest lone watchmen as well as ordinary citizens. The crowd reacted in direct physical resistance to the narrative of fear that was appearing in print; the rioters use violence to combat violence. Though it is impossible to tell who the rioters were precisely, the attack was not likely class-based; the victim was noted as a “gentleman” but Shoemaker suggests that such a crowd was likely “composed of a cross section of the London population who were likely to be in the streets” (284). Though the London poor may have made up a large portion of the mob there would also have been wealthier members of the middle and upper classes on the street. The last note about the Mohocks' beating at the hands of the watch is unnecessary factually but in terms of re-establishing the reputation of the watch, essential.³ The watch was often seen as the favourite victim of the Mohocks so an indication that the watch was victorious over the villains may have been calculated to boost the morale of the watch and possibly improve their reputation in the common view. To follow the report with this unrelated reference to the watch's earlier activities, along with the expression “well beaten” also explicitly condones the violence of the crowd, suggesting that violence was an appropriate, or at least acceptable, response to the incident. The note also implies that there have been some successes in curbing the Mohock reign of terror, an assurance to readers that the official response was effective. The message reinforces the idea that the government and its agents provide effective security, and that obedience to the government provides legal and social protection. Lawbreakers are at the mercy of the crowd.

A pamphlet that appeared on March 12 (Allen 108), titled “The Town Rakes: or, The Frolicks of the *Mohocks* or *Hawkubites*,” offers a lengthy catalogue of the kinds of violence

³ The note may refer to the arrest of Lord Hinchinbroke and others on March 12, 1712 as discussed on page 10. If this is the case the note about beating was probably an embellishment.

attributed to the Mohocks. Some of the most violent and bizarre examples of alleged Mohock crimes appear in this pamphlet; it is little wonder that it is regularly quoted. It appears to be the original source of the claim that the Mohocks “rowl'd a Woman in a Tub down *Snow-hill*, that was going to market, set other Women on their Heads, misusing them in a barbarous manner,” certainly one of the more outrageous stories about the gang. It also prints the often-repeated claim that the Mohocks were known for slitting the noses of their victims. As a piece of journalism the pamphlet is dubious at best, but as a source of public information it is calculated to create the Mohocks as a source of terror. The pamphlet says that “[t]he Watch in most of the Out-parts of the Town stand in awe of them, because they always come in a Body, and are too strong for them, and when any Watchman presumes to demand where they are going, they generally misuse them.” The watch is the primary means by which the night-time streets of the city are made secure, their presence as observers presumably discouraging criminal acts. The fact that the nascent police force of London is unable to manage the gang suggests that no one is up to the task and that the Mohocks are, if not above the law, at least beyond its reach. This is a contrary position to the suggestion in the *British Mercury* that the watch is an effective opposition to the rakes. By allowing the threat of the Mohocks to remain unresolved, the writer ensures that the subject may be profitably revisited, perpetuating the notion that the Mohocks are still a threat and that readers should continue to read (and buy) print materials about the gang.

The pamphlet also states that the Mohocks are not ordinary low-class criminals. It describes the gang as “a certain Set of Persons, amongst whom there are some of too great a Character to be nam'd in these barbarous and ridiculous Encounters, did they not expose

themselves by such mean and vulgar Exploits,” suggesting that the gang is made up of at least moderately wealthy individuals of the higher classes. The writer delves into the territory of gossip, implying that he or she knows more but is refusing to tell because of the power and status of the individuals involved. The writer also notes that “when any Watchman presumes to demand where they are going, they generally misuse them.” The idea that the watch would “presume” to accost them also hints at the gang's status, since, as Beattie points out, one of the watch's duties was “imposing a form of moral or social curfew that aimed to prevent those without a legitimate reason to be abroad from wandering the streets at night” (172). The idea of legitimacy is connected to changes in the way people used the city; with more night-time amusements available, such as theatre, those classes with money to spend on entertainment could be expected to be out after dark without criminal intentions. Beattie notes that “policing the night streets became more complicated when larger numbers of people were moving around” (172) and the watch was challenged not to overstep their authority. The watch was not well-prepared to deal with criminals who were not committing property crimes; a gentleman was simply not the sort of person for whom the watch was used to watching.

The assumption that the Mohocks were, at the least, from wealthy families is a common theme in reports about them. Statt cautions that, “[t]o assert, as many accounts did, that the rakes were 'aristocratic' youths would be an exaggeration, but they could be said to belong to a broadly defined propertied class” (191). A clear example of this assumption is demonstrated in the pamphlet called “A True List of the Names of the Mohocks or Hawkubites,” also from the Houghton Library collection, where a large number of the names listed bear the appellation 'Gent.' or 'Esq.' As Statt affirms, these titles do not necessarily indicate aristocratic ties but are

likely indications that the men listed have wealth by virtue of property. Guthrie suggests that “the *True List* seems to be sympathetic to Swift's own [Tory] party” (38) which might account for why the author of “The Town Rakes” only hinted at the people involved; if the writer's allegiance was to the Whig party then the fact that Whig scion Hinchinbroke had been arrested would have been reason enough not to identify any suspected Mohocks. The “True List” suggests that the accused are responsible “for several Murders, slitting of Men's Noses, and turning up Whipping of modest Gentlewomen” which is unusual: the gang were accused of injuring and assaulting the watch and people on the streets, but they were not widely known for killing. The mention of murder is inflationary and makes the Mohocks into a more fearsome threat, though it is a crime unsupported by the records Statt and Guthrie examine.

This particular pamphlet also greatly expands the scale of the Mohock threat, listing not less than seventy names and including reference to “several Persons of Honour (not fit to mention) that are admitted to Bail.” What may have been isolated incidents of assault is here framed as the actions of a large and well organized club with many wealthy and powerful members. The pamphlet states that the gang members listed were all arrested within the space of two days, noting that “divers others of the Gang are hourly apprehended.” The implication is that the gang is one of the larger groups in the London club scene, that they are possessed of wealth and power, and that many more still remain at large. Tales of conspiracies are even easier to believe when it appears that the Mohock club might be hundreds strong and includes powerful individuals who could not be publicly named, presumably due to their status or connections.

In several of the sources discussed, the names of suspected Mohocks are obscured, either by indirect references such as the “Pious L---'s Son” mentioned in “A True List of the Names of

the Mohocks.” Part of the reason for this tactic was to avoid possible legal repercussions, as Andrea McKenzie explains in “Making Crime Pay:”

While in theory criminal biographers could be prosecuted for libel and for plagiarism, in practice only the most blatant cases were likely to end up in court. Most writers seemed to take the minimal precaution of striking out all but the first and last letters of the names of people who were being discussed in a potentially slanderous light, and of course there was a long-standing tradition of attacking political figures and institutions indirectly through satire. (240-41)

By refusing to spell out names, writers could incriminate well-known figures in their pamphlets but claim innocence if they were threatened with legal action. By implying that the Mohocks included wealthy and powerful people the writers could also increase the sense of mystery and danger surrounding the Mohocks; as suggested, criminals with connections and status were more difficult to bring to justice. If the rakes could act without fear of legal reprisal they could not be stopped. There are also subtle hints of conspiracy at work; without the monetary motivation of the desperately poor, what could the aims of the Mohocks really be? The ambiguity is a journalistic tactic to excite imagination.

The upper class background of this particular gang challenged the London public's notions of what street violence was, and where it was expected from. It also presented some challenges to lawmakers who sought to deal with this threat against which public outcry demanded action. That these young men might have had connections to wealth and power made it less than desirable to take action against them. Though the constable or watchman might have the law on his side, the perpetrator's family could make life difficult for anyone who threatened

the future career of their heirs. And indeed, being found guilty of criminal violence would certainly be a stain on the reputation of the rakes involved, so it was in the interest of both the accused and his family to recruit whatever resources were available to ensure that there was no conviction. Statt notes that acting in the favour of the rakes are “political and economic influence, the ties of deference, the possibility of retribution, family connections and behind-the-scenes favouritism [which] made the conviction and punishment of members of the Quality singularly rare events. In large measure impunity was their birthright, and license their prerogative” (185-6). The people of London were faced with a gang that delighted in violence but also had wealth and power behind it making it difficult for the law to punish the perpetrators.

Rakes were commonly associated with the Inns of Court, which were the training halls and residences for those young gentlemen embarking on careers in law. Statt calls the Inns “dormitories,” which lends a more collegial air to their inhabitants; Statt also suggests that “the location was desirable for many, and for a young rake the low life of Holborn lay almost on the doorstep. . . Indifferent law students were notoriously liable to be drawn into lives of debauchery, and young members of the Inns generally enjoyed a handsome allowance from their families that could as easily be spent on the pursuit of intrigues as the purchase of treatises” (190). Though prone to youthful indiscretions, it is hard to understand how a group as numerous as the Mohock Club was thought to be would *all* be willing to risk their future careers and reputations by engaging in systematic street violence. The inflation of the Mohocks from a few rakes acting sporadically to an organized club numbering dozens of members is the result of exaggeration and misinformation in the media.

The Mohocks were reported to travel and commit their outrages in groups. Due to the

way in which law was enforced in eighteenth-century London, their numbers posed a problem even for those constables or watchmen who were willing to take the risk associated with pressing for a conviction. And not all were. Statt explains that “the watch had responsibility for taking offenders into custody and bringing them to a constable. The watchmen, each of whom patrolled a length of street from a sentry box, were notorious for their incompetence and corruption. It was said that a modest bribe would not only avoid arrest but gain the watchman's lantern as a light home” (192-3). Even for an honest (and competent) officer, there was also the very real threat of personal physical harm. Law enforcement was not a centralized institution, and the power of the law often depended on the purely physical ability of the watch to enforce it. Against a group of lawbreakers a lone watchman stood little chance of apprehending even one, as he would likely have to best them in a fight. It was unlikely that a criminal would simply acquiesce to the watch's request that he or she “come quietly.” Criminals could escape the law simply by beating up its representatives, such as the attack on watchman John Bouch, noted in the Introduction.

Evidence of the public perceptions of the gang can be found in private correspondence. Anne Johnson, wife of Thomans Wentworth, Earl of Strafford, says that the gang members “are said to be young gentlemen, they never take any mony from any” (*Wentworth Papers* n. 277). The lack of an economic motivation for the Mohock attacks is significant since, as Statt explains, it “reversed the typical relation of lower-class criminal to upper-class victims ... the reversal takes on more meaning in view of the absence of an economic dimension to the assaults, which, unlike the vast majority of reported offences in eighteenth-century London, could not be characterized as crimes against property” (195). Without economic reasons for their assaults the imagined Mohocks are also less sympathetic characters. The desperately poor who might

sympathize with property crimes committed in crisis would have no reason to condone the rakes' attacks. Everyone could fear the gang and their single-minded violent tendencies described in gossip and rumour.

The Wentworth Papers also includes Lady Strafford's more lengthy description of the gang and the threat they pose, along with details apparently derived from gossip in her social circle about their activities. On March 11, 1712, she writes:

Here is nothing talked about but men that goes in partys about the street and cuts people with swords or knives, and they call themselves by som hard name that I can nethere speak nor spell; but a Satturday night coming from the opera they asalted Mr. Davenant and drew there swords upon him, but he took won of them and sent to the round house, but 'tis thought 'twas sombody that would have been known and they gave mony and made their eskape, but what was the great jest about town was they said they had cut of his head of hare. (277)

Anne Johnson, the Lady Strafford, is committing to print the oral narratives that are quickly building around the subject of the Mohocks. In her brief paragraph she supplies a wealth of information, most importantly that the topic of the Mohocks was being widely discussed in the town and that it was a major preoccupation. The details she supplies are likely typical of the sort of information available to Londoners with any sort of access to information, whether from court gossip, newspapers, or coffee house discussions. Phrases such as “talked about” and “they said” indicate an oral transmission of information and an aggregate narrative built up from multiple sources. The gang Strafford describes is legion; they have enough members to organize into cadres that wander the streets with the sole aim of inflicting injury. The maligned Mr. Davenant⁴

⁴ In *Journal to Stella*, Harold Williams notes that this is Henry Molins Davenant, son of Charles Davenant and

is the target of a plurality of Mohocks, their swords implying that they are at least moderately wealthy, or have military backgrounds, and that they are willing to draw their weapons in the streets. The precise details of Davenant's encounter are unavailable and this is probably typical when such stories were told and retold in conversation.

The stories of those Londoners who were assaulted during the Mohock spring would be made more noteworthy by being associated with the popular crime wave of the moment. That Davenant was able to apprehend one of the gang is surprising, though this aspect of the story may have more to do with Davenant's own telling of it than any particular fact. His evidence is not required in any case since his quarry is apparently sufficiently well-known and wealthy enough to have escaped justice. Lady Strafford's story does have some parallels to a documented case of Mohock-related arrests and so there is likely some truth behind it, distorted by rumour and lacking direct evidence as it is.

One of the most sustained private accounts of the Mohocks and their effect on the public consciousness of London in 1712 comes from Jonathan Swift. At the time the Mohocks appeared on the London scene Swift was already an established writer of satire, and was allied with the Tory party. In his *Journal to Stella*, he makes several references to the Mohocks (or Mohacks as Swift calls them) that suggest the depth to which the rumours and press surrounding the gang were affecting Londoners. He refers to both gossip and print, sometimes favouring the former based on his distrust of the Grub Street press. Over several days he writes of the dubious nature of the storm of press surrounding the gang and, conversely, of his fear of them and their supposed nocturnal assaults. He begins briefly, adding a note to his entry of March 8, almost as an afterthought: "Did I tell you of a race of Rakes calld the Mohacks that play the devil about

grandson of poet William Davenant (509n).

this Town every Night, slitt peoples noses, & beat them &c” (508-9). There is no uncertainty in his pronouncement and he states the existence of the Mohocks as fact already established in the city of London, at least among his circle. Swift is already acquainted with the Mohocks' reputation for cutting faces and general tendency to violent assaults. He suggests that their attacks are a regular nightly occurrence and have been consistently in the public view for at least a brief time. At this point though, Swift does not think much of the Mohocks. The note appears as an addendum, suggesting that Swift has only recently heard of the rakes and is not yet concerned.

The following day Swift corroborates Lady Strafford's story about Henry Davenant: “Young D'avenant was telling us at Court how he was sett upon by the Mohacks; and how they ran his Chair thro with a Sword” (509). The Mohocks have gained a reputation for assaulting even the supposedly safer conveyances employed by those who could afford such transport, suggesting that there is no safe way to travel the streets after dark and that they do not care who they attack. Swift has also heard that the gang may be made up of individuals of status, relating that “the Bp of Salsbry's son is sd to be of the Gang” (509). Thomas Hearne had also heard the same rumour about Thomas Burnet, and was eager to believe in the young man's association with the rakes: “Bp. Burnett's Son, who was lately either Commoner or Gent. Commoner of Merton-Coll. (and hath been always look'd upon as a Young, little impudent Brat) is said to be one of the principal of the Mohocks” (327). Thomas Burnet was not unaware of his own association with the rakes, and remarks in a letter that “The Town, because I have gone sometimes to Nando's Coffeeshouse and have a sort of innate fierceness in my Looks, will have it that I am one of this gang” (Burnet, qtd. in Allen 109). Burnet may not have been entirely averse

to an association with the rakes that were so fearsome in print, but Hearne seems bent on destroying the reputation of the young man. While the Whigs and Tories could suggest that the other was at fault in the Mohock affair, individuals could use the gang as a way to publicly attack the character of their rivals.

As with many rumours about the gang's membership, Burnet's involvement was unproven but it shows the level of speculation which substituted for fact where the Mohocks were concerned. Swift's uncertainty about the Mohocks is clear, as he continues:

They are all Whigs; and a great Ldy sent to me, to speak to her Fathr and to Ld Treasr to have a Care of them, and to be carefull likewise of my self; for she had heard they had malicious Intentions agst the Ministers & their Friends; I know not whether there be any thing in this, thô others are of the Same Opinion. (509)

Swift acknowledges the possibility of a political agenda behind the Mohocks as it relates to the danger he perceives to himself, and suggests that this is not a fancy he invented himself but information passed on to him by a concerned acquaintance. He allows that the rumours may be just that, but is unwilling to completely disregard the stories. There are others in his circle who have told him they believe the Mohocks might be part of a Whiggish plot against the Tory government. Nowhere does Swift mention any official communication, or even print sources as evidence for his fears. Writing two years later, Richard Burrige was still holding fast to the ideas of conspiracy that Swift thought lay behind the Mohocks. He thought that the Whigs, “about the Streets of *London* in the Night-time of late, and under the Name of *Mohocks* did a great deal of Mischief to Men and Women, whom they knew to be against their factious Principles, by beating and cutting them after a most barbarous and inhumane manner” (*The*

History of the Rise and Growth of Schism in Europe 88). Though the fear of violence was largely gone by this point, the name of the Mohocks had found its way into the realm of political rhetoric for a time. Commentators had little trouble citing their political enemies as instigators or abettors of the Mohocks.

Swift's next entry about the Mohocks, on March 12, is a clear example of the uncertainty and ambivalence that must have become common as Mohock stories became well known. He recognizes the potential for the newspapers to exaggerate the issue but also takes the stories seriously enough that he is concerned for his safety when traveling the streets at night. He informs his readers that “Here is the D— and all to do with these Mohocks,, [sic] Grubstreet Papers about them fly like Lightning” (511), commenting on the degree to which the gang has engaged the public interest and the resulting attention the newspapers have paid to them. The reference to Grub Street here includes all papers and pamphlets not noted for their attention to fact and those that were known for printing sensational and exaggerated news. Swift clearly recognizes that the storm of press does not necessarily reflect a true crisis, and refers to the “True List” pamphlet, writing “a List Printed of near 80 put into [se]vrll Prisons, and all a Lye; and I begin almost to think there is no Truth or very little in the whole Story” (511). Swift's critical faculties are at work; he recognizes the media panic for the exaggeration that it is, and doubts the truth of the pamphlets and papers that claim to be reporting facts about the Mohock gang. He even casts doubt on Davenant's story, noting that “He that abusd D'avenant was a drunken gentleman, non of that Gang” (511). The singular pronoun suggests that Davenant was mistaken or exaggerating, as it is contrary to Lady Strafford's version of Davenant's story where the young man was attacked by a group of sword-wielding rakes. The profusion of Mohock stories and

their unlikely or contradictory content has given Swift some doubt about the situation. He specifically doubts the printed version of the narrative, based on his distrust of Grub Street journalism. However, Swift is unable to disregard the narrative altogether.

Nevertheless, Swift's vehement distrust of the narrative that is forming is belied by his own unwillingness to disregard the stories entirely: "My Man tells me, tht one of the Lodgers heard in a Coffee-house publickly, tht one design of the Mohocks was upon me, if [the]y could catch me. And tho I believe nothing of it, yet I forbear walking late" (511). Swift is not confident enough that the stories are completely untrue to disregard them. Though he does not believe the papers, he does accept second-hand coffee house gossip. Even where Londoners might be inclined, through experience or critical attention, to distrust the accounts that became readily available in the press, there is enough ambiguity to make decisive conclusions difficult to reach. What may have been most difficult to overcome is the aspect of fear and danger that surrounds the Mohocks. While perhaps not completely willing to believe in the Mohocks, particularly as they are portrayed in the media, the fear of personal physical harm is enough to encourage Londoners to act as though the gang might be real, and each repeated story does not completely resolve the issue either way. The infiltration of the newspapers' information into personal conversation means that, while a Londoner might find the media version of the account unlikely or suspect, he or she will have ample opportunities to hear corroborating stories from friends and acquaintances.

Unpublished until after his death, Swift's *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* contains a brief note on the author's continuing belief that the Mohocks were part of a Whig plot against the Tory government and its ministers. He believed that Prince Eugene of Savoy had

been hindered in his attempts to reverse the peace policy of the Tories. According to Swift, the primary obstacle to Eugene's goals was Swift's patron, Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, and Savoy sought to remove his enemy from office through assassination. Swift claims that the prince thought “[t]hat this might easily be done, and pass for an Effect of Chance, if it were preceded by encouraging some proper People to committ small Riots in the Night, and in several Parts of the Town” (26-7). As Swift had mentioned in the journal, he believed that the intended goal of the Mohocks was the assassination of Tory Ministers. Here, however, Swift does not refer to the Mohocks by name, instead referring to the gang as “A Crew of obscure Ruffians” who “acted inhumane Outrages, on many Persons, whom they cut and mangled in the Faces and Arms, and other Parts of the Body, without any Provocation” (27). Swift chose not to name the gang. Though he believed in the plot he did not hold much hope that the specifics would be long remembered. He may have underestimated the associative value of the gang's name.

Thomas Hearne shared Swift's view of the political forces behind the Mohocks, using the reputation of the gang to heap scorn upon the party he opposed. Hearne railed against the Mohocks:

They are found to be young, lewd, debauch'd Sparks, all of the Whiggish Gang, & the Whiggs are now so much asham'd of this great Scandal (provided Whiggs can be asham'd) that they publickly give out there have been no such People, nor no such Inhumanities committed, thereby indeavouring to perswade People out of their Senses. But this is only one Instance of their abominable Lying, &c. (326)

Hearne takes the status of the Mohocks as a gang rather than a club and applies it to the entire set of Whig ministers and sympathizers. He writes that it is the Whigs who are responsible for

suggesting that the Mohocks did not actually exist, and adds to the conspiracy theory rather than clarifying it. The political rhetoric connected to the gang increased its status. Guthrie suggests of the widespread fear that “what should therefore have been regarded as predictable, if unfortunate, conduct on the part of [those accused of Mohock crimes] grew out of all proportion because it occurred at a time when the public imagination was especially sensitive about political plots, secret societies, and the government's ability to maintain public order” (49). The enduring force of the Mohocks’ reputation was perhaps more a product of their time than of their power. The Whig opposition sought to reduce trust in the Tory government by suggesting that it could not contribute to the security of Londoners. By suggesting that the Mohock attacks on innocents were part of a Whiggish plot, the Tories sought to turn public opinion against their rivals. Robert J. Allen suggests that “[t]he true motives of the Mohocks were not unlike those of their seventeenth-century predecessors. It was the attempt of Queen Anne's subjects to find subtler reasons for the outrages that created the panic and lead to the confusion” (112). The public’s desire for a deeper story and a more exciting narrative built up the panic to the point at which even highly improbable claims in the press were, if not accepted, at least acceptable. The intelligent Swift was no exception, and found himself in the position of perpetuating a chimerical conspiracy that was based on the products of muck-racking journalism.

Also dismissive of conspiracy claims is the 1712 short treatise *Who Plot Best; The Whigs or the Tories*, where the author outlines several schemes supposedly hatched by each party. Of the Mohock club this author writes that “The Truth of the Matter is this, a Parcel of Wild Young Fellows frequenting a Tavern in *Fleetstreet*, when the Four Kings visited us, took upon them the Name of *Mohocks*, and play'd some such Sorts of Pranks as the *Scowrers* did 20 or 30 Years

before” (14-15). This writer comments on the profusion of stories that circulated about the gang but suggests that the narrative that emerged in the press was an exaggerated one. Instead of being a notable event in the history of London, the Mohock scare was occasioned by the very common event of intoxicated rakes involved in nocturnal rowdiness, which was followed by an eager media seeking to make some capital from the brief public concern it raised. The writer offers a selection from a contemporary publication and suggests that:

One would think by the Strength of the Reasoning, and the Beauty of the Language, that this had *pass'd under the Pen* of Dr. S—. But to deal plainly with the Reader, I took it from nor better nor worse than an Honest *Grubstreet* Half-penny Scribler, a Fellow-Labourer in the same Case, set at Work by an empty Pocket and sharp Stomach; yet this is what the Rabble hear daily bawl'd about the Street, aed [sic] greedily they suck in the Poison: These *Scriptions* reaching those who cannot buy above a Half pennyworth of Scandal at a Time. (16)

The power of the Mohock phenomenon is comprised of three parts. There are the writers who need to produce work that the public, and thus publishers, will want to buy, guided by public taste rather than an instinct to report facts. Their market is the reading public to whom the writers supply whatever stories are most exciting and timely. The interest of the public drives the writers who in turn amplify the public interest by daily providing new material on the issues of the moment. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* Jürgen Habermas explains that “One and the same discussion transposed into a different medium was continued in order to reenter, via reading, the original conversational medium” (42). Finally there are the political motives attached to the Mohocks, along with the partisan agendas that inspired commentators to level accusations at both the Whigs and Tories. The longevity of the Mohock name was ensured by its constant circulation through the mediums of oral discussion and print dialogue, and

reinforced by their value as a tool of political rhetoric.

Daniel Defoe also contributed to the Mohock lore in print, though his reaction to the reports of the gang was both more confident than Swift's and less overtly fearful. Defoe has little doubt about the existence of the gang, expressing none of the vacillations of belief that Swift allows. In number 153 of the *Review* Defoe opens his discussion of the Mohocks politically, declaring, "In a Nation and City so well govern'd as this, I cannot but wonder to see such a Consternation among the People" (613). Defoe's claim for the effectiveness of his government is not ironic; his wonder at the public concern he sees does not derive from incompetence or inefficiency in the Queen's agents but rather from the perceived gravity of the Mohock threat. Defoe is making a claim for the ability of government and its apparatus of law enforcement to manage a crisis, a claim that will later be disputed by the satirists as discussed in Chapter Two. By discussing the Mohocks so seriously Defoe also contributes to the idea that they are real.

In *The Mohocks*, watchman Bleak retroactively applies the modern name to the gangs of history, noting that "some of the greatest Men of the Kingdom were *Mohocks*, yet for all that we did not care a Fig for them" (2.117-18), and assents that "There have been *Mohocks* in all Reigns and in all Ages" (2.99-100). Defoe too applies the name broadly to any group that commits wanton violence, and notes that "It would be endless to run through the various sorts of *Mohocks* which now appear in the World" (617). Though Defoe is writing in March of 1712, he has already assigned the term, laden with ideas of savagery derived from the colonial conceptions of the Mohawk nation, to signify groups far beyond the confines of the streets of London. Defoe also found himself inadvertently included in the political aspect of the Mohocks, accused as a "Seditious Wolf in Sheeps Cloaths" in a broadside titled "The Church of England's Vision." He was incensed enough to offer a rebuttal in print. In his defense, Defoe asks, "is it not strange, that while I am proposing to you the readiest Way to Root them out, I should be Printed and cryed about the Streets, as one Concern'd in such a Villainous Practise?" (624). Though he derisively notes that "the Thing came out with an Air of *Grub-street*" (624), he is sufficiently concerned

that he offers a defence. That Defoe was anti-Tory Mohock instigator is unlikely, but it provides an example of the kind of printed speculation that fuelled the Mohock panic. Defoe uses the metaphor of Grub Street to imply a journalistic practice given over to sensation and libel, used to advance personal agendas rather than report facts. McKenzie suggests that, “given the public thirst for criminal accounts and the alacrity with which the press churned them out, no one had either the time or the inclination to be particularly discriminating” (“Making Crime Pay” 266). Defoe is the victim of a personal vendetta against him, as well as a public desire to read about criminality and conspiracy. The vehemence with which he responded to the Mohocks is implied by this broadsheet to be merely a cover story to deflect attention from his supposed political machinations.

Swift's entry of March 15 is fully concerned with information he has gained from people in his social circle, rather than from the papers which he is inclined to distrust. His disbelief has largely given way to acceptance, presumably because the stories are so often repeated, and come from a trusted source: “Ld Treasr [Robert Harley, first Earl of Oxford.] advised me not to go in a Chair, because the Mohocks insult Chairs more than they do those on Foot” (515). Swift's patron Oxford plays an important role in these narratives. Like Swift he is a Tory and thus in similar danger from the conspiracy against that party attributed to the Mohocks. He is also among those sources Swift counts as trustworthy and so Swift accepts his advice about transport. Swift states the Mohock attacks on chairs as fact though the information is probably gleaned from a number of stories and rumours circulating at the time. The most likely source is “The Town Rakes” which notes that the Mohocks “have short Clubs or Bars that have Lead at the End, which will overset a Coach, or turn over a Chair.” Reports in the media have been integrated into conversation and are repeated as fact.

The language Swift uses to preface his information about the gang is uncertain and even

vague. He writes, “They *think* there is some mischievous design in those Villains” (515; emphasis added), rather than “they know.” Even the pronoun is indistinct, referring obliquely to the collective voices of the press. For Grub Street pamphleteers intent on producing quick copy, reliance on what could be supposed to be true was the only way to frame unverifiable information without being open to immediate criticism. Dubious though they might be, media reports then gained credence by virtue of their repetition in conversation. Lady Strafford notes that everyone is talking about the Mohocks, but hardly anyone can say for certain that they have actually seen them. The language highlights the confusion that Swift and presumably others must have felt when faced with a variety of theories and sometimes competing narratives. He continues to relate the information he has acquired through oral channels, noting that “Several of them Ld Treasr *told* me, are actually taken up. I *heard* at dinner that one of them was killed last night” (515; emphasis added). Swift naturally believes that Oxford has access to reliable information but it might also be true that the Lord Treasurer's knowledge is the result of oral dispersion as well. The language Swift uses clearly points to hearsay as the primary source of his information and it is impossible to tell where the original source from that information lies. The newspapers publish accounts of Mohock violence which are exaggerated or even fabricated and the stories are then widely dispersed through social networks where they may be altered, judged and reiterated. Swift is well aware that the story about the Mohocks is far from complete; he closes his entry for the day with the consolation, “we shall know more in a Little time” (515), allowing that his knowledge is incomplete but that it is the best he can reasonably achieve.

The next day Swift adds to his Mohock lore, with a second-hand report of a nearly-personal encounter heard of at court. Swift writes, “Ld Winchelsea told me to day at Court, that

two of the Mohocks caught a maid of old Ldy Winchelseas just at the door of their House in the park where she was with a Candle, and had just lighted out somebody. They cutt all her Face, & beat her without any Provocation” (515).⁵ Swift would have reason to believe this story as it is told to him personally by someone close to the victim. In comparison to Davenant, who claims a personal encounter with the Mohocks, Lord Winchelsea has less reason to embellish; the outcome of the story does not greatly affect his own reputation. The story reinforces the idea that the Mohocks were perceived as daring and violent, and includes the characteristic act of facial cutting common to Mohock narratives. They have also struck the maid close to the safety of her home suggesting that there is no safe place on the streets after dark.

On March 18, the day after the royal proclamation “For the Suppressing of Riots” was released, Swift writes that “there is a Proclamation out against the Mohocks. one of those that are taken is a Baronett” (516).⁶ The issuance of the proclamation must have come as confirmation to many who were uncertain about the validity of the Mohock threat. Because definite conclusions are impossible to make and especially because the stakes are so high, the only option for Swift is to regard the stories as true enough to act on. Swift writes of the previous evening when he “could not get a Coach, and was alone, and was afraid enough of the Mohocks; I will do so no more, tho I got home safe” (516). A walk through the night streets of London is laden with fear based on the perception of ubiquitous Mohock gangs ready to do violence without provocation. Though they cannot obtain conclusive evidence the “right” choice for Londoners is to accept the Mohock threat and keep themselves safe, rather than to ignore the coercive narrative of fear. The stakes for disbelief in the threat posed by the imagined rake gang are too high; being wrong

5 This may be the same incident as the attack on Christon Jones noted by Statt (197).

6 Referring to Sir Mark Cole.

could mean injury or death.

At this point comes a lull in Mohock reports. Swift is prompted to write, on March 22, that “Our Mohocks are all vanisht; however I shall take care of my Person” (522). Swift has never mentioned sighting a Mohock and so presumably he means that news of them has stopped appearing, though Swift still expresses some fear. The reports of arrests have been made and little further evidence has been forthcoming so the sense of panic quickly ebbs. With less public interest there is less capital in printing stories about the Mohocks and with less newspaper reports to discuss, public interest wanes. Reports of the vanished Mohocks notwithstanding, Swift does mention them again in his March 26 entry, noting that “Our Mohawks go on still, & cut Peoples faces evry night; fais they shan't cut mine, I like it better as it is, the Dogs will cost me at least a Crown a Week in Chairs. I believe the souls of your Houghers of Cattle have gott into them, and now they don't distinguish between a Cow and a Christian” (524-5). Though the Mohocks have returned in some fashion, Swift's tone is almost cavalier towards them, expressing his own confidence that he will avoid coming to harm at their hands and even making a joke about his new habit of taking a chair to travel at night rather than walking. The narrative of fear has been promoted for too long; with little evidence of a real threat, doubt begins to overcome fear and resistance arises to the coercive force of terror. After this the Mohocks disappear from the list of those things Swift feels are important topics for his journal; at the same time the gang fades from the press in general and so became less important to the London public.

Each of these sources contains language that speaks to the vague nature of news about the Mohocks, or heightens a minor occurrence into a major event. Public sources such as pamphlets or newspapers had more rumour and supposition to add to the public discussion than details and

clear facts. Within a brief space of time the Mohocks were imagined and created as a dangerous fraternity, great in number, fearless and violent, with no clear aims aside from causing mayhem and injury. The Mohocks were thought to be well organized; frequent references to their “club” attest to that, since clubs were a well-known feature of London's culture at the time. The interest in the gang quickly reached a peak but then reports of arrests and the proclamation signifying the official reaction brought the period to a gradual close. It can be presumed that any rakes who were actually out committing violence on the streets decided that it was time to curb their activities. Perhaps it is true that the few real rakes behind the attacks were the ones arrested and that brief encounter with the law was enough to end their nocturnal attacks. The Mohock narrative had been used as a political tool by both sides but the sensational and unsustainable nature of the story had caused public trust in the narrative to wane. Fear became doubt and doubt engendered resistance to the idea that the Mohocks were a real threat, or had existed at all. At this point the Mohocks were not completely finished however. It was the turn of the satirists to manage the close of the Mohock spring.

Chapter 2 Resistance and Satire

Not everyone was willing to accept the oppressive fear that the rumoured gang exerted.

Resistance very quickly arose in the form of satire mocking the gullible readers and gossips who had accepted and contributed to the Mohock story, but the sharpest wit was especially reserved for the media that promoted the panic. While the existence of rakes was never denied, the Mohock panic was recognized as fabrication and exaggeration; satirists made light of the whole affair and everyone involved in it. What *is* denied is the authority of the media as source of inviolate information.

This chapter looks at some of the satirical material occasioned by the Mohocks. The primary sources are a series of articles in the *Spectator* and John Gay's play, *The Mohocks*. These texts, along with others appearing at the same time, treat the Mohocks as something to be amused by rather than to be feared. However, the rakes themselves are not the primary targets of the satire examined here. The interplay between media as a maker of public opinion and the public that it acts upon are the focus of these texts; they highlight both the dubious nature of the information transmitted, and the unquestioning way in which that information is often received. The writers draw attention to, and significantly resist, the way in which media expects to be uncritically accepted as fact or even history.

On March 11, 1712, at the moment when Mohock tensions were highest, *The Spectator* number 323 included a brief reference to the gang in the fictitious journal of a lady named Clarinda.⁷ In his introduction to the document, Joseph Addison notes that her journal is “the Picture of a Life filled with a fashionable kind of Gaiety and Laziness” (181). During the

⁷ In number 317 Addison recommends to his readers “the keeping a Journal of their Lives for one Week” and claims in number 323 to have received several such letters including “a very curious Piece, Entitled, *The Journal of a Mohock*” (181).

mundanity of her day Clarinda spends a great deal of time dressing, visiting, and playing cards. On Friday she notes: “*From Four to Eleven. Saw Company. Mr. Froth's Opinion of Milton. His Account of the Mohocks. His Fancy for a Pin-cushion. Picture in the Lid of his Snuff-box. Old Lady Faddle promises me her Woman to cut my Hair. Lost five Guineas at Crimp*” (183). The Mohocks are a common enough topic of conversation that even a character invented by Joseph Addison is *au courant* enough to have heard of them in passing. The Mohocks are situated solidly in the realm of idle gossip, and sub-Miltonic in the hierarchy of things Clarinda sees fit to mention. When viewed in the context of her journal as a whole, the Mohocks are reduced to nothing more than a moment of social pretension in a catalogue of forgettable moments.

The appearances of the Mohocks in *The Spectator* and the other satirical publications make light of the existence of the club itself, criticize the media that helped to enlarge the panic, and caution the public against too great a willingness to believe what amounts to merely rumours and fabrications. On March 12, 1712, the day following the brief mention of the Mohocks in Clarinda's diary, *The Spectator* 324 offers its first major sally against what is already a media panic grown beyond reason. In this article, one of Richard Steele's characters, the generous “Philanthropos,” writes:

The Materials you have collected together towards a general History of Clubs, make so bright a Part of your Speculations, that I think it is but a Justice we all owe the learned World to furnish you with such Assistances as may promote that useful Work. For this Reason I could not forbear communicating to you some imperfect Informations of a Set of Men (if you will allow them a place in that Species of Being) who have lately erected themselves into a Nocturnal Fraternity,

under the Title of the *Mohock Club*. (186)

Though nearly everything the writers of *The Spectator* have to say about the Mohocks is light in tone and generally mocking, the publication recognized some truth behind the scare. To this end the writers offer frequent gibes against the members of the club itself. Though they do not take seriously the notion that the Mohocks were an organized fraternity, they do want to make a point about the individuals whose actions might be at the root of the reports of violence on the streets. *The Spectator* claims that the young rakes of the Inns of Court were lacking in the sort of gentility, wit, and manners that the writers valued. The writers are suggesting that the conduct of the rakes is unbecoming not only of gentlemen but of any sort of human being.

Though the visit the previous year by Native North American leaders was well known and had made a great impression on Londoners, Philanthropos immediately offers some of the sort of misinformation that was a hallmark of the press and rumour surrounding the gang. He believes that the club's name is “borrowed it seems from a sort of Cannibals in India, who subsist by plundering and devouring all the Nations about them” (187). This is utterly untrue and should be a clear signal that Philanthropos is not to be trusted, that the tone is ironic. Based on the playfulness with which the *Spectator* treats the idea of “facts” connected to the Mohock gang the inclusion of this spurious information is likely intentional. Yet in the *Review* number 153 Daniel Defoe believes the passage is evidence of the failure of the *Spectator* to acquire proper facts: “With Submission to the Ingenious *Spectator*, I must dissent from his Opinion, That the *Mohocks*, from whence these People are Sir-nam'd, are a People of *India*” (613). By taking Philanthropos at face value, Defoe unwittingly associates himself with the gullible public; Defoe's own treatment of the Mohocks in his *Review* demonstrates that he believed the gang to

be real. The mistake is not entirely unprecedented and was also made after the visit of the “four kings”; Eric Hinderaker notes that “[j]ust after the kings left town, a poem recounting the details of their visit had them coming to England from India, not America” (524). It is entirely possible that Steele was aware of this earlier error and making another jest at the expense of the writer of it. However, Hinderaker does not see the cultural confusion in the *Spectator* as the irony I argue it to be, and believes, like Defoe, that Steele was simply wrong.

Philanthropos continues, mixing colonialism with proto-Orientalism in a way that presents the Mohock gang as utterly exotic. He claims that “The President is styled Emperor of the Mohocks; and his Arms are a Turkish Crescent, which his Imperial Majesty bears at present in a very extraordinary manner engraven upon his Forehead” (187). To claim that the so-called Emperor has such a clear and indelible indication of his identity is an unlikely assertion, since such a mark would make it impossible for him to appear in public without being apprehended. The emphasis on foreignness marks a move to expel the rake gang from an idealized British society. Though the *Spectator* does not claim that the rakes themselves are anything but British subjects, their behaviour and acts are dissociated from the mannered society Steele and Addison promote. The concept that the Mohocks have a leader bearing an official title speaks to the notion of the gang as one of London's many clubs that were organized along fraternal lines. Casting the gang as a club or society gives it a veneer of respectability. Philanthropos claims that “the avowed design of their Institution is Mischief; and upon this Foundation all their Rules and Orders are framed,” and underscores the suggestion that the gang is modelled after other clubs common to London by speaking of them as an “Assembly” (187). The portrayal of the Mohocks as one more club in a city rife with such institutions subtly suggests that the Mohock gang is not

particularly unusual or special, certainly not worth the media attention they have garnered.

Framing the Mohocks as a club established on particular rules with a specific agenda, Philanthropos discusses the various ranks that members of the Mohock club can occupy within their organization. He claims that the distinctions of their hierarchy are based on “the various kinds of Barbarities which they execute upon their Prisoners” (187). Philanthropos’ rationalist taxonomy implies a serious study of the gang such as might be undertaken by a later historian who had access to the gang’s minutes and proceedings. More subtly, by classifying the Mohocks and setting out their ranks the *Spectator* takes control of the rakes. By codifying the Mohocks as a club Steele has begun their reformation into respectability. While resisting the fear and loathing the Mohocks in the media generate, Steele also exerts a contrary controlling narrative, one in which the Mohocks and their like are co-opted into a mannered society. He concludes that rakish young men in general require reformation while suggesting that the Mohocks as a gang are barely more than imaginary.

Philanthropos points out that the gang, “being but of late Establishment, ... is not ripe for a just History” and adds, “to be serious, the chief Design of this Trouble is to hinder it from ever being so” (188). In this sentence the reader is alerted to the fact that, prior to this statement, the writer was specifically *not* being serious which is a clue for the moderately careful reader to take Philanthropos’ words as the satire they are intended to be. He suggests that the entire episode of the Mohock scare, characterized by press fabrications, hearsay and rumour, is immune to factual apprehension. Read without irony, as Defoe has done, the article supports the belief that the gang was far more sinister and serious than has been suggested by later historians such as Statt and Guthrie.

Having had some fun at the expense of a credulous press and public, the writer turns his attention to the likely targets of the article, in line with *The Spectator's* goal “to enliven Morality with Wit, and to temper Wit with Morality” (1:44) and informing a society of politeness and manners. Behind the facade of Dancing Masters, Lion-Tippers, and Tumblers were likely a group of young men characterized by Philanthropos as “some thoughtless Youngsters, [with] ... an immoderate Fondness to be distinguished for Fellows of Fire” (188). While the real rakes may have been delighted with the furor raised by their actions, the writer seeks to undermine any reputation they may feel they have gained from the public response, pointing out “that it is not Courage for half a score Fellows, mad with Wine and Lust, to set upon two or three soberer than themselves; and that the Manners of Indian Savages are no becoming Accomplishments to an English fine Gentleman” (188). The writer ridicules both the name and actions of the gang, cautioning that there is a higher moral authority to be obeyed, that of the gentleman. The *Spectator* asserts that prerogatives of class or wealth come with responsibilities and codes of behaviour that these young men have failed to achieve. While allowing that there may be a core of the group “as have been Bullies and Scowrsers of a long standing” who are “too hardened to receive any Impressions from [the *Spectator's*] Admonitions,” Philanthropos suggests that young men who might emulate or join the unredeemable criminals “will probably stand corrected” if only they can be convinced of the error of their ways. While not making any claims that he believes that rebellious young men would be convinced by this reproach, Philanthropos has indicated no social currency or esteem can be gained as a rake for anyone who wishes to be considered an important part of London society.

It is more than a week later that the *Spectator* offers another account of the Mohocks in

number 332 from Friday, March 21. This letter, from the appropriately named Jack Lightfoot, purports to fill out the previous article with further information on yet another rank of the Mohock club which is here called the Sweaters. The language of this epistle treats the Mohocks as almost friendly, describing the victims as patients and the attacks as a benign form of exercise rather than a vicious assault:

It is it seems the Custom for half a dozen, or more, of these well-dispos'd Savages, as soon as they have inclos'd the Person upon whom they design the Favour of a Sweat, to whip out their Swords, and holding them parallel to the Horizon, they describe a sort of Magick Circle round about him with the Points. As soon as this Piece of Conjuration is perform'd, and the Patient without doubt already beginning to wax warm, to forward the Operation, that Member of the Circle towards whom he is so rude as to turn his Back first, runs his Sword directly into that Part of the Patient wherein School-boys are punished; and, as it is very natural to imagine this will soon make him tack about to some other Point, every Gentleman does himself the same Justice as often as he receives the Affront. After this Jig has gone two or three times round, and the Patient is thought to have sweat sufficiently, he is very handsomly rubb'd down by some Attendants, who carry with them Instruments for that purpose, and so discharged.

(224)

The attack described here is barely injurious and treats the Mohock gang as frivolous and immature rather than diabolical. Where the papers and pamphlets had recently printed gruesome stories of bizarre tortures inflicted on Mohock victims, Lightfoot uses grandiloquent expressions

to add superfluous detail to his addition to the narrative and couches the whole in terms of a treatment, a turkish bath calculated to cleanse the subject. This is the beginning of the *Spectator's* move to adopt the Mohocks for a more moral project, recasting the rakes as a force to clean the Town and City of vice. The Mohocks perform what amounts to a magic ritual on their victims; connotations of quackery and fable directly critique the conceptions of a public willing to believe fully in the Mohock rakes. The result is a mockery of all accounts that claim to offer facts about the gang, its activities, or its membership.

Lightfoot introduces the Mohocks with the curious epithet of “well-dispos'd Savages,” language which brings to mind the description of “Evil-disposed Persons” in the proclamation of March 17. That proclamation was intended to deal with "Inhumane" people responsible for "Barbarities" committed in the London area. Throughout the Mohock literature are scattered numerous examples of language calculated to create a sense of foreignness and otherness applying to the rakes and their acts. Philanthropos calls the Mohocks a "worthy Society of Brutes" (223) while Thomas Hearne expresses partisan intolerance, declaring that "all Whiggs are look'd upon as Mohocks, their Principles & Doctrines leading them to all Manner of Barbarity & Inhumanity" (328). The key tension illustrated in this language can be found in Samuel Johnson's definition of barbarous: "Stranger to civility; savage; uncivilized" (n.p.; ECCO image 200). Naturally enough this definition leads to civility, which Johnson defines as "Politeness; complaisance; elegance of behaviour" as well as "Rule of decency; practice of politeness" (n.p.; ECCO image 381). The Mohocks and their aberrant acts are a direct affront to a British conception of civilization and are used by various writers to make claims about what is required of civilized people. The *Spectator* wants them to be witty and well-mannered and Hearne wants them to be Tories. With none of Swift's fear, Defoe advocates the use of

"*Protestant Flails*," a kind of street-fighting weapon, and declares that "the first *Mohock* that tastes of this Physick, is instantly cur'd ... [of] all his Barbarity and inhumanity ... he shall confess the Distemper, however violent, has left him, and be the gentlest Civiliz'd quiet Gentleman in the Place, for ever after" (615). The irony of beating civilization into someone should be comical or at least ridiculous but Defoe does not intend it as a joke. Fortunately the *Spectator* does treat the Mohocks as a joke, and an extended and intricate one.

Lightfoot includes a report of his own Mohock encounter, likely aiming satire at the sorts of stories being told by Londoners of their own meetings with the gang. The story told by Henry Mollins Davenant which was mentioned by Jonathan Swift and Lady Strafford is an example of such an unsubstantiated narrative and one thing lacking in most "serious" reports is claims of direct encounters with the gang. Lightfoot's response to the approach of a group of Mohocks is rather more pragmatic than heroic. He recounts that, faced with drawn swords and:

suspecting they were some of the Ringleaders of the Bagnio, I also drew my Sword, and demanded a Parly; but finding none would be granted me, and perceiving others behind them filing off with great diligence to take me in Flank, I began to sweat for fear of being forced to it: but very luckily betaking my self to a Pair of Heels, which I had good Reason to believe would do me justice, I instantly got possession of a very snug Corner in a neighbouring Alley that lay in my Rear; which Post I maintain'd for above half an hour with great Firmness and Resolution. (224-5)

Continuing in his verbose style, Lightfoot describes the encounter as a military operation which amounts to a tactical retreat. Though his language is flowery and euphemistic, he describes a scenario that a self-aggrandizing gentleman or a courtier mindful of preserving his reputation

would likely avoid relating. The tale is comical as Lightfoot claims firmness and resolution in his cowardice. The reader is not expected to fault Jack Lightfoot for his discretion, but rather to note that the reality of any tale told of a Mohock encounter probably resembles this one more than the stories the watchmen tell of heroically defeating large numbers of the gang in Gay's *The Mohocks*. Lightfoot concludes triumphantly, noting that he “made a handsome and orderly Retreat, having suffer'd no other Damage in this Action than the Loss of my Baggage, and the Dislocation of one of my Shoe-heels, which last I am just now inform'd is in a fair way of Recovery” (225). Lightfoot also reiterates Philanthropos' assertion that the Mohocks are simply in want of some guidance and counsel on manners and propriety, and if Mr. Spectator “would take a little Pains with them, they might be brought into better order” (225). Once again the rakes that might actually have been responsible for some real attacks are disparaged as ill-mannered and lacking in gentlemanly qualities, a move directed against any hubristic youth who might have had aspirations to emulate the Mohocks. Lightfoot's narrative denies the serious threat that the Mohocks were imagined to be. *His* imaginary Mohocks are a rebuke to the media version of vicious thugs who were, most likely, equally invented.

A final note comments on the quality of Lightfoot's character as well as the manner in which information about the Mohocks was acquired and transmitted. Having referred to the Sweaters as a “walking Bagnio” (224), he takes care to mention that he would have “sent this four and twenty Hours sooner, if I had not had the Misfortune of being in a great doubt about the Orthography of the word Bagnio” which he diligently researches before committing it to print. He explains that the news is more than a day old, which can also be seen in the “True List of Names...” pamphlet which records Mohock news for the previous three days, and which draws

attention to the fact that the news was not necessarily timely. Though Lightfoot cannot be seriously commended for fact-checking, an aspect of the Mohock press reports that is often wanting, his examination consists of visiting “the Bagnio in Newgate-street, and ... that in Chancery lane, and finding the original Manuscripts upon the Sign-posts of each to agree literally with my own Spelling” (225). Lightfoot's research on the Mohocks is specifically not about the Mohocks. Even where a journalist writing about the Mohocks might have made a pretence of serious research, the rapidity of production allowed little time for serious essays in this direction.

The Mohocks are mentioned briefly as asides in various character narratives that appear in other numbers of the *Spectator*. On March 25 there is noted a concern that “there would not be some danger in coming home late, in case the Mohocks should be Abroad” (240) and on March 28 the writer claims to have been so moved by a play that he “could at an Extremity have ventured to defend your self and Sir ROGER against half a Score of the fiercest Mohocks” (253). The Mohocks have become a part of the regular jargon of London and are no more to be feared, according to the writers of the *Spectator*, than the tides of the Thames or the stinks of Fleet Ditch. They are simply one more slightly inconvenient aspect of life in the city.

The final word from the *Spectator* on the subject of the Mohocks comes after the general concern has died down and the gang is no longer the subject of extensive press reports. On April 8, one week before Gay's play was to be published, number 347 of the *Spectator* effectively closes the book on the Mohocks, first noting doubts about any truth behind the stories of gang violence and then offering a complete reversal of any diabolical reputation the real rakes might have gained. The writer, Eustace Budgell, finds that “the Opinions of the Learned, as to their

Origin and Designs, are altogether various, insomuch that very many begin to doubt whether indeed there were ever any such Society of Men” (292), and suggests that many people have come to believe that the “late Panick Fear” was unfounded. However, the writer is reluctant to pass such judgement himself, pointing out that “there was too much Reason for that great Alarm the whole City has been in upon this Occasion” (292). His uncertainty is based on a letter he introduces and claims to have had for some time.

Dated March 15, the letter is signed by Taw Waw Eben Zan Kaladar, Emperor of the Mohocks. Budgell does allow that he has some misgivings about the veracity of the letter, though his primary reason is ironic: he is “not fully satisfied that the Name by which the Emperor subscribes himself, is altogether conformable to the Indian Orthography” (293). The letter makes the claim that, rather than a force of evil on the streets, the Mohocks are agents who seek to reform “Persons of loose and dissolute Lives” (294). These re-imagined Mohocks are so civic minded as to offer that anyone who may have been unjustly injured by them “shall be forthwith committed to the Care of our principal Surgeon, and be cured at our own Expence, in some one or other of those Hospitals which we are now erecting for that purpose” (294). There follows a list of strictures delivered to the Emperor's subjects concerning the times that their various offices previously outlined in the *Spectator* may be exercised, for example noting that “the Tumblers, to whose Care we chiefly commit the Female Sex, confine themselves to Drury-Lane and the Purlieus of the Temple” (295), areas known for prostitution and licentious behaviour. The Mohocks are presented as benign guardians of London who seek to reform the city by enforcing curfews and curbing indecencies. The letter overturns earlier conceptions that the Mohocks were servants of anarchy who attacked the watch and made life a danger for Londoners; instead they

act to keep the streets and city safe and “promise, on our Imperial Word, that as soon as the Reformation aforesaid shall be brought about, we will forthwith cause all Hostilities to cease” (295). Officers of the law are supposed to do what the Mohocks claim they are doing, a suggestion that current legal practices are ineffective. The final joke is that the task the Mohocks have set themselves is unachievable and therefore the closing of their contract to defend the streets of London will never come. Though the rakes are not completely absolved, the London population as victims of the Mohocks' crimes are not completely innocent either. The Mohocks and the *Spectator* have become allies in the reformation of manners and society.

Though not as clearly satirical or ironic as the articles in the *Spectator*, a curious addition to the sources on the Mohocks are their songs. Appropriate to the idea that the rakes were young students attached to the Inns of Court, these songs lend an air of collegial camaraderie to the gang. One of these, “The Huzza,” appears in the collection of Mohock-related material at the Houghton Library, Harvard (Houghton fMS Eng 1039). Guthrie notes that “[t]he Mohocks may actually have sung it, but it is more than likely a Grub Street fabrication that cashed in on the nine days' wonder of the scare” (38). Like a Mohock Club anthem, “The Huzza” (Appendix I) suggests an exuberant spirit to the Mohocks' night-time revels, but contains a thread of the resisting agenda of criminal as a liberator from oppressive authority. In this first verse the Mohocks state their agenda:

When the Streets are all clear,
The Town is our Own;
We *manage* the Humour, and laugh at the Fear
Of all those we *Lay on*.

Down goes the *Bully*, the *Heck*, and *Night-walker*;
But oh! the Brisk Girl, we will never forsake her.
The Constable flies,
And his Clubmen withdraw,
When they hear the fierce Cries
Of the dreadful *Huzza*, *Huzza*, *Huzza*!

The tone of the song is far removed from the sinister political machinations ascribed to the gang by Swift and others, but the assertion of control over the streets of London is a significant reminder of the power the Mohocks held over the imaginations of citizens. This verse describes the specific types of people whom they attack on the night-time streets; “Bully” (“bully” n.1, def. 4) and “Heck” (“Hector” n, def. 2) both occur in the sense of a swaggering bravo, the sort of person who might frighten ordinary citizens but holds no fear for the Mohocks singing their way through the streets. “Night-walker” could refer to a prostitute, but the term was also used literally, though associated with nocturnal criminal activities (“night-walker” n., def. 1a). In fact Defoe calls the Mohocks a “New Race of Villainous Night-Walkers” (617). Philanthropos notes that the Mohocks “enter into no Alliances but one, and that is Offensive and Defensive with all Bawdy-Houses in general, of which they have declared themselves Protectors and Guarantees” (188), but “Brisk Girl” had the sense of a “lively, forward woman, a wanton” (“brisk” adj., def. 6Bb) so the “Night-walker” of this verse is not likely a prostitute. However, if the gang is cleaning up the streets of low and high folk alike, they’re cheerfully unapologetic about their own licentiousness. They pick their fights carefully and are quite content to leave promiscuous women (or prostitutes) be, as clearly there are pleasures to be preserved. The verse makes

particular note of attacking the sorts of characters that are not entirely law-abiding citizens, but later lines record that “The Gown, Surplice, or Sword, / We spare not at all” (11-12). These terms are synecdoches corresponding to “the Lawyer, the Priest, and the Captain” (15) who are all felled by the Mohocks. The collection of victims in threes suggests that the second two groups, as representatives of state, church, and military, are potentially criminal characters like the bully, heck and night-walker. The Mohocks portrayed in this song are far from Defoe's “Offspring of Hell.” Though they control the streets and spread fear amongst the population, these Mohocks have been co-opted by an agenda that resists the authority of swaggering thugs and government officials alike. These Mohocks claim that “ on the Huzza, we are honest, and wary. / We make the Rogues fly, / Or embrace our New Law” (36-8). This gang is allied with the Emperor in the *Spectator* and pursues rebellion and reformation, rather than anarchy and mayhem.

The most dire of tales about the Mohocks associate the gang with nothing less than an attack on the civil society of England, and credit them with a political plot to destabilize the nation, as did Jonathan Swift and Thomas Hearne, as previously discussed. A pamphlet titled “An Argument Proving from History, Reason, and Scripture, That the Present Mohocks and Hawkubites Are the Gog and Magog mention'd in the Revelations, And therefore That this vain and transitory World will shortly be brought to its final Dissolution” (Houghton fMS Eng 1039) exaggerates such speculations to their most extreme end. Neil Guthrie suggests that “Gay was almost certainly responsible for [this] broadside ... about the Mohock scare, possibly written with the assistance of Pope” (38). Though the precise date of this pamphlet is obscure it was likely published quite quickly in response to the scare, given Gay's ability to produce his longer play so soon after the events it satirized. The writer of the broadside claims that the piece was “Written

by a Reverend Divine, who took it from the Mouth of the Spirit of a Person, who was lately slain by one of the Mohocks.” The pamphlet contains a series of nonsensical sentences and incomprehensible claims cited as evidence that a Biblical apocalypse is immanent. The writer points out the “near Resemblance betwixt the Names of Mohock and Gog, Hawkubite and Magog” and claims that “Gog and Magog, in the antient Language of the *Picts*, signifie Mohock and Hawkubite.” It is unlikely that any reader would have taken such claims seriously and those who did believe them were certainly among the subjects of this satire. The title of the pamphlet makes a grand claim and then completely fails to support it in the subsequent text; verbosity is substituted for veracity. Like the pieces in the *Spectator*, this pamphlet also suggests that the sources for information about the Mohocks are unreliable at best, relying as it does on the transcription of a speech made by the ghost of “the *Porter* that was barbarously slain in *Fleet-street* by the Mohocks and Hawkubites.” The spirit also mentions that the Mohocks “put their Hook into my Mouth, [and] they divided my Nostrils asunder,” corroborative allusions to the crimes that had been attributed to the gang and which had become tropes of the entire episode. The author stylistically reminds readers that other reports are equally bereft of real information, criticizing the pamphleteers and writers who created the Mohocks as a serious threat, in reality only repeating a small canon of Mohock apocrypha and making up the volume with meaningless supposition.

John Gay's play *The Mohocks* is a longer satirical response to the Mohock panic in the spring of 1712, most likely published on April 15. An advertisement in *The Evening Post* number 419 supplies the date of publication as April 15. John Fuller also notes the date as April 15 (5), while Gay's own dedication is dated April 1. This last is most likely a joke. The target of

Gay's satire was literary as well as public, aimed at John Dennis who had criticized Gay's friend Alexander Pope (Fuller 206), but my focus here is on the events as portrayed in the press and Gay's telling of the Mohock narrative. Gay provides a series of stereotypes drawn from popular public imagination including the gang, the watch, and the magistrates of London. As Peter Lewis notes in "Another Look at John Gay's 'The Mohocks,'" Gay's play "undoubtedly opens as a burlesque of Augustan tragedy, but after only one scene the burlesque suddenly stops and gives way to a straightforward farce about an adventure of the Mohocks" (791). Lewis suggests that Gay was "carried away by the farcical possibilities of his material and abandoned the more difficult task of burlesque" (791). Gay offers a pointed look at the reputation of the gang as viewed through the lens of the numerous outlandish rumours that began to spread about their activities, and at the reaction of both the public and the law.

The satire begins with the front matter which declares that the play "was Acted near the Watch-house in *Covent-Garden*. By Her MAJESTY's Servants" (77). The play had not been performed there by actors at the date of its publication, nor was it performed during Gay's lifetime; what he suggests here is that his comical portrayal of the watch and constable reflects the truth of how those persons performed their duties among the taverns, theatres and bawdy houses of the Covent Garden district. Gay makes the claim that the actions of the real watch, legal officials, and the Queen's servants are farcical.

The play opens in the den of the Mohocks, where the gang is performing a dark rite that highlights their allegiance with Hell and the Devil. Abaddon boasts, "Thus far our Riots with Success are crown'd" (1.1), and goes on to outline victories over the watch who are supposed to protect the people of London and keep the peace in the city's streets. The use of the word "riots"

mirrors the language of the royal proclamation against the Mohocks issued March 17, 1712. The Mohocks are portrayed as an organized and diabolical club, rather than an informal gathering of high-spirited and alcohol-driven rakes. Gay's response was timely; he names one of his Mohocks Cannibal, either in homage to Steele's jest in the *Spectator* or perhaps a jibe at Defoe's expense.

Watchman Bleak underscores the notion that the Mohocks were not an unusual phenomenon, recalling "the ancient *Mohocks* of King *Charles* his Days; I was a young Man then; now times are alter'd with me—some of the greatest Men of the Kingdom were *Mohocks*, yet for all that we did not care a Fig for them" (2.115-18). There are several threads of meaning worth following in this speech. First, Bleak points out that there were Mohocks in London some thirty years before the spring panic of 1712, which suggests that there is nothing particularly noteworthy about the supposed gang currently active in the city. Rather than a sign of the apocalypse, as suggested in "An Argument Proving from History, Reason, and Scripture . . .", the gang is representative of a cyclical outbreak of violence that is outside recent memory, but not completely outside the experience of Londoners.

Bleak also points out that, when those former Mohocks were active, he himself was young. The King Charles he speaks of is likely Charles II but that would still make Bleak a middle-aged man at least, and a typical specimen of the older sort of men the watch was generally perceived to be made up of. Part of the criticism levelled against the watch was that its members were not capable of the physical demands of apprehending criminals who chose to resist arrest. The perceived physical inability of the watch to deal with criminals was also compounded by the fact that, as poorly paid contractors, the watchmen had little motivation to exert themselves in the pursuit of their jobs. The belief was that the watchmen would often opt

for self-preservation over any attempt to catch criminals who were likely to injure them. Thus, in the view of the public, watchmen were weak and cowardly; Gay characterizes his watchmen as the latter sort of person.

Since the watch lacked the formal training and support that we associate with a modern police force, their reluctance to put themselves in harm's way makes sense but, for Londoners afraid of the night-time streets of their city, the cowardice of the watch was a just reason to ridicule them. Beattie notes that "much of the evidence deployed by contemporary advocates of reform was particularly critical of constables and watchmen who were virtually to a man condemned as old and infirm, cowardly, and ineffectual" (79); Gay does not modify this view in the slightest. When faced with a marauding band of Mohocks, Frost decides that discretion is the better part of valour. He recounts, "I blow'd out my Candle, and lay snug in the corner of a Bulk" (2.58-9). Rather than challenge the criminals, this watchman simply puts out the light that marks him as a member of the watch and hides, avoiding his responsibility but also saving himself a likely severe beating. Frost's self-interest underscores a tension in London's perception of their police; though empowered and expected to impose security on London's streets, they were nothing more than average citizens without special training or great resources. Though their cowardice is comical, the actions of Frost and his fellows express a view that the Queen's protection was insufficient.

The watchmen in the play are thrown into a complete panic at the merest suggestion of a Mohock approaching and can do little more than quake in fear and exhort each other to stand firm until Starlight admits that it was "Nothing but Fancy, Neighbours, all's well, only a shadow, only a shadow; but if they had come—" (2.77-8). Gay emphasizes the panic of the watchmen and

constable by using long dashes to break up the speech, to suggest halting or disjointed talk. This technique is exemplified in the constable's speech:

Therefore, Neighbours,—as our Duty requires us—I order the greatest Party of you to go—through all the several—Streets—Lanes and Alleys—to endeavour—to seize—and apprehend the *Mohocks*—if you apprehend them— d'ye hear—bring them hither before me—But if—they apprehend you—d'ye hear—then—you need not come (2.99-104).

The constable is fully willing to apprehend and arrest Mohocks who have already been pacified but is deathly afraid to deal with Mohocks who have the upper hand. Ironically, the constable *should* be ready to confront Mohocks on the prowl, based on his duty to protect the streets and citizens of London. That he does not plays to the stereotypes of watchmen as self-interested and cowardly men who are largely incapable and ineffective. Yet the constable was likely an ordinary citizen, equal in training and resolve to the neighbours he calls on to help. Exactly the same sentiment is suggested in the royal proclamation of March 17 in which the Queen commands the assistance of all her subjects in the apprehension of the Mohocks. It is very likely that said subjects would be highly resistant to the idea that they should attempt to deal with a gang of violent rakes themselves, and might wonder at the inability of the government and all its resources to deal with the problem. The stereotype of a cowardly watch is not denied here, but rather mitigated. Any male Londoner might find himself elected into the constable's role.

The constable is more than willing to adhere to the tenets of order when it benefits his well-being; as the watch ventures into the streets he cautions, “Hold, hold, Gentlemen, let us do all things in order—Do you advance, Gentlemen, d'ye see, and while you advance I'll lead up the

Rear" (2.127-9). When the watch does finally encounter the gang they fear so much, the conflict is resolved within a single scene note: "The Watch throw down their Poles and fall on their Knees" (2.139a). Though treated with a touch of compassion, the watch and the public officials who are supposed to be in charge of keeping the streets safe are thoroughly lampooned in Gay's play. They are cowardly and perhaps old but they are not corrupt in the way that law enforcement is portrayed in *The Beggars Opera*. In this play it is difficult to call any of the characters truly villainous.

The fear expressed by the watchmen, though exaggerated, is less damning when viewed through the lens of contemporary newspapers and the outrageous claims those publications made about the deeds of the Mohock gang. Abaddon relates that the Mohocks are unstoppable and that they trounce any whom they meet. Gay references the media hyperbole frequently, and aims his satiric wit at the credulous public as well as the publishers who sought to sell issues by exciting unnecessary panic. The Mohock Moloch claims that, "The Name of *Mohock* ev'ry Tongue employs;" (1.10), a statement that is true but only because of rumour, gossip and printed news rather than the actual deeds of the gang. The conversations of the watchmen are the clearest source for examples of the kind of credulous public gossip and media-managed panic-mongering that Gay ridicules. Scene 2 begins with a complex statement by Watchman Moonshine to his fellow Cloudy: "Lookye, Brother Watchman, you are a Man of Learning and can read the News" (2.1-2). Moonshine does not simply state that a learned person can read. The addition of "the News" to the end of his statement suggests a clearly naïve assumption that newspapers are the province of the educated, including the production of the Grub Street presses in a category that also includes the works of writers like Swift and Pope. Moonshine's declaration could also be

interpreted to mean that the news is so full of hyperbole and misinformation that an education is required to assess the public press critically, and to glean the truth from it.

The banter between the members of the watch presents a number of examples of the sort of rumour and gossip that drove the Mohock panic, and is indicative of the sorts of stories that would have been supported by newspapers publishing stories to appeal to the gossips. These stories can be characterized as either direct experiences or as tales heard from another party. Cloudy recounts that, "Poor John Mopstaff's Wife was like to come to damage by them—for they took her up by the Heels and turn'd her quite inside out—the poor Woman, they say, will ne'er be good for any thing more—honest John can hardly find the Head from the Tail of her" (2.63-7). Clearly exaggerated, Cloudy's story is an example of the kind of tale that might be told and re-told about the Mohocks, and is the result of public gossip running rampant. Cloudy is laughably gullible, and Gay is hinting that many Londoners might have been equally willing to believe nearly anything attributed to the Mohocks. Starlight provides an ironically serious counter view of the Mohocks power as he explains to his superior, "Oh, Master Constable, [the Mohocks are] bloody-minded Fellows! that have broke more Windows than the great Storm, and are more mischievous than a Press-gang" (2.22-4). Though the damage caused by the storm that lashed London in 1703 was significant, breaking windows is a mild offence compared to the inversion of a person's body that Cloudy recounts. The issue of press-gangs is more complex and speaks to some of the critique of authority that Gay hints at in *The Mohocks* and explores more completely in *The Beggar's Opera*.

Though press-gangs engaged in violent behaviour, they were working for the same authority that the watch represents. Impressment was the practice of forcible recruitment for

Britain's naval forces. As Nicholas Rogers explains in *The Press Gang: Naval Impressment and Its Opponents in Georgian Britain*, “impressment often entailed a high degree of coercion” (4) even though the press gangs were ostensibly agents of the government. The gangs were known for “the casual violence they dished out to ordinary folk on the street” (9), just as the Mohocks were. The Mohocks were supposedly young gentlemen, a class that should have taken part in promoting civil life yet they were instead law-breakers; the press gangs were agents of an authority that was also responsible for protecting its citizens. The streets were not safe when the press gangs were about; here Gay is questioning the legitimacy of an authority that is not only incapable of protecting its subjects, but acts to oppress them. Here again a supposed clear distinction between law-breakers and law-enforcers is shown to be indeterminate and somewhat dubious.

The constable is able to add to the catalogue of rumours about the deeds of the Mohock gang, though purely in terms of what is said about the rakes: “Why, they say that they slit Noses, cut and slash all they meet with, poach Folks in the Calves of the Legs, and disturb us and our Officers in our lawful Authority” (2.29-31). The constable sums up the gossip that is supposedly part of the common discourse in London, and points out that not only are the Mohocks violent, but also target the watch specifically. The rumour mitigates somewhat the cowardice of the watchmen in the play since they, like Swift, believe they are the favoured targets of the Mohocks and more likely to come to harm. Though the constable speaks of things he has only heard, that are talked of when the subject of the Mohocks is broached in conversation, some of his watchmen claim to have had encounters with the gang themselves.

Frost says that he “saw them hook a Man as cleverly as a Fisher man would a great Fish

—and play him up and down from *Charing-Cross* to *Temple Bar*—they cut off his Ears, and eat them up, and then gave him a swinging Slash in the Arm—told him that bleeding was good for a fright, and so turn'd him loose" (2.52-6). Frost admits that rather than intervene and exercise his duty and powers as a watchman, he hid himself away from the violent gang. Not to be outdone, Starlight offers his own tale of a Mohock encounter and declares a blatant and comical exaggeration. In response to Frost, he cries, "Poh—poh!—that's nothing at all—I saw them cut off a Fellow's Legs, and if the poor Man had not run hard for it, they had cut off his Head into the bargain" (2.60-62). Starlight's impossible narrative of legless running serves a comical purpose for Gay's play but also suggests that the publicly available narrative of the Mohocks is hardly tenable when subjected to scrutiny.

Starlight supplies another account of the Mohocks, which he claims as his own experience. His longer tale contains a number of unlikely events and sounds as if he is adding details as he is telling it:

let me see—ay—to-morrow Night, 'twill be three Nights ago—when I was going my round—I met about five or six and thirty of these *Mohocks*—by the same token 'twas a very windy Morning—they all had Swords as broad as Butchers Cleavers, and hack'd and hew'd down all before them—I saw—as I am a Man of credit, in the Neighbourhood—all the Ground covered with Noses—as thick as 'tis with Hail-stones after a Storm. (2.37-45)

Starlight reiterates the notion that the Mohocks are capable of supernatural violence but his story is nearly incoherent in its multiple digressions and reversals, which emulates the sort of dialogue one might expect to hear from a prevaricator from whom an entertaining tale is demanded. One

could imagine that, in performance, a slight pause in the middle of “five or six and thirty” would indicate an immediate embellishment, adding thirty to the size of the gang to account for their exceptional ability to detach noses. Though Starlight does claim that he “met” the Mohocks, he is not able to indicate how he alone was spared the removal of his nose.

Cloudy points out that the poles the watchmen are armed with are an ideal weapon for confronting Mohocks, and recounts that “I, one Night, Mr. Constable, clap'd my Back against the Watch-house, and kept nine *Mohocks*, with their Swords drawn, at Poles length, broke three of their Heads, knock'd down four, and trim'd the Jackets of the other six” (2.111-14). In his haste to appear heroic, possibly in comparison to Frost's admission of cowardice, Cloudy miscounts his foes, beginning with the respectable number of nine and ending by doing damage to thirteen of the miscreants. Cloudy's blatant exaggeration reiterates a gullible response to the Mohock affair, and Gay is pointing out how quickly a relatively minor event of London street violence is compounded in multiple tellings until it bears little resemblance to the truth.

Gay is also able to level some subtle insults against the real rakes behind the Mohock narrative. The references to facial deformities inflicted by the Mohocks can easily be read as references to the disfiguring effects of syphilis. As the constable points out, “between Whores and *Mohocks*, we shall not have a Man left with a handle to his Face—Heav'n keep us, say I--- and preserve that Member from danger---for a Man of Reputation would never be able to show his Nose after such an Affront” (2.46-50). Certainly an encounter with the Mohocks has the potential to emasculate and pose a serious danger to “that Member,” which is clearly a doubled meaning referring both to the male nose and the penis. Yet the Mohocks then are almost like carriers of the disease; indeed, as rakes it may have been a common gibe at the dangers wealth

and prerogative can bring. Though the watch and constable fear the physical injuries they might sustain from the gang, the implication that the Mohocks are akin to diseased prostitutes pokes fun at the real gang's reputation.

While the justices sit at their court in a tavern and discuss the finer points of law in the third scene, the disguised Mohocks bring their prisoners before them for trial. The justices are eager to make an arrest and it is only the timely intervention of Joan Cloudy that saves the watchmen and the constable. Gay makes use of the gang's ranks as outlined in the *Spectator*, and has the Mohocks name the members of the watch variously as Lion-Tippers, Dancing Masters, and Tumblers (though they call this last the Master Cooper). When asked to defend themselves, Cloudy at first states his occupation as a watchman, but, under threat from the Mohocks, reverts to the role they have impressed upon him. Rather than question the change in story, Justice Kindle pronounces Cloudy guilty, stating "when a Man talks backwards and forward—I have done with him" (3.74-5). Though cursory, this sort of procedure was not uncommon to the legal system in early eighteenth century London. As Beattie explains:

[u]ncovering crime and identifying suspects were left to the public and to the efforts of victims. An officer who saw an offence in progress had a duty to act, but there was little expectation that magistrates, constables, or watchmen would turn detective and investigate offences on their own initiative. They responded to public complaints and acted only when an accused offender had been identified.

(85)

Gay uses the frame of the Mohock story to point out the shortcomings of a legal system that was increasingly perceived to be unequal to the task of managing crime in the rapidly changing city

of London. The government issued proclamations implying that all the Queen's resources were engaged in creating safety on the streets while at the same time directly recruiting her subjects in the project of law enforcement. Gay examines this assumption and finds in it an opportunity to ask what value the official legal system and its agents have if they are not able to reduce the fear that their dire proclamations propagate.

The character of law enforcement in London changed as the city did, but usually as a reaction to new problems rather than due to civil foresight on the part of administrators. With elected constables often opting to pay their way out of the office and paid deputies becoming more common, there were already grassroots tendencies towards the sort of professional police force the Fieldings would advocate for some four decades later as they created the Bow Street Runners. Without official oversight, however, the process of law enforcement becomes haphazard and usually connected to money. Beattie has found evidence of “the efforts made by the aldermen and other officials in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries to establish some control over the officers who were supposed to police the streets” (83), efforts which were “a response, at least in part, to the changing demands and enlarging expectations of the propertied population in a city in which commercial and cultural activities expanded greatly, and in which policing problems were changing in consequence” (83). Though it may not have been entirely true that the watch was weak and constables old and corruptible, Gay’s portrayal does nothing to exonerate the agents of law enforcement. Despite a great deal of fanfare and claims of many arrests, little evidence against the Mohocks was ever produced by the authorities. As Guthrie suggests, critical and attentive Londoners may have been “left with the impression that widespread Mohock activity was hard to prove or did not exist anyway, and that the justices of

the peace were still doing their best to supply anything to support an official preconception of crisis” (45). A perception of official incompetence was part of the reason Gay saw no reason to treat the members of the watch particularly kindly. After all, the view was a common one and the watch and constable characters do create the most comedic moments of the play.

Sixteen years later Gay would find commercial success with *The Beggar's Opera* where his Mohocks had none. Yet some of the same ideas were already at work. Aside from the dramatic conventions he mocked and his brief parody of Milton noted by Peter Lewis (“Another Look” 791), Gay’s play raised some questions about class and morality. Where *The Beggar's Opera* presents criminals who are honourable and officials who are vile, the Mohocks in this earlier play epitomize amoral agents of chaos, bent on bringing society low. The inversions are similar, but not identical. The criminals here still act criminally while the officials of the law, though incompetent, are good enough at least as neighbours if not guardians of the neighbourhood. Guthrie offers the insight that Gay's first play, despite its frivolity, contains “the serious message that society has sunk to the point where young members of the ruling class are criminals who mimic and mock, rather than uphold and direct, the forces of law and order” (39). As already mentioned, the rakes that were at the heart of the Mohock myth were likely associated with the Inns of Court, and likely to have careers of distinction. Indeed, the Viscount Hinchinbroke, one of a very few ever tried for Mohock crimes, already had some service in the military as an officer and would become a Member of Parliament the following year. Gay's most serious accusation of the play comes from the mouth of Bleak, who recalls that “some of the greatest Men of the Kingdom were *Mohocks*” (2.117-18). Gay deftly points out that the worst offenders of moral law are not always those who are arrested by the watch and condemned by the

justices. He takes aim at the hysteria over the Mohock panic, the media that colluded in the production of it, and the political parties who each sought to gain political capital from it. While print sources such as the pamphlets and proclamations present a narrative that calls for people to put their trust and hope for security in the Queen and government, the satirists question the validity of that narrative. They find that an unquestioned acceptance of fear and panic leads to a loss of autonomy; a critical response becomes resistance to the authority of print and government.

Chapter 3 The Taste of the Town

Though John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* does not make specific reference to the Mohocks, it expresses a more fully-formed resistance to the concept of authoritarian legitimacy that he had begun in *The Mohocks*. The sympathetic characters of *The Beggar's Opera* are all criminals while the figures representing law are corrupt villains. Gay questions the idea that those who hold power and promote the law are lawful themselves. Gay's narrative here contends that honour and loyalty may be found on the criminal side of the law, and that those who appear to be genuine agents of authority may be criminals who undermine it. The sympathetic criminal characters resist the oppression of an unjust system and resonate with an audience that is aware of the corruption that hides behind a façade of security and civil society.

Though the Mohock as signifier is ambiguous in Defoe's use, where he might indeed be referring to the Mohawk culture for which he apparently had so little respect, most of the references to the name in London pertain to street violence and most specifically to the actions of gentlemen (or those aspiring to be gentlemen) who play the part of rakes. Robert Shoemaker explains that the tendencies towards rake violence were related to the changes in the way social status was observed in early eighteenth-century London:

Whereas contemporaries identified ordinary robbers as the most violent group in society, early in the century gentlemen were in fact proportionally the social group most likely to engage in violence leading to death, the consequence of their need to affirm their social position (and their related propensity for carrying swords). Whereas the gentry accounted for only around 3 to 5 per cent of householders in London, 15 per cent of the men accused of murder in London

were gentlemen. At a time when the definition of a gentleman was becoming increasingly fluid, those who aspired to gentility were especially anxious to assert their social superiority over their increasingly prosperous middle-class competitors. One way of doing this was to carry a sword; another was to engage in an illegal activity such as fighting that showed that they were above the law.

(*The London Mob* 162)

That the rakes called the Mohocks were on their way to becoming barristers or other officials surely was a substantial irony not lost on Gay.

The Mohocks in his first play are not redeemable in the way some of the criminals in *The Beggars Opera* of 1728 are. Other than their confident exuberance, they exhibit none of the qualities the *Spectator* calls for in a gentleman; they are bullies bent on chaos as demonstrated by their ability to take over the practice of law enforcement for the sake of their own amusement. In their defence the Mohocks claim that they “are Gentlemen ... 'twas only an innocent Frolick” (3.159-60). Though it is subtle, Gay is making a comment on the role of higher offices of law enforcement, and links the barristers and officials which the Mohocks were set to become to the criminal role they are acting. Fifteen years later, when the Mohocks had lost their cultural and metaphoric potency, Gay expressed this idea alluding to the famous criminals that were now current.

The Beggar's Opera offers up as its heroes a cast of characters derived from the London underworld of the early eighteenth century. According to Queen Anne's “good and wholesome laws,” none of Gay's characters are truly law-abiding. From the fence and thief-taker Peachum to the dashing gambler, womanizer and highwayman, Captain Macheath, all are involved in

criminal activities to one degree or another. Despite this presentation many of the overtly criminal characters are sympathetic. Part-time thief Polly is deeply in love with Macheath, as is Lucy, the daughter of the corrupt jailer Lockit. Macheath and his gang make at least a pretence of honour and are loyal to each other.

As he did with *The Mohocks*, Gay drew on recent events in London for the theme of *The Beggar's Opera*. Crime stories were still popular with the people of London and Gay wove references to the issues of the day into his play. For the character of Macheath, Gay likely had many sources to draw on. Michael Denning argues that the “three escapes in the play ... definitely establish Macheath as a Jack Sheppard” (52) and Andrea McKenzie suggests that Gay's model might have been “James Carrick (described by one newspaper as 'Major Kerrick the Chief of the Street Robbers'), executed in 1722 ... [and] the quintessential game highwayman” (“The Real Macheath” n586). Both Denning (42) and McKenzie (“The Real Macheath” 588) read corrupt thief-taker Jonathan Wild as a parallel to Peachum in the play.

Jack Sheppard was born in 1702 and began his brief career as a thief at the age of twenty. Early in 1724 he was arrested and imprisoned but within two hours made the first of the escapes for which he became famous. After a second prison break and further burglaries he gained the attention of the thief-taker and receiver Jonathan Wild but refused to work with Wild. After another arrest Sheppard was sentenced to death, largely through the efforts of Wild. Sheppard managed an escape from Newgate prison and fled London. In less than two weeks he had returned and was recaptured. On October 15, 1724, he effected his most legendary escape from Newgate over a period of several determined hours. He was arrested for the last time on October 31, very drunk but finely dressed in stolen goods, and was executed on November 16 at Tyburn.

Sheppard became a popular subject of plays and novels, portrayed as a sympathetic character. Philip Sugden notes that "[h]is robberies were characterized by adroitness and skill rather than violence, and his courage, his loyalty to companions, and his cheery if impudent disposition lend some colour to popular portrayals of him as a likeable rogue" (Sugden, "Sheppard, John [Jack]").

Jonathan Wild began to build his network of underworld contacts while in prison for debt. He was briefly the pupil of Charles Hitchen, Wild's predecessor in the business of receiving stolen goods and turning evidence against those burglars and highwaymen who were not valuable to him. Hitchen and Wild came into conflict as Wild's power grew and Wild effectively ended Hitchen's career in a pamphlet war. Wild worked ostensibly within the law and was tolerated for a time because of his connections and ability to gain convictions against criminals. Public opinion began to turn against Wild when he came into conflict with Jack Sheppard; the thief-taker was tried and arrested and executed in 1725. Where Sheppard's journey to the gallows had been almost triumphant, Wild was jeered by the crowd and stoned as he was carried to his execution at Tyburn. The London mob was eager to see justice done to the man who had betrayed the public's trust so completely (McKenzie, "Wild, Jonathan").

The conflict between Wild as the corrupt thief taker and Sheppard as the underclass hero had become a favourite subject of Londoners in 1724 and 1725. Though Wild and Sheppard had both been executed a few years before, the story was a popular one and endured in print and public discourse, in the same way the various Mohock narratives did. Andrea McKenzie suggests that *The Beggar's Opera* "may have owed its immense commercial success less to its satire of the Walpole administration than to its rakish highwayman hero who, in the final act, receives a last-minute reprieve from the gallows" ("Making Crime Pay" 242-3). Gay's presentation of

Macheath spoke to the public's interest in gentlemen criminals, or at least honourable ones, as Sheppard was popularly regarded. The career of Jack Sheppard eventually spawned even more public interest and print than the Mohocks did, and gained an enduring place in the public memory of London. The connection of his story to Jonathan Wild's served only to make it more popular. Though Wild was not a member of the upper classes by birth, he was able to take on a role as a protector of society while completely abusing the power that role offered.

The most specific example of this sort of corruption dressed in respectability (or at least corruption that is powerful and unassailable) would have been, for Gay and his audience, Prime Minister Robert Walpole. Fuller notes that the music and charming characters were certainly a factor in the popularity of *The Beggar's Opera*, “but its role as a *cause célèbre* was undoubtedly due to its social and political satire” (47), satire aimed specifically at the Prime Minister. Rather than making one character *be* Walpole, Gay managed to offer more than one sort of criminal as an analogue to the 'Great Statesman' that was Walpole. Peachum presents a respectable veneer on a corrupt practice, while MacHeath is a highwayman, robbing from everyone. Both could be seen as critiquing Walpole and, as Fuller points out, “the political parallels subtly shift, offering a slightly different perspective from each viewpoint” (48). Gay calls Walpole and his administration criminals and offered a bold critique of the party in power in his play. However, McKenzie suggests that “*The Beggar's Opera*... may have owed its immense commercial success less to its satire of the Walpole administration than to its rakish highwayman hero who, in the final act, receives a last-minute reprieve from the gallows” (“Making Crime Pay” 242-243), pointing out the popular interest in “heroic” criminals that made Sheppard a celebrity. What makes the play and its themes enduring is the fact that Walpole is not unique, and by

attacking him from a number of angles with more than one parallel in the play, Gay allows the themes of inverted justice and power to be more widely applicable. McKenzie notes that “Wild—as *The Beggar's Opera's* Peachum ... played both the villainous foil to Macheath or to Sheppard and the underworld analogue for Robert Walpole. The analogy could extend to any crooked minister” (588). Though the Walpole administration was certainly Gay's first and largest target, the play is not so specific that it does not translate to other contexts. Though MacHeath's highwaymen are among the less reprehensible characters Gay presents, they are still a gang of criminals, a term easily applied to a cabinet or political inner circle.

The criminal gang in *The Beggar's Opera* has undergone a substantial transformation from the gang that appears in *The Mohocks*. Though Macheath and his fellows still exhibit an anti-authoritarian bravado, they are not rakes who attack pedestrians and the watch. The gang of larcenous highwaymen is at odds with the wealthier Mohocks who Lady Strafford notes are not common thieves (see chapter one). Macheath's gang are poor; they steal to accumulate enough wealth that they might live as well as the “meer Court Friend[s]” (3.4.4) that the rakes in the Mohocks are set to become. The rakes will not have to risk their lives; wealth and class are already theirs. Macheath and his gang have no aspirations to social positions of status; they “retrench the Superfluities of Mankind” (2.1.24) as Matt explains, and see themselves as “Free-hearted and Generous” (2.1.28) agents who are more interested in spending money than in gaining or asserting power. They express none of what Shoemaker calls the Mohocks' “aggressive public attempts to assert their superiority over the watch, as a symbol of civic government; over the middling sort and the poor; and over women” (“Public Spaces, Private Disputes?” 61). Instead there is a link between the Mohocks in Gay's first play and the abusers of

power in *The Beggar's Opera*. In Act 2 of *The Mohocks* we see the upper class rakes release a pair of women, presumably prostitutes, from the custody of the watch, as Gogmagog declares, "Come, you Scoundrel there—unhand the Doxies" (2.147-8). Peachum uses the prostitutes of *The Beggar's Opera* to trap Macheath in 2.5. In both cases the more sympathetic characters, the cowardly but benign watch and the gallant but larcenous Macheath, are oppressed and abused by elites.

The Mohock gang, though of great interest to the London public, was an example of the problems that those possessed of wealth and class could impose upon the lower classes. The rakes were difficult for the law to bring to justice, a danger to common people, and represented no liberating force. Macheath was, like Jack Sheppard, non-violent. Even to a corrupt official like Peachum, Macheath offers clemency: "I beg you, Gentlemen, act with Conduct and Discretion. A Pistol is your last resort" (2.2.25-6). Although Macheath's gang lives by threatening violence, their tendency is to do none. The *only* known tendency of the imagined Mohock gang is to do violence to their victims. Drawing on accounts published in the media, Defoe had noted in the *Review* number 153 that the most disturbing aspect of the gang was that they "committ[ed] a Crime for the sake of a Crime," acting out their deviant "secret Pleasure" and glorying in "infernal Rage" (614). Statt strengthens Defoe's assertion by suggesting that "it is possible that the degree of brutality that set the Mohocks apart from other rakes was in part a reflection of a culture of violence acquired by young officers during service in the war" (197-8). Macheath, like Sheppard, is in a position to be admired by the lower classes for his lifestyle. He also styles himself a captain but evinces none of the brutality that might be associated with a soldier. The rakes were a violent expression of the oppression the poor already felt from those in

positions of wealth and power. Peter Linebaugh notes “the difficulty of distinguishing between a 'criminal' population of London and the poor population as a whole” (xxi), and suggests that popular criminals such as Machheath represented the desires of a major segment of London's economically disadvantaged population. What we know of the Mohocks suggests they were excluded from this group. They offer only violence and evoke no sympathy, except in cases where they are used satirically as the *Spectator's* physicians or moral custodians of London.

The fact that the characters are sympathetic brings up the difficult relationship the people of London had with the city's criminals. Though criminals represent a threat to the order and authority of society, they also make fitting subjects for exciting stories full of danger and mystery and perhaps even brave deeds. Importantly, such characters can also suggest a comparison between the virtues and vices of the upper and lower classes, and point an accusing finger at those who are supposed to be the exemplars of pro-social behaviour. The Mohocks represented in the press and in Gay's earlier play are exactly the sort of people who might be expected to exhibit the higher sensibilities associated with the gentry and aristocracy. The lack of such sensibilities makes them particularly reprehensible, and it is with irony that Peachum complains that “The Lawyers are bitter Enemies to those in our Way. They don't care that any Body should get a Clandestine Livelihood but themselves” (1.9.30-32). He explicitly states the belief that lawyers, masquerading as defenders of law and social order, are criminals of the worst sort, and jealously guard their prerogatives. The Mohocks were generally assumed to be rakes associated with the Inns of Court, where the scions of wealthy families were trained to become political leaders and law-makers, presumably prime candidates for a career parallel to Peachum's.

The Beggar's Opera also presents more than one type of criminal in its cast of characters.

We are presented with a group of women who engage in various forms of prostitution and petty theft, but are generally subservient to or dependent on men. The male criminals of Macheath's gang engage in a range of activities, but they are primarily highwaymen who, though dangerous, live by a code of honour and display a certain loyalty to each other. Finally there are those criminals who attain a quasi-legal position, such as Peachum and Lockett, who act as a liaison between the criminal and lawful worlds. These latter two retain their association with the lawful world, and it is through them that several comparisons between criminals and more law-abiding groups are made. Peachum allows that "In one respect indeed, our Employment may be reckon'd dishonest, because, like Great Statesmen, we encourage those who betray their Friends" (2.10.16-18). The criminals of Macheath's gang and the women who are involved in Peachum's ring of thieves exist largely at the whim of Peachum and Lockett, and retain their freedom so long as they are useful. These officials generate a resentment similar to that held by the middle and lower classes towards the political machinations of those who rule the city and nation. The Mohocks represent an even worse sort of criminal because they do not even pretend to act in the interests of the lower classes. The gang as presented in *The Mohocks* is not directly connected to the upper class officials responsible for the maintenance of peace, law, and order but most certainly represent the sorts of people that cynical Londoners would have expected to take those positions.

The code of honour by which Macheath's men live is contrasted against the self-serving viciousness of the upper classes. That viciousness is a trait exemplified in the gang that appears in *The Mohocks*. In a brief exchange three of Macheath's gang state their positions and suggest that their code is better than any evidenced at court:

NED: Who is there here that would not dye for his Friend?

HARRY: Who is there here that would betray him for his interest?

MATT: Show me a Gang of Courtiers that can say as much.

2.1.18-21

This exchange points out that, despite their criminal backgrounds, the gang exhibits a loyalty to each other that is less evident in the upper social classes. What the highwaymen may lose in legal status they make up for with bonds of loyalty. In those cases where they are presented as a fraternal order, the Mohocks might acquire some sense of this camaraderie. Gay's version of the Mohocks may live by a code, but it is one that is focused on committing violence and mayhem. The Mohocks' code is at odds with the affection the highwaymen express for each other. In the play the Mohocks' loyalty is to their Emperor, and it is based on fear rather than friendship; they are bound together by a curse that will befall them if they should fail to uphold their laws:

Let all Hell's Curses light upon his Head,
That dares to violate this solemn Oath;
May Pains and Aches cramp his rotten Bones;
May constant Impotence attend his Lust;
May the dull Slave be bigotted to Virtue;
And tread no more the pleasing Paths of Vice,
And then at least die a mean whining Penitent. (1.51-7)

Macheath's gang is held together by their mutual loyalty. Arriving in the tavern where the gang is meeting, Macheath declares to them, "My heart hath been with you this Hour" (2.2.1-2). Gay's Mohocks are bound together by evil rites and arcane rituals, bound by an oath that renders them

almost supernatural and beyond human sympathy, while Macheath's gang are fully human and highly sympathetic.

The fact that Gay could produce a dramatic work with criminals as its heroes, and expect that work to be popular, suggests a public fascination with criminals and criminality amongst the citizens of early eighteenth-century London. Crime is anti-social, and undermines order and authority, yet these anti-social characters are presented so as to gain a measure of sympathy. One of these types is the dashing highwayman; he is a rogue who lives by his own wits, strength and audacity. *The Beggar's Opera* gives voice to some of the public sentiments surrounding the interest and positive sentiments expressed for such characters. Playing on the romantic stereotypes of the highwayman, Mrs. Peachum, uncomfortable with being involved in decisions about execution of the criminals in Peachum's employ, suggests that "Women indeed are bitter bad Judges in these cases, for they are so partial to the Brave that they think every Man handsome who is going to the Camp or the Gallows" (1.4.8-12). She suggests a stereotype that holds women in the sway of dangerous men. Though she does not make a claim for the honesty or virtue that might warrant such affectionate feelings, she does not question the fact that they are brave. There is an automatic assumption that any criminal of note *must* be brave, for how else could he live the dangerous life he does? The Mohocks are never seen as particularly courageous; in the *Spectator* Philanthropos decries their "false Notion of Bravery" (188). They act in groups large enough to overcome even the resistance of the watch, hardly a marker of resourcefulness or bravery.

The character of the romanticized highwayman is also connected to the idea of the criminal as a free spirit. By choosing to live beyond the legal codes of society, he also frees

himself from its drudgery and monotony. In fact, as Matt of the Mint suggests, setting oneself against common social codes is inherently justified because those codes are corrupt:

The World is avaritious, and I hate Avarice. A covetous fellow, like a Jack-daw, steals what he was never made to enjoy, for the sake of hiding it. These are the Robbers of Mankind, for Money was made for the Free-hearted and Generous, and where is the Injury of taking from another, what he hath not the Heart to make use of? (2.1.24-30)

The premise he articulates here is that highwaymen are not criminals, but rather redressing an imbalance of wealth. He claims that there are those who collect too much money and do not spend it; they hold more than what Matt considers their fair share. He specifically states that the “Robbers” are those in possession of great wealth (more than can reasonably be required to support a single person), and incriminates all those who are wealthy. He suggests that those who possess riches must lack “the Heart” any honest and honourable man should possess. The assumption here is that any good and virtuous persons should share what they have, and distribute the “Superfluities” of wealth in an egalitarian way. The Mohocks are a warped version of the free-spirited highwayman; the risk for them is less, since their wealth and status protects them from the vagaries of the law. They may be acting out a fantasy of their own, but it is a twisted one focused on causing pain and invoking fear. Ultimately the Mohocks only perpetuate the sort of upper class oppression that Macheath and his gang are counter to. The highwaymen are made liberators and are liberated by their choice to live outside the law.

The Beggar's Opera does not precisely condone a criminal way of life but the upper classes are the most significant target of Gay's satire. Though he holds no official military rank,

Macheath goes by the title of Captain, which suggests a comparison to military officers who are more likely to be actual members of the upper classes. Lord Hinchinbroke, tried for Mohock crimes, had already attained a military commission. Captain John Reading and Captain Robert Beard were also included among the names of the rakes arrested for the attack on the watchman John Bouch, suggesting that the trope of the gentleman soldier is more of a fiction than the honourable highwayman. Macheath calls attention to this comparison himself, sharing his wealth with his gang and explaining, “You see, Gentlemen, I am not a meer Court Friend, who professes every thing and will do nothing” (3.4.4-5). The central idea of this statement is that people should be measured by deeds and that Macheath's actions, at least among his men, are motivated by loyalty and justice. He also claims that the higher one's social status the less one's word means, suggesting that an affiliation with court is an insignificant marker of virtues of loyalty and honesty.

Gay plays with the ambiguity of class in *The Mohocks* as well. After the rakes have taken over the role of the watch and constable they apprehend Gentle who makes a claim for his own status, surprised that the false watch cannot see that he is a gentleman:

’Tis a strange thing that the vulgar cannot distinguish the Gentleman – pray Sir, may I ask you one Question – have you ever seen a *Mohock*? has he that softness in his Look? that sweetness of delivery in his Discourse? believe me, Sir, there is a certain *Je ne scay quoi* in my manner that shows my Conversation to have lain altogether among the politer part of the World. (2.226-32)

The joke is that neither the rakes-as-gentlemen nor Gentle the “Court Friend” are allowed to recognize each other. The Mohock Emperor mistakes Gentle's use of French for Latin (2.233),

while Gentle's claim for his own status is based only upon his use of “a *French Phrase* much in vogue at the Court end of the Town” (2.237-8). Each supposed gentleman accuses the other of vulgarity and pretension and denies his claims to belong to a civil upper social class. Gay suggests that status and class in London are based on posturing and prevarication rather than any inherent worth, a position explicitly stated in *The Beggar's Opera*.

Macheath's condemnation of the wealthy and upper classes is made very clear in the song he sings as he is preparing to meet his end at the gallows, when he suggests that, though laws are meant to treat each person equally, money is often an antidote to criminal prosecution:

Since Laws were made for ev'ry Degree,
To curb Vice in others, as well as me,
I wonder we han't better Company,
Upon Tyburn Tree!
But Gold from Law can take out the Sting;
And if rich Men like us were to swing,
'Twould thin the Land, such Numbers to string
Upon Tyburn Tree!
3.13.22-9 (Air 67)

The official statement is that under the law everyone is equal, and the law is intended to be a deterrent to everyone not just Macheath and criminals of his class. The “better Company” he refers to are those who would be considered his social betters: the wealthy upper classes. He points out that money can buy freedom, or at least leniency and that if all who committed crimes, rich or poor, were hanged then the numbers of executions would be significantly higher. The real

Mohocks were apparently able to buy their release from arrest, despite the large sums required for bail. Statt notes that “The sums demanded for bail reflect the wealth of the rioters,” including “the extraordinary figure of 1500 pounds” required for Edward Richard Montague, Lord Hinchinbroke (188). Despite the high bails and obvious importance of the men arrested, high constable John Salt released them. The actions of Salt suggest his willingness to risk the punishment for whatever boon his prisoners promised him for their release. Even at the height of the Mohock panic and the most serious attempts to curb the night-time riots, the wealth of the arrested men was still sufficient to “take out the sting” from the law and render it powerless against them. Macheath indicts both the members of the upper classes who were perceived to be above the law, and the officials who, while professing the protection of London from criminals, took advantage of their offices to make themselves wealthy.

Jailor Lockit, who takes care of prisoners in Newgate, embodies the corruption that Macheath's condemnation is levelled against. The abuses that arise from the commercialization of the prison system are highlighted by Macheath when he is first brought into Lockit's custody. He notes that, “The fees here are so many, and so exorbitant, that few Fortunes can bear the Expence of getting off handsomly, or of dying like a Gentleman” (2.7.13-16). Wealth is able to buy privileges and comforts in the prison. Macheath allows himself only the expense of a more comfortable pair of shackles which Lockit is glad to deliver when properly paid. Even escape was commercially controlled; with the proper bribe a prisoner could be allowed to leave. Macheath tries to convince Lucy that they should try to buy his freedom, and points out that, “Your Father's Perquisites for the Escape of Prisoners must amount to a considerable Sum in the Year. Money well tim'd, and properly apply'd, will do any thing” (2.12.8-10). This institution is

also suggested by Lady Strafford when she writes that one of the suspects in the Mohock scare paid to escape from custody. The real world writing of Lady Strafford corroborates Gay's drama and the fact that there was over a decade between the two statements suggests that the practice was well entrenched in the legal system of the time.

While the lower class criminals of the play compare themselves favourably to the upper classes, Lockett and Peachum are more prone to justify their behaviour by other means. Where Macheath's gang professes honour and dignity as virtues, Peachum and Lockett profess their staunch mercantilism as their virtue and a justification of their immoral or amoral actions. As Peter Elfed Lewis explains, "Starting from Lockett's premises, his argument in 3.2 is sweetly reasonable and leads to his claim that, in ruthlessly pursuing their own ends, he and Peachum are merely behaving 'like honest Tradesmen.' Each of them is following the example of savage competitiveness and self-seeking expediency set by the business community, the rules of fair trade" (*John Gay: The Beggar's Opera* 50). Gay is pointing out that the values of society in general are tarnished and criminalized by association with capitalism and its interests. Profit is presented as a moral justification under which extremely anti-social acts can be considered reasonable and expected. According to Lockett's code, "Of all Animals of Prey, Man is the only sociable one. Every one of us preys upon his Neighbour, and yet we herd together" (3.2.5-7). The social contract that ostensibly asks for virtuous behaviour from its signatories also ironically leads to self-serving predatory behaviour.

The Mohocks that terrified the imagination of London are represented as the apotheosis of predatory behaviour. In the *Spectator* 347 the Mohock Emperor gives special dispensation to a particular rank of the gang, and notes "that nothing herein contained shall in any wise be

construed to extend to the Hunters, who have our full Licence and Permission to enter into any Part of the Town where-ever their Game shall lead them” (295). Even where the Emperor attempts to assert that the gang is a benign force for reformation, the most animal of instincts is given free reign. The Mohocks are a hunting pack that preys upon the underclass herd. Though there are no direct references to the 1712 panic in *The Beggar's Opera*, Gay allows almost no comparisons between the lower class criminals of Macheath's highwaymen and the street gang of rakes. The parallels that may be drawn have the Mohocks aligned with Peachum and the other upper class criminals who exploit the poorer classes under them. The Mohocks are unsympathetic because of their violence; Peachum is unsympathetic because of his corruption. Both the Mohocks and Peachum (along with his own “gang” including jailor Lockett) prey upon the more sympathetic characters of their respective dramas. Though the watchmen in *The Mohocks* are cowardly, they are endearingly comical and though Macheath's gang are criminals they exemplify qualities of loyalty to each other that make them likeable and even admirable.

The Beggar from whom the opera takes its name appears only in a framing capacity, and articulates some of the irony of the play and destabilizes its title of “opera.” One of the bluntest statements he makes concerns the marked difference between how rich and poor interact with the law. Though vice is not solely the prerogative of the lower classes, it is they who are most prone to suffer for it. He explains:

Had the play remain'd, as I at first intended, it would have carried a most excellent Moral. 'Twould have shown that the lower Sort of People have their Vices in a degree as well as the Rich: And that they are punish'd for them. (3.16.18-26)

The statement could be read as ambiguous; the subject of “they” in the final line is not explicitly

linked to the “lower Sort of People.” Yet there is the suggestion that the lower class is the only class the law punishes. As Macheath has also claimed, and as the narrative of the Mohocks implies, wealth brings a level of immunity to the law and impunity of action that is inherently unjust. There are all manner of criminal activities that could be connected with the wealthy but because wealth and authority are generally linked there is no punishment for the rich. Rather than being seen as criminal acts, the vices of the wealthy tend to be justified in social terms. The pursuit of business or politics carries certain requirements to act in ways that are anti-social and detrimental but those who follow such careers also have the power to deflect or prevent what should be legal consequences for their actions. In this world view the social order is governed by criminals who have the power to make sure their agendas are socially accepted, and perhaps even morally acceptable. The purported letter of the Mohock Emperor printed in the *Spectator* parodies this view in allowing the criminals responsible for violence on the streets to speak for themselves and claim that their actions are for the betterment of society.

In the closing scene of the play, the Beggar is convinced to alter the ending of the opera in order to provide a happier outcome for some of its characters. The changes are based on the objections of the Player who reminds the Beggar that “The Catastrophe is manifestly wrong, for an Opera must end happily” (3.16.9-10). The Beggar immediately agrees, though notes that the original intent was to achieve a sort of poetic justice and reminds the audience that there is little to choose between the high and low characters in the play. When the Beggar gives instructions for an alteration in the end of the play, the Player responds with the pithy comment, “All this we must do, to comply with the Taste of the Town” (3.16.16-17). What the Player's remark implies is that, in publishing for the public, it is necessary to satisfy the public's desires with perhaps less

attention paid to the reality of the story or to the intent of the author. Going beyond the *Beggar's Opera*, produced for commercial entertainment, we see a similar ethos likely had guided the writers of broadsheets, pamphlets, and newspapers, who were required to consider what sort of content would be publicly popular enough to sell media. Gay acknowledges this problem and critiques it, yet also participates in it. Though, as Fuller suggests, “Gay's parody of Italian opera ... may represent comparatively late thoughts in his conception of the piece” (45), the author is aware of the taste of the town and the current fashion for Italian opera. Gay parodies and critiques the result of capitalism and art which is the modification of art for capital's sake, but he is guilty of the same crime, with the preemptive “altering” of the end of *The Beggar's Opera*. The taste of the town is a powerful force, driving production and reception of entertainment, drama, and news media. Gay is declaring that “the town” wants to discard the Mohock narrative of fear where criminals present a danger that maybe resisted only by law and government. Gay offers the alternative view that law is at least equally corruptible as criminals, and is more reprehensible since it makes deceitful claims about itself.

Conclusion

In 1776 the August 3-6 issue of *The London Chronicle*, printed more than sixty years after the original visit of the Mohawk leaders and in response to the events of the ongoing American Revolutionary War, the state of the Mohawk nation is revisited:

It is well known, that the Chief of the Mohock Indians visited England in the reign of Queen Anne, and was very well received at the court of that princess. His picture is preserved in the British Museum. At that time the Mohocks were a very rude and uncivilized nation. The periodical essays of the Augustan Age of England, as Queen Anne's reign has been called, shew us that the very name of Mohock was then terrible in London; and we find many ingenious and entertaining remarks produced from speculating upon the visit of the wild American chief. But somewhat more than half a century has made a very great change upon the Mohock nation. They are now so well trained to civil life, as to live in a fixed place, to have good commodious houses, to cultivate land with assiduity and skill, and to trade with the British colonies. They are also converted to the Christian faith, and have among them a priest of the church of England who regularly performs the sacred functions as presented in the Liturgy, which is translated into their language. (124)

This passage demonstrates the enduring place the visit of the “Four Kings” and, by extension, the London street gang, gained in the minds of the writers and chroniclers of later generations, remarking on the terror that gripped the city and the writings that inspired that terror. The comments on the original tribal groups from which the name was taken are also telling, and state

unequivocally that, despite the positive reception of the Mohawk leaders, they were considered to be far less than equal to the British. Their primary failing in the eyes of the writer was their nomadic lifestyle which occasioned no need for permanent settlements or the agricultural practices that were familiar to the British. The primary mark of their “evolution” is their acceptance of colonial trade and the Christian faith. At this point the British also required allies in North America and so a positive view of the Mohawk nation was occasioned by the needs of the times. The writer expresses satisfaction that “a very rude and uncivilized nation” has, at least in print and in this publication, been civilized through the grace of God and the intervention of British colonial power.

The rake gang that adopted the name of the First Nations culture has, in print, a less determined fate. The Mohocks-as-rakes are unavailable to history; cultural artifacts point to the existence of something, and some very strong conclusions can be drawn, but what they have left behind are a collection of narratives. The Mohock narrative plays out in a number of sources, and generates a number of reactions. The publishers of pamphlets and papers were eager to print a variety of stories about the street violence in London, creating a sense that something truly unusual was taking place. Rapidly produced, and full of speculation and fabrication in equal measures, the news fuelled public speculation about the street violence, the people involved, and their aims. The position of the Mohocks in the public sphere was maintained by a circle of production which included a reading public desirous of entertaining stories to talk about and a publishing industry that added talking points for people to discuss and corroborated the rumours that were the foundation of the Mohocks' reputation. The official response also added to the importance of the Mohock threat and suggested that, if the country's highest authority was

concerned about them, the gang was something grave to be feared. And yet, as Neil Guthrie notes, “There is one great difficulty, however, with all of these sources about the Mohocks: none of them is demonstrably an eyewitness account of what took place in the streets of London in the spring of 1712. All are secondhand, at best” (39). The widespread belief in a street gang that terrorized the streets of London after dark was based on stories Londoners read and told to each other and perpetuated by commentators who, overtly or covertly, saw in the Mohocks an opportunity to advance their particular agendas. The rakes became a site of contestation for debates on the efficacy of law enforcement, the character of the English gentleman, and the authority of print.

A reflection of the public interest is found in the private or semi-private writing of Londoners and suggests that the gang evoked a variety of reactions. Swift was terrified of the gang, not only believing that they were a threat to Londoners in general, but to him in particular. Lady Strafford's remarks suggest a similar concern was felt by others, though her additions to the narrative suggest a fascination that was not dampened by her fear. Thomas Hearne and Daniel Defoe were incensed by the actions of the gang, and sought to direct their righteous anger against their political opponents. Hearne even alleges that the satirical response is a cover-up of a Whig plot that had gotten out of control of the political groups he saw as the panic's instigators. As Guthrie points out, “the Tory government was eager to use fears of Mohock violence to make political capital; and records kept by law-enforcement officers may well reflect a desire to provide the kind of answers that Tory political masters sought” (34). The political parties seized on what quickly became a public phenomenon to discredit each other. Statt corroborates the idea that a part of the panic was a result of politicking; “The apparent

novelty of the affair was permanently magnified by the attempt to put it to political purposes. Partisans both Whig and Tory exhausted their ingenuity to make as much political capital out of the Mohock outbreak as they could, and the exploits of the rakes were put to polemical use for decades after the events” (199). The use of the rakes' attacks as political currency ensured the expansion of their narrative beyond what could reasonably be considered true. By associating their rivals with uncivilized barbarism, the Whigs and Tories were utilizing the connotations that the Mohock name held for Londoners; in effect they were each suggesting that the other was no better than savages and hardly fit for government. The Mohocks were positioned as an example of people and behaviours that were antithetical to British social ideals.

Though the gang in London had a reputation for savagery, few if any of the crimes attributed to them were ever substantiated. The gang's particular sorts of crimes are largely invented, a fact lampooned by the *Spectator* in its glossary of Mohock ranks. Guthrie notes that for nose-slitting, one of the most repeated Mohock crimes, there is little evidence, “and there are no reports ... of women rolled down hills in barrels or overturned to expose their private parts, no boring out of eyes, no beating with sticks, no upsetting of coaches, no cutting down the back, no swords run through the legs of victims” (44). The majority of the attacks that made the Mohocks so frightening appear to be the invention of pamphleteers and Grub Street writers more interested in making an impression with their publications than recording the rather more mundane truths that appear in the legal records. This is certainly the view that the *Spectator* took in its reports about the gang.

The satire and parody that arose around the Mohocks demonstrates an immediate critical response to the panic on several levels. Gay's first play, *The Mohocks*, focuses primarily on the

role of law enforcement in the Mohock affair. Despite the royal proclamation against the street violence of which the Mohocks were the most significant ambassadors, reports of the gang continued to be printed and believed for some time. Not only were the Mohocks apparently able to act unhindered by the watch, they were actually able to attack and overcome members of the very institution which was supposed to protect Londoners from them. The watch was often criticized for the shortcomings of its members, and Beattie finds “direct and reliable evidence of the incapacities of watchmen, ... for ward officers themselves can occasionally be found complaining that the low pay they could offer prevented them from hiring the kinds of men they would have preferred” (180-81). Gay clearly had this in mind when he created the caricatures of law enforcement officers who are portrayed as comical and cowardly.

Though Henry Fielding is credited with creating what might have been the first British police force in the middle of the eighteenth century, his work was the culmination of antecedent ideas. Beattie points out that “the need for the vigorous detection and prosecution of offenders if crime was to be effectively controlled was well understood in the seventeenth century” (85). Gay is clearly highlighting the lax state of law enforcement on his beloved streets of London, noting that what methods were in place to deal with street crime were wholly inadequate. The idea is nowhere made more clear than in the front matter to the play, where Gay claims that the play is “A Tragi-Comical Farce As it was Acted near the Watch-house in *Covent-Garden* by Her Majesty's Servants” (77). The play was never performed in Gay's lifetime; Gay explicitly states that the real officers of the law had already made a farce of themselves in the face of the Mohock panic.

Gay's parody was not restricted to the shortcomings of law enforcement. He clearly

recognized the exaggerated nature of the Mohock scare and expresses his skepticism of the narrative through the exchange of information about the gang that the watchmen share. By having his characters discuss ever more unlikely reports of the Mohocks' actions and then respond as if they clearly believe every word of the hyperbole, Gay calls into question the tendency he sees of people to believe everything that they read in print and hear in rumours. Though the Mohock scare was a useful vehicle with which to discuss the problems of London's law enforcement, it also demonstrated the ability of unsubstantiated gossip and Grub Street journalism to gain the public attention.

Addison, Steele and the other writers of the *Spectator* also looked at the tendencies to exaggeration and the ridiculous that characterized the Mohock spring. Their notes on the gang highlight not only the absurd details of the rakes' organization, but also the public desire to know every lurid detail of the story that could possibly be gleaned. Their response was to provide great detail about the makeup of the Mohock club, more than could possibly be available from a group of criminals intent on keeping themselves out of the hands of justice. Expanding on the spurious information about the hallmark forms of violence the gang supposedly committed, the *Spectator* offered the public more particulars than could reasonably be believed. However, the paper was exaggerating an exaggeration; to some readers, and especially to those who had the information second-hand, the news printed in the *Spectator* may well have been a welcome addition to the supposedly factual knowledge base about the Mohocks. It was not a guarantee that any reader would take the material for the parody that it was. Even Defoe was inspired to suggest that the publication had gotten some of its information wrong. Though likely intended as an example of the sort of distortion that was common to the Mohock episode, the joke was not immune to being

taken seriously. Statt notes that:

The moralists like Addison and Steele, who exploited the street violence of the rakes in order to promote their vision of the polite manners suitable to an evolving British social order, also contributed to an impression that the events of 1712 were unique. It is no accident that the *Spectator*, the first important forum for the articulation of a morality of politeness, is one of the chief sources of information, and disinformation, about the Mohocks. (199)

No matter what the intent of the publishers was, the reading public could accept almost any claim about an issue that was publicly in fashion and widely discussed. The mere fact of having the Mohock name attached to an article was enough to add whatever was written there to the body of public folklore that grew around the gang, and contributed to the group's enduring place in the London psyche. It is primarily the associations that became attached to their name, derived from media conflation of facts and perpetuated by public discourse, that allows the Mohocks to be a point of reference signifying violent rake culture long after they were no longer spoken of as a current threat.

The Mohocks were not unique in the history of London; what made them appear so was the successful branding of the Mohock name which superseded less well-known ancestors as the Scowerers, Nickers, and the Hectors. Graves notes that:

all the more striking characteristics of the Queen Anne clubmen—their fondness for wine and women, their adoption of unusual titles and insignia, their elaborate and ridiculous initiation ceremony, their night revels in the streets, their terrifying of women and mutilation of men—all had been anticipated by their ingenious

predecessors of the seventeenth century. (395-6)

Even during the 1712 panic these ancestors in crime were occasionally noted alongside the Mohock name and, as Graves shows, many of the more outrageous stories printed about the Mohocks may have their antecedents in the narratives of seventeenth century gangs. The Mohocks, due in part to the expansion of the printing industry that promoted them, survive as a symbol long after the other gangs have been forgotten. The accessible nature of the published material about the gang that allowed the name to be known widely in London is what makes the difference to the reputation of the Mohocks; while notes on earlier gangs were often contained in longer works, the Mohocks enjoyed the focus afforded by the pamphlet and newspaper mediums. Less expensive media are much more likely to be circulated and widely read than the larger volumes where references to earlier rake gangs appeared. It is not surprising then that the Mohock name survived to be used throughout the eighteenth century for its association with street crime and rake “frolicks.”

Though Graves shows that there are some precedents for connecting violent gangs with political agendas, the Mohocks arrived at a time of particular instability, and their possible association with some secret plot or veiled conspiracy made them more interesting as a subject of discussion and print. Their brief ubiquity in the press afforded endless opportunities for speculation on their true nature. Though the writer of *Who Plot Best* was dismissive of any political underpinnings, and the 1779 review of *History of the Four Last Years of the Queen* doubted the veracity of Swift's sources, the connection between the Mohocks and the political maneuverings of the Tory and Whig parties also helped to extend the Mohocks' term as a subject for discussion. If nothing else, the need for each party to disprove the claims of the other were

sufficient to realms other than sensationalist journalism.

Though Gay has left the specific subject of the Mohocks behind by the time he writes *The Beggar's Opera*, the play shows signs of the issues that made the earlier rake gang a popular subject for the news. Gay looks once again at the ambivalent nature of criminality, but this time the legitimate criminals are cast as sympathetic characters. The officers of the law such as Peachum and Lockit now occupy the role that the Mohocks of the earlier play suggested; they are ostensibly of a class that should be protecting society but instead abuse their positions to exploit it for their own aggrandizement. Rather than rakes who are able to assault with impunity, the criminals of *The Beggar's Opera* are controlled by their oppressive masters who maintain the same power over them that the Mohocks did over the watch. Gay's play shows that, while crime and criminals make ever more popular subjects, the problems with law enforcement have a new focus in its corrupt practitioners. One could imagine that Gay's Mohocks have grown up, finished their schooling and have become part of the legal institution they had been the enemies of. They are no less sinister for their maturity, however, and now are the overseers that allow corrupt functionaries like Lockit and Peachum to flourish. The trope of aristocratic criminals proved as popular as it did during the Mohocks' reign of 1712. Rather than exonerating or minimalising the criminality of the Mohocks as Erin Mackie suggests in *Rakes, Highwaymen, and Pirates: The Making of the Modern gentleman in the Eighteenth Century* (55-9), the light treatment of the gang in the *Spectator* and in Gay's farce serves to ridicule unquestioned belief in the Mohocks. Rather than something to be feared, the Mohock panic is something to be laughed at. There is here a distinction between the Mohock rakes and the Mohock media. It is not that violent rakes are excused, rather the panic and those who believe in it are ridiculed. Gay in

particular is later keen to draw a parallel between criminal behaviour and the upper class; he is unlikely to be an apologist for the Mohocks.

The meta-narrative of crime being a subject for popular public interest is what truly ties *The Beggar's Opera* to the press of the Mohock scare. Though Gay offers sympathetic criminals for the audience to view as imperfect heroes, they only become so through their acceptance as such in the public eye. The action of the play closes with a reversal: the Beggar calls for the “Rabble there [to] run and cry a Reprieve” (3.16.14), a move that is calculated to appeal to “the Taste of the Town” (3.16.16-17). Rather than satisfying the demands of strict legal justice, or even the truth of what would likely have befallen a real Macheath, Gay allows the sympathetic characters to triumph but, as Michael Denning notes, “Macheath and Polly cannot win — without the artificial intervention of the rabble” (54). The Mohocks of a decade and a half earlier were largely imaginary, yet because of the enduring fascination with the gang as expressed in print and public discourse they rose to unusual prominence in the imaginative history of London.

The Mohock name appeared in print many years after 1712, a testament to the enduring place the gang had carved in London's history. In 1754 *The Connoisseur* used the name of the Mohocks for its associations with contemporary rakes, noting that “The present race of bucks, bloods, and freethinkers, are but the spawn of the *Mohocks* and the *Hell-Fire Club*” (128). Though the writers George Colman and Bonnel Thornton, under the pseudonym “Mr Town,” support the idea that the street gang was not unusual, the specific use of the name suggests that it still signified violent rake groups to Londoners. In 1755 Mr. Town writes that “The Mohocks and Hell Fire Club, the heroes of the last generation, were the first who introduced these elevated Frolicks, and struck out mighty good jokes from all kinds of violence and blasphemy” (320). The

Scowrers of the seventeenth century have been forgotten, but the Mohocks remain in memory.

In an ironic tone, Mr. Town outlines some particularly Mohockish behaviour that he has found to be in vogue thirty years after the Mohock scare: “There is a great deal of humour in what is called *beating the rounds*, that is in plain *English*, taking a tour of the principal bawdy-houses: breaking of lamps and skirmishes with watchmen are very good jests; and the insulting of any dull sober fools that are quietly trudging about their business” (320). The regular association of the Mohocks with such common behaviour attests to how deeply the name was engraved on the London psyche. While rakes occur in later generations, the intensity of the media furor over the gang in 1712 had provided a name that could be used to create connotations of unrestrained and motiveless violence. Perhaps it is not surprising then that in 1773, some sixty years after the Mohock gang was first the terror of London, they are found once again in the pages of *Lloyd's Evening Post*, number 2429:

Thursday night the persons called Mohocks committed many outrages in the neighbourhood of Covent-Garden; a Common-Councilman was very ill used by them; they turned two men and a woman out of a coach in the Strand, and, after beating the Coachman, one of them got on the box and drove to Oxfordstreet, where he left the carriage.

Whether the name has simply become a part of the common parlance for criminal rakes or whether a similar gang had copied the name from history is not entirely clear, but the appearance of the name in print so long after their first attacks suggests that there were still connotations being exploited by the media. The Mohock name became a signifier for violent and undesirable rake behaviour. In some cases it was also a signifier for gentles oppressing commons and of

those elites whose ability to be corrupt made them appear unworthy of their status.

One of the most interesting things about the Mohocks is the importance of their actual existence. From a historical perspective it may be important to prove or disprove their existence, but from a critical perspective the fact that there is a great deal of writing about them is enough. Whether the gang was accurately portrayed in the media is less relevant than the historical fact that the gang *did* appear in the public sphere and that there was substantial public interest in their actions and reputation. The effect of the gang's notoriety is undeniable; the numerous references in public and private writing demonstrate that there was significant interest in, and acceptance of, the gang. The official reaction, which included mobilization of the forces of law enforcement and a royal proclamation, demonstrated that the Mohock gang was taken seriously as a threat to stability at the highest levels of society. Even where the satire pointed to crass media capitalism and public credulity as the real forces behind the reputation of the Mohocks, the satirists used the gang as a vehicle to express their views. The Mohocks became a symbol satirists used to criticize a system that provided truth as news and was supported by a public with interest in the symbol, whatever uses to which they put that symbol. Although the evidence for the gang's historical existence may be limited or deniable, the evidence for their *imagined* existence is certain. Considered as a collection of narratives, the Mohocks are an object created by the media and given life in the public sphere by the numerous people and institutions who were sufficiently engaged in that narrative to literally buy into it or otherwise profitably engage in its circulation. The endurance of the Mohock name long after its immediacy had dissipated is a marker of the context into which that name was born. Competing Whig and Tory political agendas, claims of how British society should be constructed and where that differed from reality, and a long-

standing interest in criminal narratives all took part in producing the meaning of the perceived crisis. What the brief terror of the Mohock spring reveals is a social and cultural environment that made the Mohocks into a forum for expressing the desires of the constituent social, political, and legal publics that constructed early eighteenth-century London.

Appendix I

The Huzza

When the Streets are all clear,
The Town is our Own;
We *manage* the Humour, and laugh at the Fear
Of all those we *Lay on*.
Down goes the *Bully*, the *Heck*, and *Night-walker*;
But oh! the Brisk Girl, we will never forsake her.
The Constable flies,
And his Clubmen withdraw,
When they hear the fierce Cries
Of the dreadful *Huzza, Huzza, Huzza!*

The Gown, Surplice, or Sword,
We spare not at all;
But *Draw up our Forces*, and give 'um the Word;
Make a Show, and they fall.
Down goes the Lawyer, the Priest, and the Captain;
But wo to the House that a Candle is kept in:
We make the Glass flie,
And the Rogues stand in awe,
When they hear the fierce Cry
Of the dreadful Huzza, Huzza, Huzza!

If a Brave of the Court,
A Yea and a Nay,
Or Canting soft Sister, that's right for the Sport,
Do appear in our way,
Down Tabitha goes, the Saint, and the Wicked,
Though their Lungs are consum'd, their Noes like a Cricket,
We make 'em strain high,
To declare for our Law,
And advance the fierce Cry
Of the dreadful Huzza, Huzza, Huzza!

Some do Plot, Pimp, or Pad;
Some Play, Swear, and Whore;
Some Write till th'are laugh'd at, some Read till th'are mad,
And some Drink till th'are poor;
Some Rail and Lampoon, till their Ears do miscarry:
But, on the Huzza, we are honest, and wary.
We make the Rogues fly,

Or embrace our New Law,
And advance the fierce Cry
Of the dreadful Huzza, Huzza, Huzza!

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