

## **THE BAWD'S OPERA NARRATION**

### **Mrs. Quizzick: Prologue**

The place: London! the center of civilization and civility.

The time: the early eighteenth century, the Age of Hogarth, Wycherly and Alexander Pope.

The scene: an inn of pleasure, located conveniently close by the Houses of Parliament, whose members are ardent and repeat patrons of the Inn.

Mrs. Quizzick, from whom we have just heard, is the mother of Kate, a hard-working girl of this house of... how shall we say?...extra-marital excitement. Kate needs a safe place for her mother, who is a bit demented. And the big hearted Madame, the executrix of the Inn, Mrs. Pucker, agrees to take the baffled old woman under her roof.

Mrs. Pucker, a successful business-woman in her own right, has a profound and simple philosophy of life, which she will now share with us:

### **RS 1 All Life is a Struggle for Gold:** Heather Antoniessen (Mrs. Pucker)

The wholly worldly Mrs. Pucker has a rather other-worldly young daughter, Polly. Polly has been seen strolling in the company of a young clergyman by the unwieldy name of the Reverend Mr. Percival Andrewes... Percy. Mrs. Pucker has nothing against clergymen. Why, some of her best customers... But, this young man is a riddle.

Polly meets with Percy outside her mother's establishment, and together they pledge their love, imagining – as young people will – extravagant catastrophes their loves might endure.

### **BT 4. Were you sold on Indian soil** Heather and Jon Bauman Percy & Polly

If love be an unction, there's a fly in the ointment: Mrs. Powell. Mrs. Powell is a bag-woman who has her hands in many accounts. She pays off the police with bribes tendered from Mrs. Pucker. But she has been demanding larger payments and a cut of the profits of the House.

Now, "bag woman" (meaning someone who collects police graft) was a term unknown to Alexander Pope. But for Michael Feingold and, as you may remember, to many of the class of 1966, this phrase is remembered in news reports about Adam Clayton Powell, who in a televised interview had accused a Harlem woman of being a bag-lady.

So the tradition of Varsity Shows' critique of current events lives on in the Bawd's Opera....where, by the way, Mrs. Pucker and Mrs. Powell (the bag lady) now haggle over the cost of doing business.

### **RS 6. If money's a curse** Heather and Maude Clark: Mrs. Pucker & Mrs. Powell

The two business-women seem to be at an impasse. Providentially, the case is resolved by the establishment's most litigious and libidinous customers: the Members of the House of Parliament. The MP Sir Peter Snivel and his Aide, Rob Ravisham suggest that Parliament should pass a bill to fund an establishment for unwed mothers, and earmark the funds for Mrs. Pucker's house. Problem solved! One hand washes the other. Or, one might: Cooperation!

**RS 10. Cooperation** Heather, Jeff Kurnit and Rich Rosenblum Sir Peter, Rob, Mrs. Pucker

Alas! The Reverend Percy has learned of Polly's mother's trade. Horrors! He encourages Polly to turn her back upon her upbringing and fear not the fate of an upright life:

**RS 11. Be not afraid** Heather and Jon Bauman

The MP's plan might have been smooth sailing, were it not for those Puritans. Out of power now in Restoration England, but in no way out of rage, Ananias Squelch and Mrs. Squelch, two rabid puritans, get a whiff of the proposed bill. The Squelches are on a religious mission to put the bordello put out of business and send all its inhabitants to jail – Well, you can get the gist of their religious zest in this fundamentalist duet:

**RS 12. The devil's offerings** Annette Oliveira and Allen Kennedy

Polly, lovely as she is, has not been unnoticed by others. Mrs. Pucker has in her employ a fellow, Charles, who has become infatuated with Polly. But when he tries to play his hand he is summarily rejected by the virtuous girl, leaving him to express his feelings in this species of Baroque opera aria:

**BT 13. I have been spurned** Richard Kennedy

Mrs. Pucker also has had in her employ for some years now one Ned Kisswell, a man kept for his manly services, if you catch my drift. Mrs. Pucker, in an incredibly motherly moment, suggests to Ned that he might be used to disengage Polly's affection for the reverend Percy by applying a bit of his own skills of seduction to soften her objections.

**RS 15. As the lock** Heather and Jesse Waldinger

Impetuous Ned makes his move and seizes Polly. The reverend Percy barges into the room, preventing Polly's rape. But all is not well. Percy has learned about the MP's scheme. He feels ethically bound to stop it and so must make it public.

As he runs off, Polly realizes she may have lost everything. Her mother's affection and Percy's love. Her poignant aria brings the first act to a close.

**BT 17. Empty my arms** Heather

Act Two: Meanwhile those annoying Puritans, aghast at the world's venalities, remind themselves that God will punish the wicked and that they don't need to, really, do a thing.

**RS 20. In my haste, in my pride** Annette Oliveira and Allen Kennedy

Percy tries to enlist the help of a policeman, Ketchum, and Mrs. Powell, the bag lady, who have no interest in justice. Instead, they sing giddy limericks about how much they will profit from the protection money Mrs. Pucker will have to pay them.

**BT 21. A young man** Jeff Kurnit and Maud Clark

It seems that the MP's bill is about to pass Parliament. At the Inn, Polly and her mother are scarcely speaking. Mrs. Pucker is about to pull off the coup of her life but will have no daughter to share it with if Percy has his way; she grieves this state of affairs in a Baroque chaconne:

**BT 24. Why am I thus bereft** Heather

But Percy, on the street, has met failure in his virtuous quest to stop the scheme and save his beloved Polly. He tries to buck himself up in this brave anthem:

**BT 25. I must be steadfast** Jon Bauman

Mrs. Powell and the MP Sir Peter do not see eye to eye, and their argument is expressed in the duet, Pox take it!

**RS 26. Pox take it!** Jeff Kurnit and Jon Bauman

There seems no way the lovers can be together. Polly, at home later, realizes she is still yearning for Percy. Charles attempts to console her in a tender folksong:

**BT 29. For I must wander lonely** Richard Kennedy

For the first time, Polly realizes how much Charles loves her, and is on the verge of accepting him when Percy enters, disconsolate over his inability to arouse anyone's moral outrage. No one cares for his sermons or speeches -- venality has triumphed. He is ready to throw in the towel and join Polly and her mother in the family business. As Polly hesitates, struggling to choose between the two men, Mrs. Pucker persuades her to accept both Charles and Percy, and all agree to this solution. Sir Peter arrives to announce that the Bill has passed Parliament, the Inn will now be funded by the public purse. Everyone will be rich and happy and completely corrupt. All joyously sing in a rousing ensemble number and finale: "Though I through lust and pride did stray".

**RS 33. Though I through lust and pride** All soloists and Ensemble

**RS 34. Let us celebrate** Combined Ensemble

**RS Epilogue** Rosemary Shevlin Weiss