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“Offspring of Hell”:
Origin and Persistence of the Mohocks' Myth

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Ai miei nonni,

Antonio Giovannini e

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Note to Text

This dissertation makes extensive use of eighteenth-century sources featured in Jisc's *Historical Texts* online catalogue, which includes *Early English Books Online* (EEBO), *Eighteenth Century Collections Online* (ECCO) and 65,000 texts from the British Library 19th Century collection. Documents are uploaded as sequences of scanned images, and require login to be accessed (direct links are useless): therefore, for the sake of clarity, references are given as follows: " bibliographical data of the print copy (when available) [*Historical Texts* number of the image] ".

Introduction

Street violence has always been a component of London's public life: while brawls and fights mostly regarded lower classes, it was not uncommon that people of quality, shielded by their social status, got involved as well. Often, aristocratic ruffians banded together in clubs and fraternities devoted to mischief: as early as the sixteenth century there is evidence of gentlemen engaging in activities such as “forcibly clear[ing] taverns, br[eaking] windows and assault[ing] bystanders and the watch” [1]. Authorities were relatively powerless towards their misdeeds, and the general public seemed quite accustomed to these displays of impunity and arrogance.

Given the relative frequency of these escapades, one might wonder why eighteenth-century Londoners were so struck by the alleged rampage of the Mohocks, a gang of aristocratic hooligans which roamed the streets of Westminster in spring 1712. The group, which borrowed its name from a North-American tribe, provoked an unprecedented mediatic uproar and alarmed citizens to the point that Queen Anne's government felt compelled to intervene. The press depicted their assaults with frightened tones and pamphlets romanticised their exploits, while literary heavyweights such as Steele and Swift manifested their disbelief about what seemed plain scaremongering.

The panic did not last more than a couple of months: official investigations found scarce evidence of the rogues' crimes and few were convicted, while the press moved onto next scandal. Thus, it is not difficult to agree with David Nokes' point that “[b]oth the suddenness of the Mohock panic, and its abrupt cessation, strongly support the view [...] that they were largely a figment of the popular imagination, created by a combination of press hysteria and public credulity” [2]. Nonetheless, the Mohocks had a huge impact on their time: although they were little more than riotous pranksters, “[i]t was the attempt of Queen Anne's subjects to find subtler reasons for the outrages that created the panic and lead to the confusion”. [3] They were considered Whig plotters, hell bent on destroying the government, and often depicted with demoniac traits: Defoe called them “Offspring of Hell” [4], and many pamphlets underlined their alleged links with the Devil.

One may find be hardly surprising that, considering the story's imaginative potential, its exploitation have gone beyond Grub-street press. Actually, the Mohocks were the protagonist of a light afterpiece by John Gay (1685-1732), poet and playwright who later achieved long-lasting success with his *Beggar's Opera* (1728). The play, which represented the young author's theatrical

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1 Robert Shoemaker, "Male Honour and the Decline of Public Violence in Eighteenth-Century London" in *Social History* (2001) 26, 2: 199.

2 David Nokes, *John Gay*: *A Profession of Friendship* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), p. 93.

3 Robert J. Allen, *The Clubs of Augustan London* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933), p. 112.

4 *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, No. 154 (March 18, 1712) in Arthur Secord (ed.), *Defoe's Review* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938) vol. XXI, p. 617.

debut, was never performed, but it still remains noteworthy because of its learned representation of the rakes, which mixes references to actuality and literary allusions. After Gay, however, the loss of interest towards the rakes inhibited further significant expansions of the Mohocks' lore until the twentieth century, when their story re-emerged in *Manituana* (2007), a historical novel by Italian writing collective Wu Ming.

According to this sketch, the dissertation has been divided into three chapters. Chapter One offers a panoramic perspective of the Mohocks' scare. At first, it examines both the real and fictional roots of the gang, recalling the long tradition of similar aristocratic hooligans but also highlighting their novelty, symbolised by the exotic moniker they received from the press. Public and private sources, such as *The Spectator*, Defoe's *Review* and Swift's *Journal to Stella*, detail the Mohocks' rampage and, at the same time, give an account of their perception among literates. The picture is completed by a review of the principal pamphlets dealing with the case, which are believed to have played a significant role in establishing the rogues' traditional image.

Chapter Two will focus instead on John Gay's Mohocks-related works, investigating why "[t]he idea of this unruly fraternity of aristocratic young rakes intent in terrorizing the respectable citizens of London [...] appealed to [his] imagination". [5] Actually, the rogues made several appearances within his canon which deserve to be considered: in particular, it is discussed a mock-prophetic pamphlet which seems to have been concocted by the author as a preproduction puff for his play. The actual afterpiece, *The Mohocks* (1712), is examined thoroughly, with special attention to its sources, structure and stage issues; besides its gang's representation, the dissertation analyses at length its mingling of burlesque and slapstick farce which later came to represent Gay's hallmark.

Chapter Three begins exposing the affair's immediate aftermath, and tracing the Mohocks' imaginative persistence in the following years; these occurrences will show how features provided by the pamphlets and Gay has been established and spread. Most of the section, however, focuses on the rakes' modern re-imagining operated by Wu Ming, whose literary achievements and poetics are also briefly reviewed. While its book mainly centres on the Iroquois Indians' struggle during the American War of Independence, large sections are devoted to the London gang: its depiction is therefore searched underlining both the retrieval of eighteenth-century elements and the innovations introduced in accordance with the authors' political agenda.

Even this cursory outline might have suggested which is the critical approach this dissertation employs, based mainly on the use of primary sources and the comparative focus. In fact, this work does not pretend to offer a detailed chronology of the Mohocks' phenomenon, nor to ascertain whether they have really existed or not: historians such as Daniel Statt or Neil Guthrie

5 Nokes, p. 93.

have already taken up the burden, while there are also entire theses on the broader topic. [6] The present dissertation concentrates instead on the Mohocks' literary image, in the belief that their actual existence is less important that the traces they left in popular culture.

Therefore, while other works have looked thoroughly into historical evidence, such as official proclamations and court records, this dissertation prioritises other sources, such as the pamphlets, which were often overlooked for their scarce reliability but are undoubtedly precious for the rogues' vivid, well-rounded depiction. They have been quoted extensively, and the same approach has been adopted with Gay's works and Wu Ming's novel: while one values the vast scholarship which has been developed onto these topics – it may suffice to recall David Nokes' masterful biography of the Augustan poet – primary sources have been deemed essential to properly understand the Mohocks' milieu, and thus lie at the core of this work.

Wu Ming's presence, then, testifies how this work's scope has not been confined to the Anglophone world. Whilst it is out of doubt that the Mohocks remain primarily a British phenomenon, its latest Italian re-reading had the merit of breathing new air into the old story,stressing its similarities with modern phenomena such as youth subcultures or the "droogs" featured in *A Clockwork Orange*. Because of *Manituana*'s relative novelty and, perhaps, of its pop features, eighteenth-century scholars have failed to analyse it as a serious rewriting of the traditional myth: therefore, it seemed necessary to push the analysis beyond the English-literature boundaries and investigate this valuable addition to the Mohocks' lore.

Ultimately, one could not but agree with Guthrie when he maintains 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". [7] Indeed, these elements could be seen as the reasons for the persistence of the Mohocks' myth until the current century: because of them, the rogues went on attracting scholarly studies and prompting several adaptations, ranging from Gay's masterful treatment to Wu Ming's original rewriting. As shown in this dissertation, the Mohocks were not a far cry from other eighteenth-century scoundrels; upon considering the imaginative power of the aforementioned features, however, it comes as little surprise the Mohocks achieved a celebrity that no street gang before and after them was able to match.

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6 Meshon Cantrill, " '*Who has not trembled at the Mohocks' name?'* : Narratives of Control and Resistance in the Press in Early Eighteenth Century London", unpublished MA thesis (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2011).

7 Neil Guthrie, "*No Truth or very Little in the Whole Story* – A Reassessment of the Mohawk Scare of 1712" in *Eighteenth Century Life* (1996) 20, 2: 49.

I. An Augustan Scare: the Mohocks Case

1. 1 Between history and myth-making

Most of the historical accounts of the Mohocks scare are likely to mention, at some point, that the gang immortalised in Gay's homonymous play was not the first of its kind. Arguments in support of this thesis come from the play itself: scholars often cite the words of the watchman Bleak, who pretends to remember “the ancient *Mohocks* of *King Charles* his Days” [1], or recall Justice Scruple's comment that “there were *Mohocks* in Queen *Elizabeth*'s days”. [2] Indeed, rake violence seemed to be a common feature in London across the centuries; as Graves asserts, “there is an abundance of evidence to show that organized rowdies [...] had been operating in England for at least three generations”. [3] The novelty of the Mohocks' phenomenon, then, seemed to rely more on the outcry it provoked among press and public than on its real nature.

In order to properly understand the Mohocks gang's historical dimension, however, it may still be useful to review some of its “ancestors” who were believed to infest London's streets in the earlier days. Just as Justice Scruple suggests, these groups actually trace back to the Elizabethan age: at the end of the sixteenth century, a group of rakish gentlemen, led by sir Edmund Baynham, became infamously known as “the Damned Crew”. In May 1598, a sermon delivered by Reverend Stephen Gosson depicted them as “a prophane company”, made of “menne without feare or feeling eyther of Hell or Heaven” [4], who indulged in drinking, playing pranks and assaulting the watch.

These behaviours, which frightened the general population far more than ordinary thefts and robberies, were eventually shared by Jacobean fraternities. Associations such as the “Order of the Bugle” and the “Tyture-tus” grew to public attention due to their allegedly mischievous conduct; the government suspected political schemes behind their activities, and its plot-finding eagerness was mocked by several satirists. But, even if these drunken night roisterers “may have been guiltless of any sinister political purpose [...] it is certain that they made themselves a general nuisance to the London of their day”. [5]

About the middle of the XVII century, the most famous of the many pre-Mohocks brotherhoods arose under the name of “Hectors”. A flood of popular literature described its customs

1 John Gay, *The Mohocks* (1712) ii. 115-16 in John Fuller (ed.), *John Gay: Dramatic Works* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 77-99 [*Oxford Scholarly Editions Online*, 2014]

2 *The Mohocks* (hereafter *TM*) iii. 2.

3 Thornton Shirley Graves, "Some Pre-Mohock Clansmen" in *Studies in Philology* (1923) 20, 4: 395.

4 Stephen Gosson, *Pleasant Quippes for Upstart Newfangled Gentlewomen. To which is added, Pickings and Pleasantries from the Trumpet of Warre: a sermon by Gosson*. (1598, repr. Totham 1847) [*Historical Texts* 33]. See also S. E. Sprott, “The Damned Crew” in *PMLA* (1969) 84, 3: 492–500.

5 T. S. Graves, 405.

and operations, detailing admission tests, favourite activities and criminal deeds of the rakes; in particular, "[t]he wild night life of the Hectors – their swaggering and drinking, their riots in taverns, their connection with brothels, their breaking of windows and fights with the London watchmen, and their impositions upon harmless pedestrians" [6] became a common theme for Restoration writers.

Plays, poems, and ballads were dedicated to these organised rowdies and their activities; Edmund Prestwich's *The Hectors; or the False Challenge* (1665), for example, represents the rakes' ploy to extort money from wealthy gentlemen, forcing them to pay a considerable sum of money to avoid a risky duel with gang members. Later rioters took their name directly from their favourite activity, "scouring", which the *Oxford English Dictionary* incisively explains as "to roam about at night uproariously, breaking windows, beating the watch, and molesting wayfarers". [7] Another dramatist, Thomas Shadwell, devoted to them a play, *The Scowrers* (1691), where the rake Wildfire links himself to the roisterers' tradition, recalling earlier brotherhoods and commenting that "they were brave fellows indeed". [8]

Even this brief review of gangs' history in London, which omits several less significant associations, should be sufficient to prove that organised rake violence had deep roots in the social context, or at least that its press representation and public perception remained consistent through the ages. It bears little surprise, then, that eighteenth-century historian Thomas Babington Macaulay could smoothly epitomise two centuries of "scouring" in three sentences: "[s]everal dynasties of [...] tyrants had [...] domineered over the streets. The Muns and Tityre Tus had given place to the Hectors, and the Hectors had been recently succeeded by the Scourers. At a later period arose the Nicker, the Hawcubite, and the yet more dreaded name of Mohawk". [9]

The last of the gangs cited, the Mohawk or Mohock, was eventually going to assert itself as the most feared and infamous of them. The real nature of the Mohocks' criminal deeds has been endlessly disputed by scholars, and it will be assessed later, but it seems necessary, before analysing their rampage, to examine their background. Actually, one could hardly deny this brotherhood belonged to a long, documented tradition of dissolute gentlemen's societies, but what made it stand out among them were its fictional features, which Grub Street press was eager to depict. A significant role, in this sense, was played by the gang's denomination, which is, therefore, worth of some critical attention.

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6 T. S. Graves, 416-17.
7 "scour, *v.* 1." *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, September 2016)
8 Thomas Shadwell, *The Scowrers* (London 1691). [*Historical Texts* 8]
9 Thomas Babington Macaulay, *The History of England from the Accession of James II* (Chicago: Donohue, Henneberry & Co., 1890), p. 329. "Nickers" were hoolingans "who made a practice of breaking windows by throwing copper coins at them" (*OED* s.v.). Hawcubites or Hawkubites were immediate predecessors to Mohocks.

The earliest mention of the term “Mohawk”, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is found in William Wood's *New England's Prospect* (1634), and designates “a member of a North American Indian people, one of the original five of the Iroquois Confederacy, inhabiting parts of southern Ontario and northern New York State”. [10] Wood's words about the tribe testify a striking feature of the Indians – their violence – which will last for a long time in the colonisers' mind:

> These are a cruell bloody people, which were wont to come downe upon their poore neighbours with more than bruitish savagenesse, spoyling of their Corne, burning their houses, slaying men, ravishing women, yea very Caniballs they were, sometimes eating on a man one part after another before his face, and while yet living; in so much that the very name of a Mowhack would strike the heart of a poore Abergenian dead [...]. [11]

Despite all their cruelties, the Mohawks still remained just one of the many “savage” tribes which the Englishmen met and faced during their colonisation of North America. In order to explain how an exotic ethnonym became the *nom de guerre* of London's most notorious gang, one should consider a relevant event who took place some months before the Mohocks scare's outburst. In 1710, indeed, an embassy of four Native Americans, belonging to the Iroquois confederacy, travelled to London to met with the government; as Hinderaker notes, “[t]hey were neither the first Indians to visit the British Isles nor the last, but in cultural impact the episode was unique”. [12]

The visit, organised by colonial governors and opportunistic adventurers, was aimed at restarting the aborted invasion of the French-dominated Canada. They intended to use the Indians to dramatise their case in front of the Queen and gain support and funding for their project. At the same time, the organisers wanted to impress the outlandish visitors and strengthen the allegiance with their tribes, as the Six Indian Nations, despite some involvement in the invasion of Canada, were trying to maintain neutrality between the two colonial powers instead of clearly siding with the English.

Under these premises, it is little surprise that the Iroquois refused to send their actual chiefs to England; promoters were thus forced to collect other Indian supporters willing to go along with them. As a result, the visitors who were boastfully presented as the “Four Indian Kings” were in fact not leaders but “a miscellaneous collection of young and relatively powerless Anglophiles, among whom four of the five tribes of the Iroquois confederacy went unrepresented, [...] depicted as

10 "Mohawks, *n.* and *adj.*", *OED Online*.

11 William Wood, *New England's Prospect* (London 1634). [*Historical Texts* p. 69]. Aberginians were another North American Indian tribe.

12 Eric Hinderaker, "The "Four Indian Kings" and the Imaginative Construction of the First British Empire" in *The William and Mary Quarterly* (1996) 53, 3: 487.

plenipotentiaries”. [13]

Their lack of real credentials was compensated by shameless invention. They were given grand names and impressive titles: the highest-ranking of them, who actually was a minor figure among the Mohawks, was presented as “Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row, Emperour of the Six Nations” , and his companions received similar appellations – pretentious names would have been a feature later employed also by the Mohocks gang. Posing as kings, the Indians immediately gained recognition as official representatives of another nation, and thus potential allies and clients of the Crown, instead of being considered just savages from overseas; this impression was enforced by their theatrical dressing and by their persisted, solemn silence during official meetings, obviously due to their ignorance of English.

After the audience at Court, they paid visit to several important personalities and toured the whole city, attracting massive mob interest. They even attended a representation of *Macbeth*, where the crowd was more interested in the outlandish hosts than in the play, and forced the theatre manager to accommodate them in plain sight on the stage. Moreover, the Tories were eager to exploit the Four Kings' presence as a political tool in support of their “blue water policy”. In late stages of the War of Spanish Succession, indeed, the Tory faction was advocating a turn from the Whigs ministry's continental campaigns to naval and colonial expeditions, such as the Canadian invasion. Then, as Queen Anne was switching her preferment from one side to the other, the Indian embassy became a useful symbol to popularise the project also among the larger populace.

Furthermore, one should consider the flurry of printing which surrounded the event, and the use writers made of the Kings' visit. Ethnographic pamphlets satisfied the public interest on the Mohawks' territories and customs, while satirical ballads allowed ordinary people to freely mock the idea of divine-right monarchy, disguised under the exotic appearance of the kings. Joseph Addison and Richard Steele anticipated Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* in using the foreign element as a device to criticise their own society; above all, “the visit stimulated patriotic celebrations of Britain's expanding maritime empire” and its civilising mission, nurturing the “dawning awareness of Britain's imperial identity”. [14]

The Four Kings' mission was brief but had some impact on the affairs of state; even if a newinvasion of Canada, in 1710, failed again, its significance for the British empire-building project was notable. Hinderaker argues “it pushed the ministry to revive and enlarge its efforts to effect a significant territorial conquest in North America, [...] strengthened Britain's ties to the Iroquois Confederacy and served as one source of inspiration for the more fully developed culture

13 Hinderaker, 491.
14 Hinderaker, 502.

of empire that soon emerged as a defining characteristic of British national identity". [15] But it also left an enduring legacy in the English culture and imaginary, which abruptly resurfaced two years later.

When in early 1712 a group of young ruffians started roaming the streets of London, the press soon christened them "Mohock club". One of the very first accounts of the group, to be found in Steele's *The Spectator* No. 324, links the name of that "Nocturnal Fraternity" to "a sort of Cannibals in India, who subsist by plundering and devouring all the Nations about them". [16] While the idea of cannibalism seems to recall traditional accounts of the Mohawks, such as Wood's, the author of the essay incorrectly locates the tribe in the Far East and not in the New World. The error was later corrected by Daniel Defoe, who pointed out the club's name referred to

> "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". [17]

One could recognise some bitterness in Defoe's words: a Whig supporter, he saw the "pretended Indian Kings" as Tory puppets and linked their mission to the change of political balance that occurred in 1710, even if the natives were not directly responsible for Queen Anne's switching of preferment. Once corrected the geographical error, however, the writer stresses again on the cruelty and barbarity of the natives, which appears to have been inherited by the London rakes. It remains unclear if the name of "Mohocks" was self-attributed by the gang's members "after the fashion of many private clubs and convivial societies" or "was 'in the air' at the time and applied to the group when the story broke" [18]; it may also be linked to the Mohocks alleged practice of cutting their victims' hair, such as the Indians did with their scalping. [19] Here, nevertheless, it seems worth to note that the rakes received (or took) a highly symbolical name, reminding the public of remote and dangerous tribes it began to know thanks to the Four Kings' embassy.

Eventually, an external observer may conclude the Mohocks gang was just another stage in London's brotherhoods tradition, as they were not dissimilar to the Jacobean "Tyture-tus" or the

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15 Hinderaker, 519.

16 *The Spectator* No. 324 (March 12, 1712) in Henry Morley (ed.), *The Spectator: A New Edition* (3 vols; London: Routledge, 1891) [*Project Gutenberg*].

17 *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, No. 153 (March 15, 1712) in Arthur Secord (ed.), *Defoe's Review* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), vol. XXI, pp. 613-15. Quoted also in Hinderaker, 524.

18 Guthrie, 48-49.

19 Guthrie, 39.

Restoration “Hectors”. Furthermore, one should also remember that “the tradition of marauding groups of rakes in London, some, like the Hell Fire Club, better documented than the Mohocks, continued to the end of the eighteenth century”. [20] Nonetheless, it ought to be stressed again that the Mohocks' relevance and long-lasting literary persistence was mainly due to the narrative built around them by Grub Street press, in which the identification with the Indian “savages” played an instrumental role. Indeed, by linking the London rakes to the Mohawk tribe, the pamphleteers and scribblers gave the Mohocks an aura of exoticism and danger which boosted the popular attention towards them, even without factual evidence of their deeds.

1. 2 The Mohocks' rampage: a reconstruction

A key point in the investigation of the Mohocks narrative, indeed, is assessing the truth about their alleged crimes. Scholars are largely sceptical about the issue; in fact, most of them dismiss the Mohocks as “chimeras of an overheated public imagination nourished by sensational press reports and political opportunism” [21], and deny any reliability to most of journalistic and literary sources of the time, deemed as politically biased or thoroughly false. [22] Others, however, caution against underestimating these texts: as Statt puts is, “[t]he rakes of I712 were more than fabrications of the press [...] and by delving behind the published accounts one can find considerably more than simply phantoms conjured by Grub Street scribblers”. [23]

It is out of doubt that the unruly development of trade publishing after 1680 played a huge role in the Mohocks affair; in particular, the first decades of the eighteenth century saw the press industry hell bent on “the rapid production and dissemination of inexpensive, often controversial, street literature”. Indeed, hack-writers were eager to exploit and dramatise any relevant event which happened in London to sell more copies of their works: one earlier example of this method is the buzz about the Four Kings' visit that was briefly mentioned before. The Mohocks case probably represented the process' acme, where Grub Street scribblers employed their whole arsenal to strengthen “the popular impression that Londoners were witnessing something extraordinary and singularly topical”. [24]

If one looks for factual accuracy, aiming at historical truth, eighteenth-century printed sources did undoubtedly present some reliability issues. Perhaps it would be more useful to future historians, for example, analysing official documents such as those from the Greater London

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20 Daniel Statt, "The Case of the Mohocks: Rake Violence in Augustan London" in *Social History* (1995) 20, 2: 190.
21 Statt, 179.
22 Guthrie, 48.
23 Statt, 184.
24 Hinderaker, 500.

Records Office (GLRO), which “are more likely to reflect what truly happened than are the more fanciful productions of Grub Street” [25]. However, if one is more interested in the Mohocks narrative and its legacy, regardless of their actual deeds, Cantrill's advice that “[t]he actual existence of the Mohocks is less important than the traces they leave in the public discourse of eighteenth century London” [26] still retains its validity.

Following this thread, which favours *interpretations* over *facts*, the gang's rampage will be followed through available historical sources, which consists mainly of newspapers, such as *The Spectator*, and street pamphlets, the so-called “broadsides”. It is believed that these two types of documents give a well-rounded perspective on the matter, as they combine descriptions of the gang with reflections on its social and political significance. While newspapers (or private documents, as Swift's *Journal to Stella*) seem to be more useful in building an actual chronology of the event, though often marred by political partisanship, broadsides help to understand the Mohocks' role in contemporary culture, and played a relevant role in establishing the long-lasting literary image of the gang which John Gay will further develop.

The earliest references to the rakes comes from Jonathan Swift's letter to Stella, dated March 8, 1712: after describing his daily occupations, the writer makes a passing mention of “a race of rakes, called the Mohocks, that play the devil about this town every night, slit people’s noses, and beat them”. [27] The Irish author appears to be lucid in his description, and easily identifies the gang members as playful, perhaps a bit over-the-top debauchees, but he also underlines how their violent behaviour is often repeated and exceeds the boundaries of youthful rebellion against authority, because the targets are said to be generic “people”, not watchmen. Nevertheless, he seems to dismiss the phenomenon as no more than an ephemeral nuisance.

Swift soon changed his opinion, as the letter of the 9th of March, where he relates the Mohocks' aggression of a Mr. Henry Davenant, demonstrates. He starts fearing them, and claims “[i]t is not safe being in the streets at night” due to their activities. Friends indeed recommended him to stay safe, and he avoided coming home late, fearing frightful encounters with the scourers. Here appears also the first explicit political characterisation of the rakes: apparently “[t]hey are all Whigs”, and have “malicious intentions against the Ministers and their friends”. [28] Swift, a Tory partisan and an ally of Sir Robert Harley, Queen Anne's chief minister between 1711 and 1714, clearly felt to be targeted by heated Whig supporters.

However, just three days later, Swift's attitude towards the phenomenon changed again, as he

25 Guthrie, 34.
26 Cantrill, p. 5.
27 Jonathan Swift, *The Journal to Stella*, ed. by George Aitken (London: Methuen & Co., 1901), p. 419. [*Project Gutenberg*]
28 Swift, p. 420.

dismisses irrational fear in favour of a more sceptical approach. What seems to have disenchanted the Dean about the Mohocks' true nature was their sensationalist media coverage: he observes that “Grub Street papers about them fly like lightning”, spreading false and inaccurate news, and therefore he “begin[s] almost to think there is no truth, or very little, in the whole story”. He still retains some caution, as it has been heard in the streets that “one design of the Mohocks is upon [him], if they could catch [him]”, [29] and keeps coming home in a chair, but his words reveal that he is not as afraid as before.

Swift's letters are useful for understanding his position towards the Mohocks scare but remain a private document, a token of the correspondence between him and his beloved Esther Johnson (Stella). Far more relevant to the public context, and the literary myth-making of the gang, are the *Spectator* issues which contain references to them. *The Spectator* No. 323, dated March 11, 1712, shows how the Mohocks were already a common topic of discussion, as Clorinda's journal carelessly mentions chatting with a Mr. Froth about the subject. The scare was indeed gaining momentum, as Mr. Davenant's aggression demonstrates, even if Swift himself later acknowledged that “he that abused Davenant was a drunken gentleman; none of that gang”. [30]

Capitalising on rising popular fears, Steele dedicated almost an entire issue of *The Spectator* (No. 324, March 12, 1712) to the Mohocks. Under the alias “Philantropos”, he proposes to present “imperfect Informations of a Set of Men [...] who have lately erected themselves into a Nocturnal Fraternity”, aimed at integrating Mr. Spectator's “general History of Clubs”. [31] The piece appears to be the gang's first full-length description, and thus plays a relevant role in establishing many Mohocks features which will later become topical; therefore, it is worth to analyse it extensively, and compare it to factual evidence historiography has provided.

First, it is interesting to note how Steele, although mistakenly linking the Mohocks to India, seems to be aware of the connection between London rioters and North-American natives, and made it explicit in the text. According to the author, the gang leader bears the title of “Emperor”, which immediately “suggests conscious imitation of the Iroquois chiefs from whom the name "Mohock" was derived” [32], and in particular of the “Emperor of the Six Nations”. The Emperor's arms are said to be a “Turkish Crescent”, but even this oriental image hints to the Mohawks, because “his Imperial Majesty bears [the arms] at present in a very extraordinary manner engraven upon his Forehead”: this description should have recalled to the readers the impressive tattoos sported by the Four Kings, and reproduced by artist John Verelst and others. [33]

29 Swift, p. 422.
30 Swift, p. 422.
31 *The Spectator* No. 324 (March 12, 1712) in Henry Morley (ed.), *The Spectator: A New Edition.*
32 Guthrie, 41.
33 See Hinderaker, 508.

Once outlined the group's hierarchy, “Philantrophos” explains its aim: “[a]n outrageous Ambition of doing all possible hurt to their Fellow-Creatures, is the great Cement of their Assembly, and the only Qualification required in the Members”. In order to attain their goal, they get drunk and then roam the streets attacking bystanders; beating members of the watch is considered a sign of distinction. Furthermore, the Mohocks appear to be divided into units specialised in different cruelties:

> Some are celebrated for a happy Dexterity in tipping the Lion upon them; which is performed by squeezing the Nose flat to the Face, and boring out the Eyes with their Fingers: Others are called the Dancing-Masters, and teach their Scholars to cut Capers by running Swords thro' their Legs [...] : A third sort are the Tumblers, whose office it is to set Women on their Heads, and commit certain Indecencies, or rather Barbarities, on the Limbs which they expose.

The fictional correspondent closes his piece recalling the club's association with brothels – favourite hangouts of all-ages rakes – and, while invoking Mr. Spectator's solemn reproof directed to the rioters, makes clear the group includes both “Bullies and Scowrers of a long standing” and “thoughtless Youngsters”, who joined it “out of a false Notion of Bravery, and an immoderate Fondness to be distinguished for Fellows of Fire”. [34] One could argue Steele, with his description, laid the ground of the Mohocks myth; later writers were going to build upon his account and provide additional, sensationalist features to the story.

Around mid-March the gang was still on a rise, and tales of aggressions multiplied: Swift, in his letter of the 16th, relates for example the beating of Lady Winchelsea's maid. The authorities could not ignore popular fears any longer and were forced on the 17th to put out a royal proclamation for the suppression of riots and the apprehending of rioters, which was intended to reassure the public about the government's response to street crime. Only two days after, Swift mentions the first arrests of “Mohocks”. It was a group of young gentlemen, actually apprehended one week before for the beating of a watchman; the most prominent among them was Edward Richard Montagu, Lord Hinchinbroke. They were all released on bail: Hinchinbroke, future MP for Huntingdon, had to pay the extraordinary sum of 1,500 pounds but was not prosecuted further.

While the government was trying to suppress the outbreak of violence, with scarce results, Steele returned on the topic in *The Spectator* No. 332 (March 21, 1712), presenting the humorous letter of a “Jack Lightfoot”. As it can be seen by the correspondent's name, the tone of the letter is

34 *The Spectator* No. 324.

decidedly ironic. The writer describes another branch of the "worthy Society of Brutes", the "Sweaters", which are used to make their victims sweat pricking them with swords. However, their depiction is all but fearful: the aggression has ritualistic features and is compared to a "Piece of Conjuration", the victims became a "Patient" and at the end of the "Jig" they are discharged without any harm. The scene almost lacks violence, and a friend of the writer can jokingly recall "he had the Honour to dance before the Emperor himself, not without the Applause and Acclamations both of his Imperial Majesty, and the whole Ring". [35]

Lightfoot's letter is interesting for many reasons: it underlines how the Mohocks were by then perceived as an organised club, not a rioters' crowd, and nurtures oriental imagery, qualifying the gang as a "walking Bagnio". Even when real violence is presented, it assumes comical tones:the writer recalls a meeting with two Mohocks, whom he escaped "betaking [him] self to a Pair of Heels". In a mock-heroic style, he represents himself hiding in a "very snug Corner" of an alley, maintaining his position "with great Firmness and Resolution" until he can make "a handsome and orderly Retreat" to his house. Here again, the essayist hints at some possibility of reforming the rakes but leaves it to the editor's discretion.

The light-hearted tone seems to betray Steele's belief that Mohocks were little more than a press fabrication and mocks the scaremongering in the media. Both Philanthropos' and Lightfoot's letters enforce the perception that the group is just an organised club, with rules and hierarchy, made of rakish youths in need of reformation. Therefore, according to Cantrill, "[w]hile resisting the fear and loathing the Mohocks [...] generate, Steele also exerts a contrary controlling narrative, one in which the Mohocks and their like are co-opted into a mannered society". [36] Eventually, one could also recognise in the *Spectator*'s social project the influence of the Societies for the Reformation of Manners, groups that since 1690 "emerged as a response to the perceived depravity of [R]estoration", [37] and were campaigning against rake violence.

While public and government did not fully subscribe to Steele's opinion that the Mohocks were no more than hot-headed youngsters, Swift was ready to call the end of the scare in his letter of the 22nd of March: "[o]ur Mohocks are all vanished". [38] His guess, however, was untimely, as he was forced to admit, four days later, that the rakes "go on still, and cut people's faces every night" [39], event though he adds a humorous hint, hoping they do not cut his face as he likes it better as it is. Actually, "the spasm of street violence and its attendant panic" continued for a couple of weeks, and

35 *The Spectator* No. 332 (March 21, 1712) in Henry Morley (ed.), *The Spectator: A New Edition.*
36 Cantrill, p. 64.
37 Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Gender and Petty Violence in London, 1680-1720* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005), p. 46.
38 Swift, p. 430.
39 Swift, p. 432.

only by mid-April “the popular fear of the Mohocks was beginning to subside” [40], although prosecutions and trials went on until summer.

The Spectator, aside from some passing mentions, gave the last word about the topic on the 8th of April; this time, the essay was written not by Steele but by Eustace Budgell, cousin and assistant to Joseph Addison, and features both Budgell's reflections and some documents which are said to come from the Mohocks themselves. In the introduction, the writer asserts “many deep and penetrating Persons” are beginning to “doubt whether indeed there were ever any such Society of Men”; as the “Panick Fear” decreased, the idea the Mohocks were almost a fabrication was becoming more popular. Therefore, the gang is considered “like those Spectres and Apparitions which frighten several Towns and Villages in her Majesty's Dominions, tho' they were never seen by any of the Inhabitants”. Eventually, it could have been just a bugbear “invented by prudent married Men, and Masters of Families, in order to deter their Wives and Daughters from taking the Air at unseasonable Hours”.

These rationalistic explanations, however, are followed by some documents which, according to Budgell. may prove the Mohocks' real existence – though the satire is evident from the orthographic remarks about the sender's name. The writer indeed inserts a letter signed by “Taw Waw Eben Zan Kaladar, Emperor of the Mohocks”, who appear to be concerned with the good name of his fraternity; upon discovering that their “earnest Endeavours for the Good of Mankind have been basely and maliciously represented to the World”, he sends his “imperial Manifesto” to *The Spectator* in order to re-establish the truth and clarify his organisations true goals.

The Emperor's narrative is a humorous re-imagining of the Mohocks features known so far. While he claims his gang's innocence for “several Outrages committed on [...] the good People of England”, even proposing to cure the victims in “Hospitals which [the Mohocks] are now erecting for that purpose”, he still admits they are performing the activities that made them famous, and that were described in *The Spectator* No. 324. However, these “Penalties” appear to be inflicted only on “Persons of loose and dissolute Lives”; in other words, the Emperor cast himself and his group as civic-minded vigilantes bound to clear the streets of London from criminals and rakes. The manifesto then details the hours in which the Mohocks' different cohorts (Sweaters, Tumblers etc.) can operate, and the city zones to which each one is assigned.

The comical effect is strengthened by the concerns expressed by the Emperor about the victims' well-being. He orders the Sweaters, for example, to practise their art “in such close Places, Alleys, Nooks, and Corners, that the Patient or Patients may not be in danger of catching Cold”, and if “they are reduced to the Necessity of Pinking, it shall always be in the most fleshy Parts, and such

40 Statt, 189.

as are least exposed to view". This kind of behaviour means the gang is not a pack of bloody street avengers: their aim is "the Reformation of the Cities of London and Westminster" not through blind violence but through almost harmless pranks – indeed, there is no endorsement of severe physical assault in the Emperor's address.

As it is easily understood, Budgell, who speaks here through the fictional Emperor, fully supports *The Spectator*'s crusade for the rakes' reformation. The Mohocks, who were the chief example of the behaviour Steele criticised, morph into an educational tool at the essayist's command. If the author thought the gang a bugbear invented by householders to avoid their relatives' escapades, here it is Taw Waw himself who

> pray[s] and exhort[s] all Husbands, Fathers, Housekeepers and Masters of Families [...] not only to repair themselves to their respective Habitations at early and seasonable Hours; but also to keep their Wives and Daughters, Sons, Servants, and Apprentices, from appearing in the Streets at those Times and Seasons which may expose them to a military Discipline, as it is practised by our good Subjects the Mohocks. [41]

The Emperor's letter closes with the promise that, once reformed the morals, the Mohocks will disappear. Several remarkable elements justify such a long examination of this letter. First, Budgell aptly exploits different undertones of the Mohocks affair in order to tickle readers' imagination. He develops the Iroquois connection pointed out by Defoe and somehow suggested by Steele: the gang leader's pompous name, for example, consciously recalls that of the Four Kings' leader, Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row, "Emperor of the Six Nations". At the same time, he does not dismiss oriental nuances featured in Philanthropos' letter: the "Hummums" mentioned are indeed equivalent to Steele's "Walking Bagnio" where the Sweaters practise their art.

Budgell also strengthens the idea, already present in *The Spectator*'s previous issues, that the Mohocks are an organised club or society, provided of moral code and fixed hierarchy: they are all subjects to the Emperor and must obey his commands and the rules he sets for their activity. Finally, although he casts them as methodical vigilantes, and assigns them relevant social function, the writer cannot restrain himself from giving a small, but revelatory clue of the darker legends which surrounded the gang. The Emperor's court is said to be "at the Devil's Tavern": it could be just an ironical treatment of the popular fear about the rakes, but it could also hint to the devilish aura the rakes assumed in the pamphlets and Gay satirised in his play.

Historians agree that, as April passed, the Mohocks scare started to vanish. There were no

41 *The Spectator* No. 347 (April 8, 1712) in Henry Morley (ed.), *The Spectator: A New Edition.*

substantial proofs of their crimes, and the trials the judiciary earnestly carried on did not give the expected results, leading to a plenty of *non prosequitur*. [42] One year later, historian David Jones, while recalling the episode, was already subscribing to the widespread idea the general panic was unjustified: “when People, under the Security of [the Royal] Proclamation, came to inquire calmly and cooly into the Matter, it was found that there was nothing near so much in it, as was given out or apprehended”. [43] As time passed, indeed, the phenomenon was often and often described as a media-inflated case of collective hysteria; however, more sinister interpretations, concerning alleged political plotting, remained active under the radar.

Indeed, politics played a crucial role in this story since the beginning. Daniel Statt argues that “[p]artisans both Whig and Tory exhausted their ingenuity to make as much political capital out of the Mohock outbreak as they could”, even though the “crimes of the rakes had almost no direct political content”. [44] The Tories were the first to exploit the case for their purposes: it has already been cited Swift's opinion that the rioters were enemies to the Ministry, and the Dean itself, in a later work, “formulated an elaborate theory of political conspiracy” [45] which involved attempts to the ministers' lives and diplomatic sabotages. Furthermore, pamphleteer Richard Burridge believed the Mohocks “did a great deal of Mischief to Men and Women, whom they knew to be against their factious Principles”, which are “Abhorrence of kingly Government, and the Church of England” [46]: here the gangs' targets are presented not as members of general public but as Tory loyalists, even if there is no proof of this alignment in the victims, often from lower classes.

Daniel Defoe, acting at the time as intelligence agent and propagandist for the government, subscribed to this vision, but his response seemed less vigorous. His *Review* No. 153, entirely dedicated to the rakes, shows how the author's main concern was the gang's unmotivated brutality:

> This is such a committing a Crime for the sake of a Crime, such a degree above the Devil, that the like of it has not been heard of for some Ages in the World; what secret Pleasure these People find in it I confess I am at a loss to find out, and cannot imagine what infernal Rage it can be said to gratify.

While he waits for “the Gallows, the Army, or the Navy” to get rid of “such a Sett of Blood-

42 For a detailed account of Mohocks-related indictments and trials see Guthrie, 40-47.

43 David Jones, *A compleat history of Europe: or, a view of the affairs thereof, civil and military, for the year 1712.* (London 1713), p. 145 [*Historical Texts* 148]

44 Statt, 199.

45 Guthrie, 36.

46 Richard Burridge, *The history of the rise and growth of schism in Europe, to the great scandal of the Christian religion* (London: Morphew & Dodd, 1714), p. 88 [*Historical Texts* 119]

Hounds", he advocates the use of a self-defence weapon known as the Protestant flail to keep at bay any assailant, and goes as far as proposing the creation of an anti-Mohocks task force and volunteering for it. Here one may find the essay's only political hint: lamenting the passivity of his generation, Defoe exhorts his readers to take up arms against "Bullying of any kind", comparing the Mohocks to external foes (Spain, France, Jacobites) but also to "Party-Bullies" – adenomination which may well conceal the Whigs. [47]

His enthusiastic eulogy of the Protestant flail, however, was not enough to shield him from malevolent allegations of Mohockism: an anonymous pamphlet, entitled *England's Delivery, or the Fanaticks discover'd*, accused him of "using the Mohocks to spread general panic in the streets" while "incit[ing] the Dissenters to rebellion". [48] Although the charge was unsubstantiated, Defoe took it very seriously and denounced what he perceived, quite ironically, as a media lynching: he saw behind it "a Villainous Design, to have [him] torn in pieces by the Rabble", and responded with loud protestations of innocence:

> "This indeed is *Mohawking* me a New-fashion'd way, like Crying out a *Mad-Dog*, and setting the Parish upon him, but *it will not do* – I am ready to shew myself to Mob or Magistrates, in spite of these, or any other kind of of *Mohawks* in the Nation". [49]

Too busy with defending himself, the author of *Moll Flanders* did not contributed further to the general indictment of the Whigs for the gang's rampage. One should stress how, in the first instance, it may have been prompted by the fact Lord Hinchinbroke, the most prominent of the apprehended, belonged to that camp: when Thomas Hearne talked about a group of "young, lewd, debauch'd Sparks, all of the Whiggish Gang", who went under the name of Mohocks, he is probably thinking of him. In fact, Hinchinbroke was one of the few arrested who was implicated, though loosely, with politics, but Tory propaganda was eager to portray all the gang as biased. As a result, in Hearne's words, "the Whiggs [were] now so much asham'd of this great Scandal [...] that they publickly g[a]ve out there have been no such People, nor no such Inhumanities committed, thereby indeavouring to persuade People out of their Senses". [50]

In order to build their self-defence, Whigs adopted a diversionary strategy: they did not try,

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47 *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, No. 153 (March 15, 1712), pp. 614-15.

48 Calhoun Winton, *John Gay and the London Theatre* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993), pp. 22. The broadside, printed by Charles King in Holborn, seems to survive only in a single, hard copy at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington D.C. Therefore, it has not been possible to examine it.

49 *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, No. 155 (March 20, 1712), p. 624.

50 Charles E. Doble (ed.), *Remarks and Collections of Thomas Hearne* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1889), vol. III, p. 326 [*Historical Texts* 334]

if not sporadically, to accuse the Tories of Mohockism, but they underplayed the scare, denying the rogues' atrocities and portraying them as a group of high-spirited, young rakes who meant and made little harm. The best example of this scheme is the anonymous *Who Plot Best: The Whigs or the Tories*, a four-pence pamphlet published in 1712 in London. Cast as a letter to a Mr. Ferguson, it proposes to reveal eight plots (three from the Tories, five from the Whigs) happened in the last thirty years, but it is immediately clear the aim is discarding the allegations against the Whigs, depicting the alleged conspiracies as concocted by hostile propaganda or purely fictional.

Actually, the pamphlet's account is not a far cry from modern historical reconstructions: the gang is reduced to a “Parcel of Wild Young Fellows” which took its name from the Four Kings and“play'd some such Sorts of Pranks as the Scowrers did 20 or 30 Years before”. The author has clear the Mohocks are just another step in London street gangs' tradition, not an appalling milestone, and goes on denying the Emperor of these “Frolick-some Sparks”, who may have remembered Whig scion Hinchinbroke, had any political affiliation. The pamphlet's disruption of Tory propaganda is carried on quoting a brief sample of conspiracy theory about the Mohocks, which “ by the Strength of the Reasoning, and the Beauty of the Language” could have “*passed under the Pen* of Dr. S-”.

Swift, a leading conspiracy theorist and a vocal Tory, is the obvious target, but the satire relies also on the source the pamphleteer cites, which is said to be more trustworthy than the Dean himself. According to the author, he took the excerpt from

> nor better nor worse than an Honest *Grubstreet* Half-penny Scribbler, a Fellow-Labourer in the same Case, set at Work by an empty Packet and sharp Stomach ; yet this is what the Rabble hear daily baw'd about the Street, and greedily they fuck in the Poison: These *Scriptions* reaching those who cannot buy above a Half pennyworth of Scandal at a Time; and as they make up the Numbers, the Mischief they do is the more pernicious: I defy the Doctor himself [Swift] to tell this Story more cleverly, or to make more Judicious Reflections, or more delicate Eulogy.

This piece is almost merciless as it makes clear what is the real engine behind the Mohocks scare, namely the sensationalistic press coverage, and casts Grub-Street hack-writers as chiefly responsible for it. The affair, the author concludes, was soon settled by Queen's proclamation for the riots' suppression: “[t]he Scowrers scamper'd, the Emperor fled to the *Indies*, and his Empire came to an End”. [51] In *Who Plot Best* the gang disbanded almost peacefully, as they were just juvenile

51 Anon., *Who plot best; the Whigs or the Tories* (London: Baldwin, 1712), pp. 15-16 [*Historical Texts* 16-17]

pranksters, and the Emperor disappeared without harm: it is a far cry from the bloody destiny which attended him in Tory narratives. Ned Ward indeed maintains that, while fighting with a lady's escort, "he receiv'd a Fracture in his Skull, which prov'd his Bane, tho' it was given out, being a Great Person, that he dy'd of the Small-Pox"; therefore, "the Death of their Emperour and the Wisdom of the State", under the form of royal intervention, "put a stop to [the Mohocks'] Barbarities". [52]

Undoubtedly, the authorities put out a serious effort to suppress the outbreak of violence, but modern historians have several reasons to be sceptical about its effectiveness. Statt, detailing Mohocks-related indictments and trials, cites non-reporting crimes and procedural defects as main causes of criminal impunity. Even when apprehended, private prosecution was often a preferred option, as "[l]egal redress was reserved to those who could afford the costs and fees". Furthermore, the popular belief the Mohocks belonged to the society's upper strata provided a formidable deterrent to prosecutions:

> [t]he first line of defence was bribery and intimidation of captors and prosecutors. Beyond that, political and economic influence, the ties of deference, the possibility of retribution, family connections and behind-the- scenes favouritism made the conviction and punishment of members of the Quality singularly rare events. In large measure impunity was their birthright, and license theirprerogative. [53]

All these remarks underline how difficult was for the government to cope with the gang. It also lacked effective law-enforcers but the city watch, whose faults and flaws were largely satirised: more professional forms of policing would have debuted only around mid-century, when Sir Henry Fielding created the Bow Street Runners (1749). The Mohocks' nebulous nature, suspended between real crime and press scaremongering, made almost impossible to find out which crimes were actually their responsibility: a plenty of criminal proceedings came to nothing, or at best to petty pecuniary fines. Nevertheless, even if the proclamation had little effect, by the end of April the Mohocks seemed to have disappeared both from the news and the streets.

Within such a short amount of time (two months), the gang's alleged deeds sparked outrage among citizens, made the fortunes of the Grub-Street industry and prompted an official reaction from the government, before vanishing into thin air. In the eyes of modern readers, it seems just another step in London's long criminal tradition, but eighteenth-century denizens found its notoriety fully justified, especially because of the press supplying "a very marketable narrative, ridden with

52 Edward Ward, *The Whigs unmask'd: being the secret history of the Calf's-Head-Club* (London: Morphew, 1713), p. 129 [*Historical Texts* 159].

53 Statt, 185-86.

hints of conspiracy” [54] and tales of outrageous crimes. Alongside newspapers, then, broadsides played their part in spreading the psychosis and, due to their own nature, they had a larger reach than official sources: therefore, any investigation of the Mohocks' legacy could not ignore them.

1. 3 The Mohocks in the broadsides

It has been already mentioned one pamphlet, *Who Plot Best*, which tackles the Mohocks affair. However, far more interesting are those broadsides which put aside – or at least underplay – the scare's political undertones and give instead imaginative descriptions of the rakes' deeds and habits. Scholars have identified several noticeable elements in the gang, ranging from lack of economic interest in their crimes to misogyny or ethos of militarism, [55] but the few pamphlets survived [56] appear to focus just on some aspects, which probably were deemed to be the fittest to capture readers' imagination. If one wants to understand the Mohocks' phenomenon, it may thus be worth reviewing the broadsides' main contents and concentrating the attention on the elements which were more appealing to the 1712 audience.

First of all, the Mohocks stand out because they were no ordinary criminals: apprehensions such as Hinchinbroke's confirmed the popular perception they had a high social status and therefore could operate in substantial impunity. Indeed, examining the evidence, one scholar concludes 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”. [57] The pamphleteers, for their part, were eager to exploit the theme, as shown in anonymous print *The Town-Rakes: or, the Frolicks of the Mohocks or Hawkubites*: the paper's opening line does mention “a Certain set of Persons, among whom there are some of too great a Character to be nam'd in these barbarous and ridiculous Encounters”, which now is under the spotlight because of its crimes.

The tone of the piece, as it describes the Mohocks' topic crimes, seems frightened but it should be noted that their actions, although described as “Barbarities” made out of “Mischief”, are somewhat downplayed as “Frolicks”. [58] The idea, already in the title, is that the Mohocks are not a ruthless group of bandits, but a pack of young bloods whose pranks simply went too far. Of course, the pamphleteer does not dismiss fear and violence in their actions and is well aware of the imaginative potential their deeds have on readers, as he describes at length outrages done against

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54 Hurl-Eamon, p. 48.

55 Statt, 190-198.

56 The *Historical Texts* database lists only four Mohocks-related pamphlet in 1712, all examined here. *The Mohocks or Hawkubite Catechism* (1712), another pamphlet mentioned by Statt (184, n. 28), is nowhere to be accessed.

57 Statt, 191.

58 Anon., *The Town-Rakes: or, the Frolicks of the Mohocks or Hawkubites* (London: J. Wright, 1712) [*Hist. Text* 1]

innocents or attacks on the Watch. At the same time, however, he highlights how a stronger intervention from public authority was enough to put a stop to their activities, unlike crime syndicates which were already flourishing in the period. [59]

The keyword in this text is “rake” – a qualification the Mohocks often received, and hints both to their upper-class status and debauchery. The concept itself of rakery provides further interpretative keys for the Mohocks phenomenon, and in particular for their hyperbolic media coverage. It has already been stressed how London has a long history of rakish gangs, but none of them reached the Mohocks' popularity: indeed, “the attitude toward earlier rakes tended to be fairly indulgent, in stark contrast to the moral panic surrounding [the 1712 rogues]”. [60] Actually, the Mohocks' notoriety was not just the result of Grub Street machinations to maximise sales, but reflected also a change of the rakes' social status: together, both these elements could fully justify the event's relevance to its contemporaries.

As argued by Hurl-Eamon, early XVIII century saw a decline in public toleration of libertinism. Many Londoners were actually tired of lewd behaviour and rebellious escapades of young bloods, and curbing elite young violence was often and often perceived as a compelling necessity. The Mohocks affair offered a timely expression of these concerns: the gang's representation provided by newspapers and pamphlets, although with different gradations, promoted the idea that their class-sanctioned violence was no longer bearable in a mannered society. Pamphleteers, in particular, were used to reproduce “the few real [documented] assaults as a highly distorted picture of serialized violence, and they eagerly grasped at hints of gentry assailants as evidence of the dangerous excesses of rakery”. [61]

In this context, one cannot but agree with Hurl-Eamon in adopting the category of “moral panic” to describe the phenomenon. The definition, as popularised by sociologist Stanley Cohen, marks a situation when a “condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests” [62], and thus is surrounded by popular hostility and gossip until authority intervenes to counter the alleged menace. The Mohocks suit well this portrayal, as they quickly became the target of collective reprobation through unfairly press representation – even though their actions were often “frolicks”, not so dangerous or brutish to justify such a response.

At this moment, however, scouring and bullying were not tolerated any more: a general

59 No better example could be provided than Jonathan Wild's criminal enterprises. This infamous rogue, who was a renown "thief-taker" and public vigilante by day and a fence and mob boss at night, was portrayed by Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding and served as primary inspiration for Mr. Peachum in John Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.

60 Hurl-Eamon, p. 46.

61 Hurl-Eamon, pp. 43-44.

62 Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 1.

distaste for elite male excesses grew from paranoia to moral panic, and “the exaggeration met with a credulous audience”. [63] The rogues became a useful symbol of behaviours the society was rejecting, as “the Mohock, defined by his gratuitous and brutal physical assaults, embodie[d] the violent criminality of the rake in isolation from his more winning ways as a social libertine”. [64] Even if their enterprises were not such a nuisance, especially compared with recurring waves of street violence in London, a strong social stigma was impressed on them: the population demanded security, the government tried to provide it and as a result, the scholar notes, following years saw a perceptible increase in rakery prosecutions.

Alongside the representation of the Mohocks as infamous rakes to be extirpated, however, the pamphlets sometimes show them on the other side of the barricade, supporting *The Spectator*'s reformation project. It is the case of *The Huzza*, a short song advertised as the gang's anthem while being no more than a Grub Street fabrication. Its title, as the OED suggests, means “a shout of exultation, encouragement, or applause”, “a cheer uttered by a number in unison” [65]: indeed, it is the war tune allegedly sung by associates when they roamed the streets of London. The texts asserts the Mohocks' chief aim is to bring down “the *Bully*, the *Heck*, and *Night-walker*”, cleaning the city from criminality, but at the same time they target “the Lawyer, the Priest, and the Captain”, whose corruption is implied: in a world where distinctions between wrongdoers and censors appear already blurred, as *The Beggar's Opera* would later state, the only path to reformation seems to come with through the “dreadful Huzza” uttered by the gang. [66]

Aside from their upper-class debauchery, a second element which charmed eighteenth-century readers was the devilish aura which surrounded the Mohocks. The theme was already developed by Defoe: according to him, “a Man” who considers the rogues' rampage “would think Satan was let loose a second time for the Destruction of Mankind”. [67] It was also popular enough to be at the core of the ballad *The Mohocks Revel*, set to the tune of famous English country dance *The Jovial Beggars*. Large sections of the text, actually, do include direct hellish references: the Mohocks' hurrah, for example, are so blaring because of the Devil's assistance: “Our jargon loud shall crack the Sky, / for Satan lent us Notes”. The gang's entire project of mayhem, eventually. is put under his direct protection: “ 'Gainst Monarchy, we do declare, / in Lucifer's dread Name, / The Devil's Drum beats up for War, / let's now persue the Game”.

63 Hurl-Eamon, p. 45.
64 Hurl-Eamon, p. 56.
65 "huzza, *int.* and *n.*" *OED Online*.
66 Anon., *The Huzza* in Ernest Lewis Gay (ed.), *Collection of Papers Concerning the Mohocks and Hawkubites*, 1711-1712 (MS Eng 1039) Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge (Mass.). The text is reproduced as an appendix to Meshon Cantrill's MA dissertation, previously cited.
67 *A Review of the State of the British Nation*, No. 154 (March 18, 1712), p. 617.

One may also note references to the Mohocks' political affiliation, which betray the pamphleteer's alignment: one stanza mentions "Great Noll and Bradshaw" – Oliver Cromwell and Justice John Bradshaw, who were responsible for Charles I's trial and execution. Behind their actions, according to the pamphlet, there was Satan itself: "They had Commissions sent from Hell, / and they whip't of Charles's Head". The Mohocks toast to the memory of the two regicides, as little before they stated they decry "Crowns and Scepters" [68]: the anonymous author is clearly conjuring every possible element to show them as enemies of monarchy and established order. His depiction obviously led readers to place the Mohocks in the Whig camp, whose trust in parliamentarianism over kingly authority was often misrepresented as treacherous sedition by the Tories.

Imagining the rakes as "satanically inspired Whigs" [69], ultimately, meant giving some Miltonian echoes to the Mohocks' enterprises. *The Mohocks Revel* contains some hints in this sense: the rogues' proposition to fight monarchy, for example, seems a small-scale version of the cosmic war Satan swears to wage against the Almighty, and the insistence on their master's might remembers Lucifer's pre-eminence among other fallen angels. The Mohocks society, in a word, appear to be a loose replica of the infernal cohorts gathered around Lucifer in *Paradise Lost*'s first book, but with a significant difference: while Satan promised his fellow-creatures to regain their celestial seat, Mohocks' prize will be the opposite, "For our great Master, oft has said, / he will Reward us well, / Has promised, we shall have his Aid, / and Places Great in Hell". [70]

Miltonian imitation, which will be significant in Gay's *The Mohocks*, characterises also the last text examined, *The Mohocks: a poem in Miltonic verse, address'd to The spectator*. Here, however, the imitation concerns more form than content: the rogues are indeed presented as Homeric heroes, and not devils, and the whole text lacks hellish references. On the other hand, the author demonstrates a good command of literary materials, as he opens with a double epigraph from Virgil's *Aeneid* and Samuel Butler's *Hudibras*, [71] immediately giving a heroic landscape to the Mohocks' enterprises. Butler's quotation, in particular, might be not a casual choice, as his poem was aimed at ridiculing Cromwellians during English Civil War. Its insertion, then, mirrors *The Mohocks Revel*'s mention of Parliamentarian leaders: both succeed in establishing in readers' mind a connection between Mohocks and Whigs, ideal heirs to the Republican tradition.

The poem, which details a fight between Mohocks watchmen and the formers' apprehension, is valuable mainly with regards to its literary construction. The prologue, for example, stresses on the subjects' novelty, compared to earlier epic's themes, and the "outdoing" *topos* (*Überbietung*) is

68 Anon., *The Mohocks Revel. An Excellent New Ballad* (London 1712) [*Historical Texts* 1]
69 Guthrie, note 14.
70 Anon., *The Mohocks Revel.*
71 Virgil, *Aeneid* I. 339; Samuel Butler, *Hudibras* III. 321-24.

mockingly applied to the gang's escapades:

> HEROES, and dreadful Arms, and bloody Fields,
> FLANDRIAN or LATIAN, oft have deck'd the Song
> Of Poets much with Wine, and Muse possess'd.
> I Scenes untrod before of Civil Strife
> Internal draw ; the Subject wild and new,
> Pleas'd me revolving long, beginning late.
> YE Haunts of Drury, consecrate of old
> To British VENUS, tell (for ye have known)
> The Mohocks Acts, unparallel'd by Tales
> Of antique THESEUS, or of PELEUS Son; [72]

Two elements here are worthy of notice. First, the Mohocks scare is seen as “Civil Strife”, more similar to an intestine war than to a criminal rampage: indeed, the author expresses full support to the Mohocks' activities, whose legality is never questioned, and goes as far as ordering the magistrates to release them: “YE partial Judges, who the Mohocks damn, Reverse your Sentence now”. Then, there is an remarkable mention of the “Haunts of Drury”, who should take the Muses' traditional place to help the author tell his story: Drury Lane was one of the Mohocks' traditional playgrounds and attracted lowlife of all sorts. The lengthy periphrasis, which involves the goddess Venus as well, seems to indicate whorehouses, of which Drury was full: they can confirm the Mohocks' acts because the rakes are their staunch enemies, “Dire foes to Brothels”. [73]

Actually, the Mohocks' image one gets from the text is mainly positive: they are not frequenters of bawdy houses, nor mindless rioters. They instead appear to be “Great Reformers, whose exalted Souls / Despise stiff formal Rules, and Knots of Law”: Steele and Budgell would have appreciated a description of the Mohocks such as this, as it seemed to fit perfectly in their project to cast the rakes as instruments of reformation for the larger society. However, scrolling the text, it appears evident how the Mohocks have not really helped anyone: only drunkards, “willing Slaves of BACCHUS Tribe”, benefit from the terror the Mohocks inspire in vintners, as the latter do not dare to sell “sophisticated Juice” to the rakes and their friends.

Eventually, the text's boastful rhetoric does not conceal a strong irony, which affects every person involved: the Mohocks are portrayed as intrepid Homeric heroes, while watchmen, generally

72 Anon., *The Mohocks: a poem in Miltonic verse, addressed to the Spectator* (London 1712), p. 3-4 [*Hist. Texts* 2-3]
73 According to Steele, instead, the Mohocks forged a "Offensive and Defensive [Alliance] with all Bawdy-Houses in general, of which they have declared themselves Protectors and Guarantees" (*The Spectator* No. 324, 12/03/1712).

mocked for their incompetence, become “the gloomy Guards of Night [...] arm'd / With formidable Length of Poles, [...] dreadful to behold”. Even their chief, the constable, who will receive an highly satirical treatment in Gay's *The Mohocks*, is said to be a “tremendous Name / To nightly Rovers”, ruthless and incorruptible. [74] Considering all these elements, then, it sounds not strange that the manuscript was sometimes attributed to John Gay himself, a renowned master of satire. [75] Actually, even without being entangled in philological discussions, these lines

> But yet, ye MOHOCKS, tho'by hapless Fate
> Now captive, in my Verse your growing Fame
> Shall stand untouch'd, and down by Time convey'd
> To late Posterity, with Joy be read. [76]

might well have been read as the author's promise to explore the topic further. Therefore, if one embraces this hypothesis, it will be not casual that young literary hopeful John Gay, recently arrived in the City, decided to mark his dramatical debut with a fine reading of the scare which goes under the name *The Mohocks*.

74 Anon., *The Mohocks: a poem in Miltonic verse*, p. 4-8 [*Historical Texts* 3-7]

75 This attribution is documented as a side note in the *Historical Texts* database. As it bears the indication "Foxon M394", it might come from David Foxon's *English Verse, 1701-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975), a vast catalogue of eighteenth-century printed poems.

76 Anon., *The Mohocks: a poem in Miltonic verse,* p. 6 [*Historical Texts* 5]

II. A Satirical View: John Gay's *The Mohocks*

2. 1 Gathering momentum for a dramatic debut

In March 1712, when the Mohocks scare began, John Gay was still a minor figure in the London literary scene. Native of Barnastaple, Devon, he first came to the City when he was 19 years old and was apprenticed to a draper: during his traineeship he had few occasions to nurture his literary talent, but in exchange he became fond of theatre, and probably assisted to several plays by Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and others. Eventually, he left his position in trading to pursue writing but lacked political and cultural connections to enter the factious world of literature. He was then forced to resort to his former school-friend Aaron Hill, who edited the *British Apollo*, a "question-and-answer" newspaper[1] aimed at the tastes of London's middle classes.

Hill's enterprise consisted mainly of hack work, but this sort of eclectic Grub Street encyclopaedia was Gay's first hope to enter the literary milieu, though from a back-alley. The young poet wrote several pieces for the *British Apollo*, even if he felt uneasy with its down-market reputation. However, when Steele's *The Tatler* appeared, the paper's popularity began to dwindle, and both Hill and Gay managed to distance themselves from the sinking ship. The former wrote a memoir of his Ottoman wanderings and later was appointed manager of the Drury Lane theatre; ejected from his post because of the players' opposition, he eventually took the direction of Haymarket, where he staged Händel's successful opera *Rinaldo*.

Gay, instead, chose to disown his hack-writer past in his pamphlet *The Present State of Wit* (1711), an exercise of flattery towards possible literary patrons. Here, while praising the likes of Addison, Steele, and Swift, he ostentatiously forgets his previous occupation at Hill's. Only a postscript acknowledges the paper's existence, and recognises it still retains some utility in "deciding wagers at cards, and giving good advice to the shop-keepers, and their apprentices". [2] Such a condescending gesture made clear that, "[a]lthough providing him with his first literary employment, the *British Apollo* was still associated in [Gay's] mind with [the commercial] milieu from which he desperately yearned to escape". [3]

Nevertheless, despite his contempt for such a plebeian, dull work, the months at the *British Apollo* proved useful to the young poet. He reinforced his acquaintance with Hill, whose involvement with London theatres could have helped Gay's dramatical ambitions, and he befriended

1 Inaugurated by John Dunton's *Athenian Gazette* (1691), this format aimed at satisfying public curiosity about disparate topics; readers sent their eclectic questions and writers gave their authoritative replies. More than often contributors made up the questions in order to praise their friends' enterprises or promote their own literary works.

2 John Gay, *The Present State of Wit* (1711) [*Project Gutenberg*].

3 Nokes, p. 72.

a group of writers such as Nick Rowe, Fortescue, Henry Cromwell and Eustace Budgell. The latter represented a valuable connection for a literary newcomer: a member of the *Spectator* project, he was intimate of both Addison and Steele, the "twin peaks of the Whig literary establishment". [4] In a world where literature was increasingly political, and writers were required to show their allegiance to the Whig or the Tory camp, Gay soon had to choose a side, and his admiration for the *Spectator*'s godfathers addressed him towards the opposition to the ruling Tory ministry.

Therefore, it makes little surprise Gay's decision to write a play about the rampaging Mohocks is deeply related to the *Spectator*'s coverage of the rogues. In fact, textual evidence suggests Steele's and Budgell's three essays on the topic (No. 324, 332, 347) served as a primary source of inspiration for *The Mohocks*. Calhoun Winton, for instance, goes as far as saying that under the nickname "Philantropos", the correspondent who first relates about the gang, may be concealed Gay himself, and not Steele [5]; other scholars, perhaps with more circumspection, propose that Gay may have read Budgell's subsequent piece before the publication, or have been informed of his composition.

Actually, one could conclude with Nokes that "*The Mohocks* was not an entirely solo work, but rather Gay's own variation on satiric themes developed by friends with whom he was seeking to establish closer ties". [6] If Budgell was already a good acquaintance, indeed, Steele was still relatively distant: resuming his Mohocks' depiction, after *The Present State of Wit*'s lavish praise, could thus be seen as another respectful tribute. But the two *Spectator* writers were not the only influences on *The Mohocks*: it should not be forgotten two years before Gay was also introduced to Pope, who gradually took him under his protection and, although younger, always considered him one of his "elevés". As it will be shown, hints to this developing relation, which will deeply shape Gay's life and career, are already present in the one-act afterpiece.

Finally, pamphlets played an important role not only in establishing the Mohocks' image among the larger populace but also in tickling the poet's imagination. In particular, *The Mohocks: A Poem in Miltonic Verse* appears as a natural forerunner to *The Mohocks*: Stroup argues this text may have been realised by Gay as well. [7] It is not strange that several anonymous Mohocks-related pieces – essays and broadsides – have been attributed to the young poet: actually, they all served as pre-production puffs for his farce and contributed to fuel the public discourse about the phenomenon. Be them his direct work, amicable gestures from Budgell or Steele, or Grub Street exploitations of the ongoing scare, these documents increased chances for the drama to reach the

4 Nokes, p. 86.
5 Winton, p. 24.
6 Nokes, p. 95.
7 Thomas B. Stroup, "Gay's 'Mohocks' and Milton" in *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* (1947) 46, 2: 167 (note 15)

stage, as its birth conditions were actually unfavourable.

At first, Gay probably hoped his friend Hill would have staged his play, but by the time *The Mohocks* was completed he had already abandoned Drury Lane and was busied with the operas-devoted Haymarket theatre. The dramatist was then forced to offer his work to Drury Lane's new managers which, in times of political uncertainty, were pursuing a conservative line on the titles, rejecting proposals with minimal political hints – and *The Mohocks*, as it will be shown, does indeed contain some germs of social critic. Therefore, concocting some side-pieces to his play, "Gay perhaps envisioned adding to the hullaballoo about the Mohocks as an incentive for the Drury Lane managers to produce his play". [8] Evidently, the flurry of shocking tales about the rakes, united with the popular psychosis, was still not enough for the direction to risk its production.

As a further move in this strategy, Gay put out another anonymous pamphlet, originally 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.* Published in May by Lintot, a first-class bookseller who eventually printed also *The Mohocks*, the broadside was written by the end of March, and thus served as an effective introduction to the play, which came out two weeks later. Its authorship has been debated, and sometimes attributed to Pope; however, given his well-known indifference to the Mohocks affair, most scholars now recognise Gay as the main author, though his newfound patron may have contributed to some capacity. [9]

Later known as *A Wonderful Prophecy*, this brief satirical text shows hints of the author's natural gift for burlesque, a literary genre he will practise throughout all his literary career. Here, Gay mocks the apocalyptic effusions of the "French Prophets", a group of Huguenots refugees (Camisards) from the Cévennes. After a failed insurrection against Louis XIV, they fled to England and became famous – and discredited – for their millenarian beliefs and preaching. An eighteenth-century account details their activities in such fashion: "They beat themselves, fell on their backs, shut their eyes, and heaved their breasts, as in fits; and when they came out of these trances said, they saw the heavens open, the angels, paradise, and hell; and then began to prophesy [... about]the near approach of the kingdom of God, the happy times of the church, the millenium-state". [10]

Clearly, Gay grasped the imaginative potential in their inconclusive ravings and decided to imitate them in order to present the 1712 rogues as heralds and instruments of the final judgement. Writing in the guise of a "Reverend Divine", he pretends to have received some supernatural

8 Winton, p. 24.

9 John Fuller, *Introduction* to John Fuller (ed.), *John Gay: Dramatic Works*, vol. I (Oxford: OUP, 1983) pp. 71-72 (note 6) [*Oxford Scholarly Editions Online*, 2014]

10 Hannah Adams, *A Dictionary of All Religions and Religious Denominations* (Boston: Eastburn & Co., 1817[4] [1784]), p. 84 [*Google Books*] For a detailed account of the phenomenon see Hillel Schwarz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: UCP, 1980).

predictions from the spirit of a person slain by the vicious rogues. The mechanism of satirical exaggeration is already at work, as there are no documented murders attributed to the Mohocks, but here the author needs to heighten their sins in order to make them reliable sign of the forthcoming apocalypse: “[...] Woe to the Men, the Women and the Children, for the MOHOCKS and HAWKUBITES are already come, the Time draweth near, and the End approacheth!”.

The core of the text is the association the spirit establish between the Mohocks and the biblical populations of Gog and Magog; in order to maintain a binary correspondence, the former are associated with the Hawcubites, whose noun may be just a synonym of “Mohocks” or indicate a lesser-known gang often confused with them. [11] The link between the two gangs is one of the elements which lead to identify Gay as the pamphleteer, as *The Mohocks* often feature this combination; however, Winton's tentative claim it is his exclusive authorial mark is countered by the same occurrence in the *Town Rakes* broadside, which seems not to come from the same hand.

More interesting is the mention of Gog and Magog, enemies of Israel first introduced in Ezekiel 38-39. These barbaric populations are featured both in the Judaeo-Christian and Islamic traditions and were popularised to the Middle Ages through the *Romance of Alexander*'s episode of “Alexander's gates”, a defensive barrier he supposedly built in Asia against the hordes. In England, the portmanteau “Gogmagog” was imported as the name of a giant defeated by Corineus during the Trojan colonisation of the island, as related by Geoffrey of Monmouth in his *Historia Regum Britanniae*. The two rivals later assumed the role of guardians of London, and in 1708 their figures were carved by Captain Richard Sunders and displayed in the City's Guildhall, where they returned to be named Gog and Magog. [12]

Therefore, reference to Gog and Magog allowed Gay to hint both to a recent event – the installation of the new wooden statues, as early versions burnt in the Great Fire of London – and biblical hypotext. The two elements actually mingle in a passage where the images' destruction unleashes the Armageddon: “those Emblems of GOG and MAGOG at the Guild-Hall shall fall to the Ground, and be broken asunder. With them shall perish the MOHOCKS and HAWKUBITES, and the whole World shall perish with them”. Furthermore, Gay adds, “when the MOHOCKS and HAWKUBITES came, Satan came also among them; and where Satan is, there are GOG and MAGOG also”: the link between the populations and the Devil clearly recalls a passage from Saint John's Apocalypse

11 *OED* s.v. considers them an autonomous gang, while the pamphlet *The Town Rakes; or, the Frolicks of Mohocks and Hawcubites* (London: J. Wright, 1712) considers "Hawcubites" one of the rogues' nicknames: "their mischievous Invention of the Word is, they take people betwixt Hawk and Buzzard, that is, betwixt two of them, and making them turn from one to the other, abuse them with Blows and other Scoffings" (qtd. in Dearing p. 456, note to title).

12 See Victor Scherb, "Assimilating Giants: The Appropriation of Gog and Magog in Medieval and Early Modern England" in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* (2002) 32, 1: 59-84.

> And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. [13]

As the passage shows, the rogues' devilish aura brought forth by pamphlets like *The Mohocks Revel* was one of Gay's favourite features. Another example follows immediately: describing the rakes, the prophesying spirit asserts "[t]hey have the Mark of the Beast in their Fore-Heads", thus making a double reference both to Revelation 13 ff. and to Steele's description of the Mohock's Emperor in *The Spectator* No. 324. Such an attention to their satanic traits will return in the opening lines of *The Mohocks*, although with distinct Miltonic undertones; here, it serves mainly as an element of analogy between modern rakes and Israel's old enemies.

Actually, there are no real reasons connecting the two groups: explanations given range from fake philological studies – "as this learned Author very well observes, GOG and MAGOG, in the antient Language of the Picts, signifie MOHOCK and HAWKUBITE" – to utter nonsense modelled on the Camisards' obscure sermons. Ultimately, all the Biblical pastiche seems to be just a useful device to develop and strengthen the Mohocks' dreadful image. By contrast, passages like this set the Mohocks in their historic context, recalling pieces of information from earlier broadsides and newspapers:

> The Day shall come, when the Junto shall be overthrown, then shall GOG and MAGOG arise, and the MOHOCKS and HAWKUBITES shall possess the Streets, and dwell in their Quarters, they shall come from far at the Sound of the Cat-call – Yea, they shall come from the furthermost Part of America, yea, from the furthermost Corner of the furthermost Part of the Earth. [14]

Linking Gog and Magog's rampage to the fall of the Junto, the previous Whig ministry (1708-10), the author is discrediting the claims of Whiggism cast on the gang by Tory opponents; as Gay was trying to enter the opposition's literary circles, such an action may have been an inexpensive gesture of allegiance towards his future patrons. Later, politics will be deliberately

13 Revelation 20: 7-8, from the *King James' Version* (1611).

14 Anon., *An argument proving from history, reason, and scripture, that the present Mohocks and Hawkubites are the Gog and Magog mention'd in the Revelations* (London: Lintott, 1712) [*Historical Texts* 2]. See also Vinton A. Dearing (ed.), *John Gay: Poetry and Prose* (Oxford: OUP, 1975), pp. 456-58, where the text is emended according to the later version published in the Pope-Swif *Miscellanies* (1727).

excluded from *The Mohocks*: Gay was aware of the Drury Lane's strict contents policy, and tried avoided any anti-establishment pronouncement in order to see his play produced, but his cautiousness was not enough to convince the managers to stage it.

A further notation is added through the mention of the American lands whence the Mohocks came: Gay makes clear he knows the association between Indian tribes and London rogues contended by Defoe – who, by the way, hated the younger satirist, suspecting the author of *A Wonderful Prophecy* to have been also behind the defamatory *England's Delivery*. [15] Some paragraphs later, the "Reverend Divine" hears from the spirit, who identifies himself as a "Porter [...] barbarously slain in Fleet-street", the account of his death at the rogues' hands: according to the victim asserts, the mischievous rakes "put their Hook into [his] Mouth" and "divided [his] Nostrils asunder". [16] The image is two-folded: while the first action does have some biblical echoes, the second one reminds the "tipping the lion" practice related by *The Spectator* and the pamphlets. [17]

At last, it seems *A Wonderful Prophecy* sported all the qualities to be a perfect preproduction puff for Gay's first dramatic attempt. It took a topical event (the Mohocks' scare), transfigured it into an apocalyptic prelude and coupled it with references to other momentary events such as the French Prophets' stir (1706 onwards) or the Guildhall statues replacement (1709), in order to make readers *feel* the contemporary relevance of the forthcoming play. Actually, some scholars contested the broadside quality, arguing that, "although th[e] piece is skilfully contrived, it fails as a vehicle for social satire" [18], and did not match the publication standards for *The Spectator*. Here, however, Gay was not trying to craft a refined literary gem: he just wanted to add to the sensationalist coverage of the event, preparing the ground for his stage debut.

According to Fuller, *An Argument...* was published the 18th of March; by this time, one can guess, Gay was already at work composing his one-act afterpiece. Scholars have generally dismissed the dedication date "April, 1st" as ironic; collected evidence from newspapers and advertisements suggests instead the play came out between the 10th and the 14th of the same month. As it has been already mentioned, the printer was Bernard Lintott, a leading figure in that business: being enlisted with the same publisher of the likes of Pope, Steele and Dryden undoubtedly gave the satirist a sense of pride, although he was only paid the modest sum of £2. 10*s*. for the copyright.

However, *The Mohocks* had yet to find its way to stage – though not all the scholars agree it was meant to be really acted. The title page describes it as "A Tragi-Comical Farce. As it was Acted

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15 Winton, pp. 22-23.

16 Anon., *An Argument Proving...*

17 See Ezekiel 38: 4 (*KJV*): "And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen". It is still unsure what "tipping the lion" actually meant: Julian Walker reviews most of the eighteenth-century interpretations in his blog (www.jwalkerwords.blogspot.it/2012/01/tipping-lion.html)

18 Nokes, pp. 96-97.

near the Watch-House in Covent-Garden. By her Majesty's Servants", but refers to the play's internal action, and not to real performances. Therefore, upon considering also the mock-datation, Nokes speculates "the play's non-performance [was] part of an elaborate April Fool's Day hoax" [19], similar to the Bickerstaff joke set by Swift four years before: according to the scholar, nothing is better suited to represented fictional rogues than a fictional play, and therefore the author never intended to see it at Drury Lane.

Nevertheless, this suggestive view implies Gay thought the Mohocks were totally invented – something that is not possible to demonstrate from private correspondence or references in his works. Surely he holds a highly satirical view of the matter, and shares Swift's scepticism about the affair, but one could also argue that, after he discarded his first dramatic draft *The Wife of Bath*, he really wanted to see his work produced, regardless of its factual basis. Furthermore, in *The Mohocks*' dedication the author contends his play has been rejected by the players, and hence meant to be played; accordingly, some scholars argue "the script Gay brought to the Drury Lane partners was not on his face a loser […] and all evidence indicates that Gay expected it to be produced". [20]

Indeed, Winton offers several arguments supporting this thesis. At first, he notes *The Mohocks* is an afterpiece, a short one-act play designed to follow and lighten classic five-act tragedies. The eighteenth-century audience appreciated this kind of work, which provided the necessary comic relief after the main event, and many afterpieces did enter the repertory: if Gay chose this dramatic form it was because there was a market for it. Moreover, it features several attractive songs which reveal a skilled librettist at work, and may have well competed with Haymarket's operatic extravaganzas: it seems difficult to justify such an ingenious effort for a work destined to remain just on paper.

Both Nokes' and Winton's arguments seem convincing, but evidence is often two-edged. The cast, for example, appears to be far too large for a light afterpiece: those twenty-two speaking-roles could be a dramatical flaw the neophyte satirist overlooked, resulting in the piece's non-performance, but also a conscious break of theatrical conventions which underlined the play's fictional character. Eventually, most critics are inclined to think Gay wanted to see his work staged, but he was hindered, as it will be later discussed, by the play's political implications: as mild and humorous as it was conceived, *The Mohocks* appears to have been subjected to a sort of prior restraint by Drury Lane managers, and subsequently rejected in the context of the increasing Tory-Whig polarisation.

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19 Nokes, p. 94.
20 Winton, p. 14.

2. 2 Between Milton and Shakespeare: "A Tragi-Comical Farce"

Undoubtedly, Gay's first dramatic effort contain many elements of interest: "it *is* apprentice work, but the apprentice knows his craft surprisingly well" [21]: the rogues' depiction, for example, reveals "how current Mohock literature gave Gay some ideas, but Gay's conception of his subject is already characteristically his own". [22] However, before examining the way the satirist portraits the historical rakes, it should be useful to review how this work relates to the rest of Gay's production. Actually, the work suggests *in nuce* the lines along which the dramatist's career would have developed; it does contain early germs of the ideas which, sixteen years later, would have contributed to the outstanding success of the *Beggar's Opera*.

A crucial feature inside Gay's canon, as Lewis acutely pointed out, is the distinction between "regular" and "irregular" plays or, in other terms, between works adhering to strict neoclassical precepts and works inspired by new dramatical forms, such as these brought forth by Thomas Betterton (1635-1710) in order to revive popular interest in theatre. The only Scriblerian who wrote for the theatre, Gay was deeply aware eighteenth century was an age in which great dramatic forms were easier to mock than to uphold. Therefore, it comes as little surprise that his "regular" plays lack the inventiveness and originality copiously found in his "irregular" production, where "he was not restrained by dramatic convention and formal propriety, and could invent structures to give free rein to his talent for satire, irony, burlesque, and pastiche". [23]

A quick glance inside Gay's anthology will confirm this assumption: neoclassical tragedies such as *The Captives* or feeble comedies such as *The Distress'd Wife* have failed to attract much attention, while works such as the *Beggar's Opera*, *Three Hours After Marriage* or *Polly* endured significant success in their time and further. [24] *The Mohocks* decidedly belong to the "irregular" portion, and the reason is already self-evident in the title page: indeed, the afterpiece is labelled a "Tragi-Comical Farce", "a generic mixture liable to reduce any right-thinking neoclassicist to apoplexy since tragicomedy itself violated the doctrine of the strict separation of kinds". [25] From the very beginning, Gay is signalling he will not abide by old, stiff poetical norms, but he is determinate to dwell in paradox, ambiguity, and irony.

The Mohocks is clearly a neophyte's work, but represents Gay's first attempt to yoke together

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21 Winton, p. 13 .
22 Fuller, p. 4.
23 Peter Lewis, " 'An Irregular Dog': Gay's Alternative Theatre" in *The Yearbook of English Studies* (1988) 18: 232.
24 According to Lewis, Gay's dramatic catalogue includes four "regular" (*Dione*, *The Captives*, *The Wife of Bath*, *The Distress'd Wife*) and seven "irregular" plays (*The Mohocks*, *The What D'Ye Call It*, *Three Hours after Marriage*, *The Beggar's Opera*, *Polly*, *Achilles, The Rehearsal at Goatham*), plus the libretto for Händel's *Acis and Galatea*.
25 Lewis, 233.

discordant subjects and styles under the appearance of a light piece. A man with “a natural delight in oddity and inconsequence” [26], he decided to mark his dramatic debut with a play which happily borrows from a wide range of authors, and mixes high, declamatory tones with comedic skirmishes, thus creating “a deliberate literary freak [...] which mingles Miltonic parody with slapstick farce”. [27] As one could expect from an early work, such a mixture is not always consistent; the apprentice would need more years to master the craft. His smooth 1728 ballad-opera would represent “the complete vindication and triumphant climax of the ironic and mock-heroic approach [...] Gay developed” throughout his dramatic career; here, at his very beginning, he is just freely experimenting with different materials and formulations. [28]

Such an attitude becomes immediately clear looking at the play's structure. Actually, the three scenes do not flow seamlessly: scholars noted a fracture between the first one and the two following, which shows the passage from burlesque – complex parody of high texts, like epic – to straightforward farce. It is indeed a clear transition, “demarcated by the shift from […] mock-heroic blank verse and solemn prose to brisk language and ludicrous exchange”. According to Lewis, such change was due to the different effort required by the two genres: “Gay was [...] carried away by the farcical possibilities of his material and abandoned the more difficult task of burlesque” [29]. It seems plausible the dramatist, at his first attempt, felt unable to produce full-length burlesque, and therefore fell back to more conventional, comical shores.

The error many critics made, however, was dismissing the whole play because of this passage, feeling it represented an abrupt downgrade to ordinary Restoration comedy. While, on a literary level, the initial sequences are probably more rewarding than the rest, farcical scenes in the second and third act are still worth of some critical attention, because Gay proceeds in his pastiche but towards a different direction: he passes from Miltonic imitation of the beginning to punchy sequences which closely remind of Shakespeare's plays. Actually, despite several other influences, it seems the whole play almost swings between the two peaks of English literature, between the Augustan mock-epic and the slapstick tradition which dates back to the Bard's days. While the first act evokes atmospheres from *Paradise Lost*, the following recalls scenes from *Henry IV* and beyond; therefore, it is believed following the transition between the two blocks will enable to gain deeper understanding of Gay's sources and dramatic practices.

In order to see such phenomenon at work, however, it might be useful to recall the main elements of the plot which, although based on comic upheavals, appears to be relatively simple. The

26 Fuller, p. 2.
27 Nokes, p. 94.
28 Lewis, 241.
29 Peter Lewis, “Another Look at John Gay's 'The Mohocks' ” in *The Modern Language Review* (1968) 63, 4: 791.

Mohocks assemble in a tavern under their Emperor's command, and welcome a new associate; all swear unwavering allegiance to their leader. Then, in order to have some fun, they decide to play a practical joke at the watchmen's expenses: they will exchange their dresses with them and see them convicted as Mohocks. Meanwhile, fearful guards and their constable patrol the streets and share dire stories about the rogues they hope to seize; however, when confronted by the rakes, they quickly surrender and are brought into the watch-house.

There, according to the plan, roles and appearances are exchanged, whilst a watchman's wife and an inoffensive beau are also taken, deceived and locked up. Later, the disguised Mohocks and watchmen appear in front of three judges who, amidst learned discussion about law, interrogate the prisoners. The threatening Mohocks prevents the guards from telling the truth and, as a result, the judges seem ready to condemn them. At the last minute, however, another group of guards comes in and recognises their colleagues, exposing the rogues' scheme: the Mohocks are eventually jailed and will be soon judged, while all watchmen on stage celebrate with a dance.

As remembered, scholarly attention has focused especially on the first act, dominated by the rogues' conclave. It is undoubtedly a skilled burlesque of much of contemporary neoclassical tragedy, whose “ponderously inflated idiom” is satirised “by incongruously applying it to a 'low' subject” [30], and its doctrinaire prescriptions; its mock-heroic style imitates Buckingham's *The Rehearsal* (1672) in “deflat[ing] the pretentiousness of a contemporary dramatic form” [31]. However, the main target appears to be Milton and his Augustan imitators and admirers, such as the influential critic John Dennis: the latter, it will later be argued, is particularly lampooned as a part of Gay's strategy to gain Pope's allegiance.

Formally, it seems difficult to deny some degree of relation between Gay's afterpiece and Milton's works. Resemblances start from the *dramatis personae*, as two of the Mohocks' names come straight off the epic poet: Moloch is one of Satan's lieutenants, the “horrid King besmear’d with blood / Of human sacrifice, and parents tears” [32], while Abaddon is the name of the bottomless pit where Lucifer resides in *Paradise Regained* IV 264. [33] But Milton, of course, is not the only source: another rogue bears the name of Cannibal, thus referring to Steele's essay in *The Spectator* 324, and also the title of Emperor for their leader shows his debt to the newspaper's description of the rakes. In addition, the playwright does not forget to hint to his preproduction broadsides, since the gang features also a member called Gogmagog.

Apparently, all the Mohocks' names, in Gay's intention, had to convey an idea of danger and

30 Lewis, " 'An Irregular Dog' ", 234.
31 Lewis, "Another Look", 791.
32 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* I. 392-93, ed. by Barbara K. Lewalski (London: Blackwell, 2007).
33 Stroup, 165.

evilness. The two remaining rakes are indeed called Myrmidon and Whisker: the first recalls the warlike Iliadic population, but was also a type of gladiator and a Restoration term for “mercenary”, while the second is semantically related to rakish habits. [34] By contrast, the guards' names anticipate their weakness and humorous incompetence, as they come from weather predictions watchmen were used to cry during their patrolling: hardly the Mohocks would have feared the likes of Peter Cloudy, Starlight or Frost. Nonetheless, it should be noted that, just as he borrows from Milton for the names, Gay evokes also Shakespeare: guard Moonshine is named after one of the characters of the mechanicals' play within *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, while two prostitutes, Peg Firebrand and Jenny Cracker, bear “descriptive sexual names analogous to Doll Tearsheet in *2 Henry IV*”. [35]

The play begins in a tavern, where the Mohocks assembled recap their achievements and welcome a candidate: though they are actually borrowed from Dryden's *Tyrannick Love*, much-quoted opening lines immediately convey, despite Fuller's doubts, a distinctive Miltonic atmosphere, both for their odd disposal of verbs and their prolific vocabulary. [36] As noted by critics, similarities throughout the act regard more content than form: while there are relatively few textual reprisals from *Paradise Lost* (“Glorious Enterprize”, “Great Potentate”), “the thought and the style of the scene are more important in illustrating the Miltonic quality” of the text. [37] The self-presentation of a Mohock hopeful is particularly suggestive:

NEW MOHOCK — Great Potentate, who leadst the Mohock Squadrons
To nightly Expeditions, whose dread Nod
Gives Law to those, lawless to all besides:
To thee I come – to serve beneath thy Banner.
Mischief has long lain dormant in my Bosom
Like smother'd Fire, which now shall blaze abroad
In glorious Enterprize –

EMPEROR — Bravely resolv'd – henceforth thy Name
Be *Cannibal* – like them, devour Mankind.

(*The Mohocks*, i. 29-37)

Out of context, it would likely seem the speech of a fallen angel who, after the “dubious Battel on the Plains of Heav’n” [38], decides to join Lucifer in his crusade against the Almighty; here,

34 "myrmidon, n." and "whisker, n." *OED Online*.
35 John Fuller (ed.), *John Gay: Dramatic Works*, vol. I, p. 80 (note to the *The Mohocks*' list of characters).
36 Richard Terry, "Pope's miltonic parody and his feud with Dennis" in *English Studies* (1993) 74, 2: 142.
37 Stroup, 165.
38 *Paradise Lost* I. 104.

instead, it is just a young rake trying to gain admission to the debauchees' society. When, some lines before, the Emperor inquired whether the aspirant was a “superficial Sinner” or notorious villain, his sponsor's prideful response made already clear the Mohocks' real dimension:

MIRMIDON I'll answer for him, for I've known him long,
Know him a Subject worthy such a Prince;
Sashes and Casements felt his early Rage,
H' has twisted Knockers, broken Drawers Heads,
And never flinch'd his Glass, or baulk'd his Wench.
(i. 23-27)

Eventually, the newly baptised “Cannibal” is little more than a street thug, a “Nicker”, whose enemies are not angelic legions but, more prosaically, windows and items of furniture. The burlesque does not end with the neophyte's induction, but goes on with the magniloquent oath the Mohocks pronounce in front of their leader. Again, the imagery is truly Miltonic, and might easily recall the famous “Evil, be thou my Good” [39] passage; actually, all this satanic grandeur will lead to little more than a schoolboy prank, and certainly not to the siege of Heaven.

GOGMAGOG By all the Elements, and all the Powers,
Celestial, nay Terrestrial, and Infernal;
By Acheron, and the black Streams of Styx,
An Oath irrevocable to Jove himself,
We swear true Fealty, and firm Allegiance
To our most High and Mighty Emperor. [...]
That we'll to Virtue bear invet'rate Hate,
Renounce Humanity, defie Religion;
That Villany, and all outragious Crimes
Shall ever be our Glory and our Pleasure.
(i. 39-49)

Perhaps more interesting are the first scene's final lines, where the Emperor invites his associates to fill up their glasses, drink and sing a libertine hymn – an early record of Gay's gift for songwriting. Actually, it sounds strange most critics has often ignored the obvious link between this

39 *Paradise Lost* IV. 110.

passage and the satirist's first poem *Wine* (1708), which involves far more than simple thematic analogy, and therefore should be explored carefully. Of course, the praise of the “heav'nly Juice” is central in both texts, with the Emperor underlining how it ignites any risky enterprise: “this Celestial Nectar [...] gain'd the Macedonian Youth the World [… and] rais'd the Soul of Catiline to such brave, unparallell'd Ambition”. Its pre-eminence is further confirmed by the quasi-Virgilian formulation: “Wine conquers all things – all must Wine obey”. [40]

Nonetheless, similarities become more striking if one looks at the context where the two piece are set, which makes *Wine* a sort of prelude to *The Mohocks*. Indeed, the poem shows Gay “with Friends Select / Swiftly [hying] to Devil *Young* or *Old* / Jocund and Boon”, and there indulging drunken revels. The reference is to “the famous the famous Devil Tavern, [...] where meetings were governed by Ben Jonson's *leges conviviales*” [41]; it is the same tavern whence the *Spectator*'s fictional Emperor sent out his manifesto, and may well be the Mohocks' meeting place in the homonymous play. According to Nokes, “[t]here is a conscious dare-devil air in the way the antics of Gay’s tavern-companions parody the ambitions of Satan’s fallen angels”, as marked by the direct borrowing from Milton. [42] Four years later, the author probably had in mind his early verses when he set up the location for the rogues' satanic assembly.

Eventually, the structure itself of the two texts shows their affinity. Both the pieces seem to use Milton as superficial ironic target: actually, they do not mock Milton, but Miltonic imitation in their period. *Wine* “is in fact a kind of double jest, a parody of a parody, imitating the mock-Miltonic burlesque of John Philips’s poem[s] *The Splendid Shilling* (1701)” and *Cyder* (1709), and thus incurring in Dr. Johnson's reprobation. [43] *The Mohocks*, instead, satirises Milton's chief appraiser and imitator, critic John Dennis, who authored several neoclassical tragedies. Again, “as in *Wine*, Gay’s target is not Milton’s works themselves, but the literary taste for sub-Miltonic rodomontade”, of which Dennis' *Appius and Virginia* is a bright example. [44]

The play's dedicatory preface to “Mr. D--” makes clear from the beginning who is the satiric target. Gay pretends to offer to the great critic a “Piece written according to the exactest Rules of Dramatick Poetry” promoted by him, which consists essentially of the three Aristotelian units; as a further flattery, the author maintains “the Plot of it is form'd upon that of *Appius and Virginia*”, although there are little or no similarities between the two works. Dennis is jokingly portrayed in his “elegant Retreat in the Country” where he busies him with “such Rhapsodies and Speculations as cannot but be beneficial to the Commonwealth of Letters”; such elevated reflections eventually

40 *TM* i. 62-64; 70-71. Compare with *Eclogues* x. 69: "Omnia vincit amor et nos cedamus amori".

41 John Gay, *Wine* 150-52 and relative note in Vinton A. Dearing (ed.), *John Gay: Poetry and Prose*, vol. I, p. 25.

42 Nokes, p. 57. See *Paradise Lost* IX. 793: "hight’nd as with Wine, jocund and boon".

43 Nokes, p.55. Johnson praised Philips' Miltonic imitation but ruled out any subsequent imitator, including Gay.

44 Nokes, p. 94.

justify his “Monopoly of English Criticism”.

All these hyperbolic expressions clearly betray Gay's irony. Some passages are insultingly ironic: he maintains “to be not at all concern'd at this Tragedy's being rejected by the Players” upon considering “how many of [Dennis'] immortal Compositions have met with no better Reception”, therefore implying the critic's tragedies were highly unsuccessful. Moreover, *The Mohocks*' subject is said to be “Horrid and Tremendous”: these two adjectives come from Dennis' critical vocabulary, and soon began a satirical commonplace used against him. [45] Within Gay's corpus, one may further cite *Three Hours After Marriage*, a 1717 collaboration with Pope and Arbuthnot featuring Sir Tremendous Longinus, “a Gentleman who can instruct the town to dislike what has pleased them, and to be pleased with what they disliked” [46]: five years onwards, it was still a running gag.

Such a sharp and personal satire, however, is minimally due to Dennis's appraisal and imitation of Milton – though perhaps excessive, it was common to many other writers of the age. Critics have suggested the real reason behind the dedication lies in Gay's self-promoting campaign: “by the end of 1711 [he] had made a tactical decision to ally himself with Pope” [47], and he found no better occasion to show his loyalty than supporting the poet in his ongoing feud with Dennis, who had felt attacked by the *Essay on Criticism* and consequently abused its author. Pope refused to counter personally, but Gay was the ideal proxy for his literary revenge: *The Mohocks*' dedication is just one of the friendly gestures towards the *Rape of the Lock* author which will in the years build an image of Gay, “in a favourite well-worn simile, as a burly Ajax shielding a malevolent and diminutive Teucer”. [48] Miltonic parody was thus chosen as “the sharpest available instrument for humiliating Dennis” [49], who was appropriately depicted as “a kind of literary Mohock”. [50]

As the first scene closes, Gay abandons blank verse and Miltonic imitation for prose and farce. Among different explanations for such turn, it has been underlined how burlesque would have been more difficult to sustain throughout all the play; after all, Gay was a relative neophyte in the world of theatre writing. Nonetheless, it sounds convincing also Lewis' hypothesis that he was carried away by the comedic possibilities the farce gave him: emancipated from the mock-epic's formal constraints, he could carry on his play with lighter tone. Therefore, while the initial “miniature satanic bullying of this metropolitan War in Heaven is [obviously] delightful”, a “mock heroic with a purpose” [51], the following scene are worth ofsome praise as well, especially for their

45 *TM*, *Dedication* 2-26 (= Fuller, p. 78).
46 John Gay, *Three Hours after Marriage* I. 386-88 in John Fuller (ed.) *John Gay: Dramatic Works*, vol. I, pp. 222-223
47 Nokes, p. 83.
48 David Nokes, "The Ambitious Pursuit: Pope, Gay and the Life of Writing" in *Proceedings of the British Academy* (1998) 91: 135.
49 Terry, 141.
50 Nokes, *John Gay*, p. 94.
51 Fuller, p. 6.

"witty prose dialogue, full of significant pauses, surprise, emotion, stifled outrage". [52]

Actually, though they do not have the ironic seriousness of the Mohocks' conclave, the Watch scenes are genuinely entertaining. Again, as in the case of Milton, direct references are not widespread, but it is out of doubt the guards are "neo-Shakespearean clowns through and through". [53] The inept watchmen do indeed remind of many groups of comic, low characters which are featured in the Bard's works, ranging from the "rude mechanicals" of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to Falstaff's recruits of *Henry IV*, part II. Perhaps the strongest analogy is to be found in *Much Ado About Nothing*, as it may be argued the likes of Dogberry, Hugh Otecake or George Seacole probably served as inspiration for Constable Prig and his hilarious colleagues.

Such a claim may be proven comparing, for instance, Constable Dogberry' address to the citizens recruited to the Prince's watch and Constable Prig's orders. Dogberry, a pompous officer renown for his malapropisms, is expected to provide some training and instructions to his new subordinates, but his speech comically inverts the law enforcement's basic principles. His logic is paradoxical: he bids to leave any vagrant who does not yield to inspection because, as his associate Verges comments, "[i]f he will not stand when he is bidden, he is none of the Prince's subjects" and watchmen "are to meddle with none but the Prince's subjects" [54]. Similarly, drunkards are to be left until they are sober, and public noise tolerated until it ceases spontaneously. Furthermore,

DOGBERRY If you meet a thief, you may suspect him, by
virtue of your office, to be no true man, and for such
kind of men, the less you meddle or make with
them, why, the more is for your honesty.

SEACOAL If we know him to be a thief, shall we not
lay hands on him?

DOGBERRY Truly, by your office you may, but I think
they that touch pitch will be defiled. The most
peaceable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to
let him show himself what he is and steal out of
your company.

(*Much Ado about Nothing* III. iii. 49-59)

52 Viola Papetti, *John Gay o dell'eroicomico* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1971), p. 106. Translation mine.
53 Fuller, p. 6.
54 William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* III. Iii. 31-34, ed. by Barbara Mowat et al. (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library) [online]

Gay's constable offers analogous advice to his men when he illustrates, with a broken, frightened tone, how to deal with the dangerous rakes:

CONSTABLE 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–

(*The Mohocks* ii. 99-104)

Last lines seem to mirror the comical suggestions made by Dogberry: even if Prig seems more willing to take action against the lawbreakers, his personal safety always comes first. The guards, in both plays, share their officers' concern to avoid troubles: Shakespeare's watchman commends sleeping as his office's distinctive activity while Gay's Frost, in a previous confrontation with the Mohocks, found no better way out than "blow[ing] out [his] Candle, and lay[ing] snug in the corner of a Bulk". [55]

One could easily realise how both the Elizabethan and the Augustan poet, through these incompetent, bumbling policemen, are satirising law enforcement in their time. Actually, not much changed between the two periods: professional policing was yet to come, and parish constables and watchmen were still regarded as ineffective, corruptible and coward. As the Mohocks' scare spread, Gay tuned into the popular dissatisfaction about public policing and lampooned the guards' lack of formal training and resolve, but at the same time he did not forget to hint to Shakespeare's treatment of the matter. Such tributes does not regard only contents: it has been noted how Falstaff's "feats of pugilistic and mathematical agility in recounting the Gad's Hill episode" [56] are mirrored by Cloudy's mock-heroic account of his meeting with the Mohocks:

CLOUDY 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.

(ii. 109-114)

55 *TM* ii. 58-59.
56 Nokes, p. 95. See *I Henry IV* II. iv.

However, as Fuller argues, although Gay's characters "may verbally remind us of Dogberry or Falstaff or Bottom at almost every line, the bite has gone. They are as fine imitations as the period could produce, but they have been inevitably scaled down to [...] comfortable pantomime" [57]. Indeed, it is no wonder a dramatic debutant could not achieve all the verve and brilliance of some of Shakespeare's best works; one should also note that Gay's work is a light afterpiece and not a complete play, and therefore unfit to rival with the Bard's more complex works. Actually, these scenes' real interest might be found in their depiction of the historical rakes, since it underlines how *The Mohocks* was conceived primarily not as literary exercise but as satiric exploitation of the ongoing scare.

Large sections of the second scene are indeed devoted to the guards' discussion about the Mohocks' alleged deeds; most of the atrocities mentioned comes from what contemporary pamphlets and newspapers attributed to the rakes. A relevant place is granted to the nose-slitting, probably the most infamous of their frolics: Starlight recounts seeing Mohocks with "Swords as broad as Butchers Cleavers" who "hack'd and hew'd down all before them", making "all the Ground covered with Noses–as thick as 'tis with Hail-stones after a Storm". [58] The *Spectator*'s categorisation of the rogues is followed as well: the constable explicitly mentions the Dancing Masters, who used to "make a Man Dance without a Fiddle", namely to "poach Folks in the Calves of the Legs", while Cloudy recalls the Tumblers and their abuses against women. [59]

Most accounts revolve around cutting and slashing parts of the victims' bodies; while most historians considered the Mohocks' acts, if ever happened, harmless pranks with occasional outbursts of limited violence, the watchmen's stories appear decidedly darker. It seems likely Gay is playing the card of ironical exaggeration in order to poke fun at widespread hysteria and media scaremongering, as Frost's "Horrid and Tremendous" anecdote clearly demonstrates:

FROST Ha, ha, ha–but that is nothing to what I have
seen–I 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.

(ii. 51-56)

57 Fuller, p. 6.
58 *TM* ii. 41-45.
59 *TM* ii. 30-34; 63-67.

Gruesome details, such as cannibalistic acts, highlight the Mohocks' cruelty and deviance, while their salacious comments ("bleeding was good for fright") recall their inner nature of pranksters, albeit satanic. Furthermore, the author does not forget to develop an image already present in *A Wonderful Prophecy*, the "man-hooking" operated by the rakes, thus explicitly connecting his two pieces and recalling the Mohocks' apocalyptic features.

Eventually, the watchmen's frightened tales are meant to reproduce public discourse about the Mohocks, which mixed inflated facts and sheer fabrications. One may agree with Fuller stating that "for most of the play their masquerade is serious enough, and [...] Gay needs the Mohocks to exist [and] speak like fallen angels or Hamlet's ghost" [60], but the watchmen's hyperbolic tales, together with their fearful behaviour, soon show the rakes' real nature and mock popular credulity. At some point, the guards tremble at the Mohocks' arrival, until they realise they are fearing nothing more than shadows blown out of proportion; it seems difficult not to laugh at Starlight's feverish imagination when he cries to have seen a rogue "with a Face like a Lion", to whom "the Guildhall Giant is a meer Dwarf". [61]

Therefore, when the Mohocks really arrive, readers hardly trust their threats, and focus instead on the panicking guard's antics: when Cannibal declares he will cut first ears and then noses to anyone who speaks, for example, Cloudy rushes to check if he still have his nose, since he "was afraid he had took him off as a Mountebank draws a Tooth—with a Touch". [62] The farce is then reinforced throwing in other two characters as comedic disturbances. The beau Gentle, probably tailored to comedian Colley Cibber, represents an enjoyable addition: his often-quoted tiff with the Emperor satirises his foppish manners and, at large, the modes of the court, including sophisticated use of French expressions. On the other hand, Cloudy's wife is a feisty but brave woman, who stands up to the Emperor, proclaiming her "Tongue shall still be at Liberty; he must have good Luck, ifackins, that ties a Woman's Tongue". [63]

Ultimately, as the afterpiece runs to its end, all characters receive marked ironic treatment:Winton appropriately speaks of a shifting "focus of mockery", and observes "each group become the satiric victim in his turn". [64] While the first act featured a burlesque of the rakes, deflating their heroic pretensions with incongruous Miltonic language, and the second ridiculed the guards' clumsiness and incompetence, the last one introduces another target, three judges who are supposed to trial the Mohocks; they are depicted while they search statute books for precedents and discuss how to handle the affair. Gay here lampoons the cumbersome functioning of justice in his

60 Fuller, p. 6.
61 *TM* ii. 74.
62 *TM* ii. 196-97.
63 *TM* ii. 329-330.
64 Winton, p. 15.

time: confronted by Wiseman, who suggest their sentence “to be guided by Reason”, his colleague Scruple responds advocating blind obedience to the “Letter of the Law”, for “Reason and Law have been at variance in our Courts these many Years – a mis-spell'd Word, or a Quibble will baffle the most convincing Argument in the World”. [65]

It comes as little surprise, then, that these obtuse justices are more than ready to condemn the wrong Mohocks, especially after the disguised rogues give an imaginative account of their deeds. Borrowing once more from *The Spectator*, the harmless guards are accused of “tip[ping] the Lyon upon five several of her Majesty's true-born Subjects, and afterwards slit[ting] all their Noses”; among them, according to their accusers, there are Dancing-Masters and Masters Coopers, whose “Office is to Barrel up old Women”. [66] Threatened by the Mohocks, the guards are unable to prove their innocence and their hesitant answers make the justices commit them. As in the *Beggar's Opera*, a coup de théâtre solves the situation: other watchmen free Gentle and Joan and the lively woman unveils the rogues' scheme. Surrounded by fellow guards, Cloudy and his colleagues eventually denounce how the Mohocks “unconstabled the Constable” and “unwatch'd the Watch”. [67]

Final lines definitively erase any demonic trait from the Mohocks: once their plot is discovered, they reverse from Miltonic demons to juvenile pranksters, who protest their deeds were only an “innocent Frolick”. It is not enough to avoid their right punishment: Wiseman, the brightest of the justices, deems their “Frolicks”” apt “for Brutes and not for Men”, and jails them. Even if the rakes ask to be treated like gentlemen, possibly hinting to the real rogues' upper-class connections, and sheepishly promise to seek pardon, they are assured they “shall be punished with the utmost Severity”. The Mohocks' weakness, by contrast, emboldens the guards: the same Cloudy Abaddon threatened of emasculation now laughs at his persecutors, and seizes Cannibal with these words: “I find you have Ears to lose – I was afraid the Pillory had been before-hands with me”. Even the coward constable, in the end, invites everyone to dance in order to “show the Emperor[... they] can Dance without his Instructions”, defiantly referring to the Dance Masters' practices. [68]

Ultimately, one may wonder if the Mohocks will really pay for their crimes or, as it happens to Macheath in the *Opera*, a sudden reprieve will set them free: after all, the play does already contain the idea, central in Gay's masterpiece, that law-enforcers and law-breakers are essentially interchangeable. For all its whimsicality, *The Mohocks* already suggests “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”. Of course, the satirist has not yet developed the

65 *TM* iii. 25-31.
66 *TM* iii. 37-45.
67 *TM* iii. 142-43.
68 *TM* iii. 167-83.

pessimism which informs his later ballad opera: the mingling between legal and illegal is forced and not spontaneous as in the Peachum-Lockit bond, and guards are represented as ineffective and clownish, not corrupted. This explains the author's light touch: primary aim remains “pok[ing] fun at what may well have been a gross overreaction to isolated incidents and youthful high spirits”. [69]

The Mohocks does little to clarify Gay's opinion about the rakes. Surely he was sceptical, like his future patron Swift, and the whole play suggests he looked at the affair as a media-inflated storm in a teacup. At the same time, however, he needed the Mohocks to exist, at least on paper, in order to promote his work, and the side-pieces he composed happily added to the general hysteria. On a literary level, the afterpiece appears to be one of the best elaborations on the Mohocks' lore, deriving most of its virtues from the exploitation of the Miltonic mode: though the association between devils and rakes was widespread – they were “Offspring of Hell”, according to Defoe – no one before Gay seemed to burlesque their affinity. At the same time, however, the use of Shakespearean comedy allowed to produce a fresh, lively farce which, in the author's mind, had more than a chance to reach Drury Lane stage.

Some reasons for the failure have been already highlighted: the big cast, for example, made the production uneconomical, though Gay probably considered the final dialogues and dance, with every character on stage, as a valuable asset – and replicated this kind of pyrotechnic gathering in the *Opera*. However, there were also issues beyond the work itself: as scholars point out, “the play lost his opportunity for production not because it was a bad play but because it appeared at a bad time”. [70] *The Mohocks* were born in an age of political turmoil, where every cultural expression was passible of strict partisan scrutiny; for all his efforts to keep the play unpolitical, Gay was unable to avoid it. What prevented his work to be staged, indeed, was its *lightness*: many people were convinced, as highlighted before, that the Mohocks were Whig or Tory plotters, and therefore more a threat to be feared than a joke to be laughed at. [71]

Politics were indeed a crucial part of the Mohocks' scare and its representations. Commenting on the phenomenon, Cantrill confronts pamphleteers, who dwell in sensationalism and scaremongering, with satirists such as Gay, who allegedly “find that an unquestioned acceptance of fear and panic leads to a loss of autonomy”, and therefore satirise the rakes as“resistance to the authority of print and government”. [72] Conversely, Guthrie considers the author's treatment of the Mohocks “surprisingly ambiguous” for “someone so closely associated with the Tories” [73] and thus the ruling ministry. Both the judgements seem to bear the stigma of over-politicising the issue:

69 Guthrie, 39.
70 Winton, p. 13.
71 Winton, pp. 24-25.
72 Cantrill, p. 88.
73 Guthrie, 37.

Guthrie, for example, forgets Gay, in these years, was aligned with the Whigs, and only later, due to the influence of Pope and Swift, changed side – otherwise, he would have treated the Mohocks with the same seriousness the government did.

Nonetheless, Cantrill's thesis seems equally haphazard, as it attributes to Gay a political commitment he did not have. If *A Wonderful Prophecy*, through the Whig Junto mention, could have contained feeble hints of partisanship, *The Mohocks* lacks any reference to contemporary political strife: its main satiric targets (watchmen) are quite traditional and the polemical edge against the corrupted society is nowhere comparable to the *Opera*'s topsy-turvy Weltanschauung. Here, Gay was mainly trying to exploit a momentary event for his dramatical debut, after the *Wife of Bath* aborted project; if he made an error, then, it was hoping the play's topicality would have overcome Drury Lane managers' concerns. But even a light afterpiece, with some passing lampoon of the law and order forces, was too much in that climate, and thus the play was rejected and soon sunk into oblivion.

The satirist had great faith in his work – at some point, he even bought back the copyright from Lintot – but, after the scare ended, there are no clues he attempted to see *The Mohocks* finally on stage, nor he came back to the topic. The only mention of the rakes within his later works comes from the poem *Trivia; or, The Art of Walking the Streets of London* (1716), where the Mohocks, alongside other gangs, are simply an ornamental detail in the urban life's depiction:

> Who has not heard the *Scowrer*'s Midnight Fame?
> Who has not trembled at the *Mohock*'s Name?
> Was there a Watchman took his hourly Rounds,
> Safe from their Blows, or new-invented Wounds? [74]

Evidently, Gay's interest in the topic ran out with the scare's end: he lost his occasion to reach the stage, and he had to wait until next year to make his dramatic debut – with an updated, yet unsuccessful version of the *Wife of Bath*. Although *The Mohocks* did not enter Drury Lane, however, it had the merit of epitomising most of the rakes' lore within a framework of literary allusions, and thus served as a solid foundation for later elaborations.

74 John Gay, *Trivia; or, the Art of Walking the Streets of London* III. 325-28 in Vinton A. Dearing (ed.), *John Gay: Poetry and Prose*, vol. I, p. 169.

III. The Mohocks' legacy (1712-2007)

3.1 Early reception and consolidation

As 1712 passed, the Mohocks affair quickly deflated; after all, it turned out to be "merely one of a series of similar nine days' wonders that caught the attention of the eighteenth century public". [1] More pressing political events, such as the Treaty of Utrecht and the accession of George I, stole the scene, while Grub-street press moved onto next scandal: there were others societies of debauchees, such as the Hellfire Club's various branches, who commanded the public attention. Obviously, the rakes were not erased from collective memory but, before entering British official history and folklore, their image was subjected to some polishing and fine-tuning, until it was lead back to a single, coherent narrative.

On one hand, some people still believed the Mohocks were a threat against the government which only the Queen's timely proclamation halted. For example, ballad *Plot upon Plot* (1714)accused the Whigs of conspiracy against the sovereign and her ministry and included the rogues among their "Machi'villian Crew". Depicted while they assault prostitutes and scare women "[w]ith Razors arm'd and Knives", the rakes of two years before are presented as agents of the opposition; their classicalmisdeeds, such as beating the Watch or breaking windows, are considered a mere decoy, concealing darker political goals: in the pamphlet's words," 'twas their true Intent, / (As our wise Ministry did smoke) / T' o'rturn the Government". [2]

Such an interpretation, however, was soon overshadowed by the vision of the Mohocks as plain scoundrels, without political implications; acquitted of partisanship, the rakes still retained that libertine aura which, as Hurl-Eamon pointed out, was less and less tolerated by the general public. Not for instance, further mentions of the Mohocks, generally associated with their late imitators, contain extensive social critic of their rakish escapades. It seems worth citing mid-century newspaper *The Connoisseur* which, in a long essay about the "Frolicks" of contemporary rakes, ironically describes their "violation of all decency and order" as "an exquisite piece of wit". Pretending to commend their behaviour, the author makes clear there is no place any more for their systematic transgressions and abuses: "the generality of mankind have no taste for [their kind of] humour", which means it does not like to be harmed just for the rogues' amusement.

Since the tide appears to have changed, these young bucks now face serious opposition from government and society at large. As the current "legislature has been absurd enough to be very

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1 Guthrie, 49.
2 Anon., *Political merriment: or, truths told to some tune* (London: A. Boulter, 1714), pp. 82-83 [*Hist. Texts* 118-119]

careful of the lives of the lowest among the people", the author contends, it would be better for the Mohocks wannabes, "since the taste of the age is so incorrigible, to lay aside th[eir] high-seasoned humour" [3]; otherwise, they will risk severe punishments. Under the irony, one can easily perceive the writer's dislike for aristocrats such as the Mohocks – and their epigones – were thought to be; after all, *The Connoisseur* was born as a "plebeian counterpart" to Edward Moore's *The World*, catered to upper-class tastes. [4]

Actually, the newspaper's "cease-and-desist" advice to the rakes seems ironic; the editors were aware the scions' social status would still have mitigated any sentence against them, as it did with the few apprehended in 1712. However, it is out of doubt that, after the Mohocks' scare, there was "a perceptible increase in the prosecution of similar forms of rakery" [5], and new aristocratic clubs, such as Wharton's Hellfire Club, avoided blatant escapades which involved physical violence, limiting themselves to drinking and whoring. Retrospectively, the Mohocks were consigned to history more as drunken knaves than as pernicious criminals; essayists made them symbols of degradation but downplayed their topicality. Whitelock Bulstrode, for instance, inserts them among the scoundrels' larger crowd which infests contemporary England:

> I Do conceive, that the Immorality and Looseness, the Profaneness and Debauchery of this present Age, is principally owing to that Flood of Irreligion and Debauchery that came in, in a late Reign; for that then there arose such a Spirit of Debauchery, mixed with an Excess of Wit, Buffoonry and Knavery, and even Atheism, that spread itself throughout the whole Kingdom, that it became the Seed-Plot or Spawn of all that Generation of Men, that are now called Beaux, Fops, Rakes, Mohocks, rattle-headed Coxcombs, and profound Debauchés. [6]

Apparently, most of the writers and historians, after the scare ended, were ready to dismiss the whole affair as little more than drunkards' revels: in fact, alcohol became the key to explaining the Mohocks' rampage and alleged crimes. This viewpoint was already common, as highlighted by the Emperor's toast in *The Mohocks* (i. 65-71), but subsequent commentators made it mainstream. One could find a sound example of this belief in Matthew Prior's ironic poem *Alma; or, The Progress of the Mind* (1718), where the author, an acquaintance of Gay, depicts a youngster's

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3 *The Connoisseur* No. 54 (February 6, 1755) in *The Connoisseur by Mr. Town, Critic and Censor-General* (London: R. Baldwin, 1754-56), pp. 320-22 (*Historical Texts* 327-329)

4 Frédéric Ogée (ed.), *The Dumb Show: Image and society in the works of William Hogarth* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1997), p. 155, n. 49.

5 Hurl-Eamon, p. 47.

6 Whitelock Bulstrode, *Essays* (London: Bettesworth & Clarke, 1724), p. 221 [*Historical Texts* 240]. Not to be confused with parliamentarian politician and Lord keeper of the Great Seal Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605-1675).

progress from politeness to rakery through drinking. Until he takes only milk and tea, the protagonist dutifully follows the social rules, pays visit to his relatives and comes home at reasonable hours,

> But give him Port, and potent Sack;
> From Milk-sop He starts up Mohack:
> Holds that the Happy know no Hours;
> So thro' the Street at Midnight scow'rs:
> Breaks Watch-men's Heads, and Chair-men's Glasses;
> And thence proceeds to nicking Sashes; [7]

Prior's humorous description recalls most of the rakes' standard misdeeds, already established by the pamphlets and Gay, but makes also the point the distinction between law-abiding citizens and hooligans is easily blurred – and a glass of wine or liquor may at any time trigger the degradation. Such a viewpoint seemed not out of place in an age plagued by overconsumption of alcoholics, as the first half of the eighteenth century saw a staggering increase in the spirits' market which eventually lead to the infamous "Gin craze". Indeed, enduring conflicts between Britain and France resulted in government banning imported French booze and thus promoting domestic production; the situation quickly grew out of control and only the rise of living expenses, coupled with severe legislative backlash, was able by mid-century to stop the flow of gin.

In this context, it comes as little surprise that the alcohol-related explanation of the Mohocks' crimes became dominant; epidemic drunkenness, more than aristocratic boredom, was considered the reason for their shenanigans. Moreover, some authors considered the rakes bested by contemporary drunkards in terms of depravity: Elias Bockett's *Geneva* (1729), which completes an ideal triad of Miltonic imitations with Philips' *Cyder* and Gay's *Wine*, thus supports this thesis:

> GENEVA! the pernicious origin
> Of villanies ineffable! unknown
> To former ages. Ruffians, by its fumes
> Intoxicated, dare to perpetuate
> Crimes monstrous, desperate, unparallel'd,
> And horrible to name! Not Mohocks fierce,

7 Matthew Prior, *Alma; or, The Progress of the Mind* III. 230-235 in H. Bunker Wright and Monroe K. Spears (eds.) *The Literary Works of Matthew Prior* (Oxford: OUP, 1959), vol. I, p. 506 [*OSEO*]. First quoted in Winton, p. 173.

With glaring eyes, and whiskers formidable,
Dread misanthropes! were more tremendous, when
At dead of night, intent on mischief, they
Itinerants nocturnal terrified. [8]

Reduced to little more than a casual circle of prankster and drunkards, the Mohocks had lost all their topicality, but quickly became a conventional element within any representation of Queen Anne's reign. Most of Britain's general histories, together with London's antiquarian accounts, featured their alleged misdeeds, although it has been shown how they were almost entirely concocted by the media. As a badge of honour, they were included in *Blackguardiana* (1793), a voluminous dictionary of all types of criminal and lowlifes, and found their space even among Dr.Johnson's writings: the *Adventurer* No. 34 indeed presents an essay from a modern rogue who, relating his life of excesses, names the 1712 rakes his “illustrious progenitors”. [9]

During the nineteenth century their appearances became sporadic: usually, the rogues were cited within editions of great Augustan writers, and every editor supported his subject's belief about the Mohocks. Accordingly, Defoe biographer Walter Wilson followed the *Review* author in thinking the Mohocks were really “a set of unmanly miscreants” and “inhuman wretches” roaming the streets of London [10], while Pope's and Swift's editors often quoted Lord Chesterfield's categorical assertion about the non-existence of the rakish society. [11] In the same fashion, historical works appeared to split between doubtful accounts and frightening narrations directly borrowed from Grub Street press, where the rakes still figured as “demons […] incarnate”. [12]

Novelists, in turn, did employ the Mohocks in their books, but with different roles. Some writers found their image useful to convey an immediate sense of rakery and crime, as Walter Scott does in *The Fortunes of Nigel* (1822), where the protagonist, fleeing from justice, seeks sanctuary inside one of London's liberties, Alsatia, infested by all kind of knaves. A brief poem, signed by the Mohocks, aptly describes the local atmosphere and society made of “men o' the sword, that live by reputation / More than by constant income”. [13] The novel is set during James Stuart's reign, one

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8 Alexander Blunt (= Elias Bockett), *Geneva: a Poem* (London: T. Payne, 1729), p. 21 [*Historical Texts* 18]

9 *Adventurer* No. 34 (March 3, 1753) in *The Works of Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* (Oxford: Talboys & Weeler, 1825), vol. IV, p. 4 [*Historical Texts* 26]

10 Walter Wilson, *Memoirs of the Life and Time of Daniel De Foe* (London: Hurst, Chance & Co., 1830), vol. III, p. 273-74 [*Google Books*]

11 "...a set of people called Mohocks (which Society, by the way, never existed)" (May 23, 1758) in *The Letters of Philip Dormer Stanhope, Earl of Chesterfield* (London: R. Bentley, 1845), vol IV, p. 277 [*Google Books*]. Quoted, for example, in *The Works of Alexander Pope* (London: J. Murray, 1872) vol. VIII, p. 284, n. 2 [*Google Books*].

12 William Howitt, *John Cassel's Illustrated History of England* (London: Cassel, Petter & Galpin, 1860), vol. IV, p. 292 [*Google Books*].

13 Walter. Scott, *The Fortunes of Nigel* (Edinburgh: A. & C. Black, 1852-53), p. 251 [*Historical Texts* 265].

century before the actual scare, but such anachronism does not undermine the poem's impact, for the rakes' mention is undoubtedly effective in establishing the roguish background Scott sought.

Most authors, however, used the Mohocks as simple tokens of an age, casually dropping their name within any narration settled in the eighteenth century. It is the case of William Makepeace Thackeray, who references the rakes in his *History of Henry Osmond* (1852), and Frances Hogdson Burnett in the similar-sounding, yet unrelated *His Grace of Osmonde* (1897). Her novel is worth of mention also because the rogues are evoked in a scene where a group of aristocrats is attacked by an angry mob: the beaux invoking help from the watch and the constables, and commenting "[t]is [crowd] worse than the Mohocks" [14] do remember, perhaps voluntarily, Gentle's antics from Gay's afterpiece.

However, as the time passed, the Mohocks seemed to lost their fascination: they were less frequently cited in literature and the historical judgement about them became almost consistent in considering "the stories of their outrages [...] coloured by much romantic exaggeration" [15] and thus not reliable. The twentieth century had them mostly excluded from works of fiction, and still being mentioned only in philological studies such as those examined in previous chapters. Sometimes they resurged as a tenuous echo, like in Terry Pratchett's comic novel *Jingo* (1997), where a juvenile street gang is named Mohocks, but they remained largely ignored. The same fate occurred to Gay's afterpiece, which went on being ignored by all but few specialised scholars; apparently, it never reached the stage, although in 1991 it was translated into German by Felicitas Groß. [16]

3.2 A Modern Reading: Wu Ming's Manituana

Given the general anonymity in which the Mohocks had sunk, it was quite unpredicted their story would have resurfaced in *Manituana*, a 2007 historical novel by Italian writing collective Wu Ming. [17] Even more surprisingly, the rogues featured in the book are not a mere decorative element, but play a relevant role in the whole narrative structure, as the second section's title, "Mohock Club", immediately suggests. Before investigating it thoroughly, however, it seems useful to summarily recall some pieces of information about the authors: apparently, the reasons for the Mohocks' insertion within the story are strictly intertwined with the writers' personal experiences and cultural formation.

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14 Frances Hodgson Burnett, *His Grace of Osmonde* (London: Warne & Co., 1897), p. 452 [*Historical Texts* 456]

15 William H. Davenport Adams, *Good Queen Anne; or, Men and manners, life and letters in England's Augustan age* (London: Remington & Co., 1886), vol. I, p. xx [*Historical Texts* 26]

16 There are scarce informations about this edition and its translator. Upon requesting information, Munich-based publisher Litag Theaterverlag Gmbh was only able to provide the cover ("Titel") and the electronic text of the play.

17 Wu Ming, *Manituana*, trans. by Shaun Whiteside (London: Verso, 2009).

"Wu Ming" is a Mandarin word which can mean, according to the tone, both "anonymous" and "five names": therefore, it seemed the perfect nickname for a group of five young Bolognese writers who considered their collective work more important than individual authorship. They mainly came from the local section of the Luther Blisset Project, the countercultural movement which, between 1994 and 1999, achieved international recognition for its pranks and hoaxes played on mainstream media. In these years, hundreds of activist and artists all over Europe, haphazardly grouped under the shared name of a British footballer, engaged in what they defined "a guerrilla warfare on the cultural industry" [18]; among their various performances, they spread several elaborated fake news in order to demonstrate the press' gullibility and incompetence.

In 1999, most of the LBP adherents decided to commit a symbolic *seppuku*, or suicide; in Bologna, its last act was the publication, by four of the five future Wu Ming, of historical novel *Q*, an ambitious and extended fresco of sixteenth century Europe. The book, which deals with a nameless Anabaptist's wanderings and involvement in the Protestant Reformation, was a commercial and critical success and contributed to launching the solo career of its authors. Upon embarking a fifth member, the writers adopted as their new alias Wu Ming – being individually identified by progressive numerals – and went on publishing several books, which included Cold War thriller *54* (2002), and *Altai* (2009), set in the same historical continuum of *Q*.

Described as "fairly serious leftist radicals who get annoyed about being called anarchists by the press" and "entertaining jokers with a finely tuned pop sensibility and a keen sense of the ridiculousness of acting like revolutionaries" [19], the authors were also instrumental in spreading the debate about the "New Italian Epic", a critical denomination first coined by Wu Ming 1 in a 2008 memorandum. In the essay, he argued for the existence, in contemporary Italian literature, of a body of works whose characteristics go beyond postmodernism, and include transmediality, refusal of ironic perspective, "oblique gaze" on the events and narrative complexity. Among the authors pertaining to this kind of metahistorical fiction, characterised by underlying allegorical nature, were cited Saviano, Camilleri, Lucarelli and the collective itself, although there is no scholarly consensus about the NIE's real scope or pretensions. [20]

According to his authors, also *Manituana* should be placed within this framework; for the purpose of this dissertation, however, its NIE features will be sidelined unless they are featured in the Mohocks' representation. It should be useful, nonetheless, giving a brief account of the book's content, in order to understand the role the rogues play within it. The novel represents the first

18 "Who is Luther Blissett? Birth of a Folk Hero" [*www.lutherblisset.net*]

19 Christopher Tyler, "A Life in Writing: Wu Ming", *Guardian*, 14 November 2009.

20 For a global account of the NIE and its criticisms, see (in Italian) Stefano Giovannuzzi, "Stella del Mattino: *New Italian Epic*" in *CoSMo*. *Comparative studies in modernism* (2012) 1: 129-136 and Paolo Giovannetti, "C'è dell'epica nel New Italian Epic?" in *CentoPagine* (2011) 5: 91-103.

instalment of a pan-Atlantic trilogy set in the late eighteenth century, later continued with *The Army of Sleepwalkers* (2014); it takes place during the American War of Independence, focussing on the uneasy allegiance between the Iroquois Indians and the British, who have promised to protect the natives from the rebellious colonies' expansionism.

At the centre of the book stand the figures of Joseph Brant, interpreter and cultural mediator which will become the leader of the Mohawk resistance to the Americans, and Guy Johnson, troubled Crown representative for Indian affairs. After the latter fails to unite the Six Iroquois Nations against the insurgents, they decide to reach London in order to secure stronger support from king George III: there, among various entertainments and official meetings, they are approached by a thuggish street gang which claims the name and the legacy of the 1712 Mohocks, and ultimately seeks an absurd allegiance with the Iroquois confederacy.

Given these biographical and bibliographical references, it is not hard to understand why Wu Ming decided to feature a version of the Mohocks within its novel. Their past belonging to the Luther Blisset Project is indeed instrumental in explaining their interest in the phenomenon, as the whole 1712 affair, with all its media scaremongering, seems an ancestor to the stunts and hoaxes played by the movement in the Nineties. It is a consonance most reviewers have not failed to point out: Roberto Saviano, for example, praised the presence in the novel of “a highly mediatic society where the English newspapers helped to fan the events' flames, in a situation identical to the actual mediatic circuit [the LBP mocked and fooled]”. [21]

According to Wu Ming 2 [22], the group's first contact with the Mohocks' lore came from a reference in Swift's *Journal to Stella*, possibly the famous excerpt from March 8, 1712 about “a race of rakes, called the Mohocks, that play the devil about this town every night”.Nonetheless, the author mentioned also a passage where the Mohocks are associated with the Mohawks and thus to the Four Kings' 1710 visit: in this case, he is probably referring to Defoe's bitter rectification to *The Spectator* No. 324. In any case, once found the story, the collective was able to search all its aspects and find similarities with their own experience; merging historical data and personal hints, they were eventually able to breathe new life into the eighteenth-century legend.

As a starting point, there is little doubt Wu Ming's re-imagining of the London Mohocks relies heavily on historical evidence: the Bolognese collective is renown for the extensive and accurate research already demonstrated in *Q* and elsewhere. Traces of this creative process are to be found in *Indian Kings*, a “prolegomenon” to *Manituana* released on the book's website some months before its publication: it is a sort of eclectic collection of eighteenth-century materials which

21 Roberto Saviano, "Io sto con gli Indiani", *L'Espresso*, 16 (26 aprile 2007). Translation mine.

22 Wu Ming 2, interviewed by the author (April 13, 2017). All subsequent pieces of information by Wu Ming 2, if not specified otherwise, come from this telephonic interview, attached to this dissertation as “Appendix 1”.

makes clear the sources employed by Wu Ming for the novel's historical background. [23] They coincide with most of the documents assessed in previous chapters, including Gay, Swift and *The Spectator*; the documentary research goes as far as featuring an excerpt from lesser-known pamphlet *A Wonderful Prophecy*, carefully translated into Italian as the rest of the papers.

Although Wu Ming 2 declared they are not specialists in the field, not being literature scholars nor archivists, *Indian Kings* and the forthcoming *Manituana* do betray a significant historical research: indeed, many recurrent praises for the novel concerned its accurate background and use of real-life characters within the plot. Obviously, it was not an easy task: in the authors' words, modern overabundance of primary and secondary sources online forced them "to learn how to learn and to navigate through the shambles" and "to limit themselves and avoid succumbing to the hubris typical of the compulsive researcher, of the 'news addict' ".

One should rightfully insist on this aspect, because it helps to define their work not simply as historical fiction, but as something more: the collective maintains they do not write "novels with historical background", but "novels of historical transformation", where the ample material allows them to "insert the fictional element in such deep corners [...] that, ultimately, [they] find themselves working directly with real history". [24] Within *Manituana*, indeed, only two main characters are entirely fictional, and the Mohocks are depicted according to all their traditional features, albeit with significant modernisations.

Wu Ming's main authorial intervention, nevertheless, was adjusting the rakes' legend to its needs. Actually, *Manituana* takes place in the wake of the American Revolution, more than sixty years after the grip of fear which held London in 1712; in order to exploit the Mohocks' narrative potential, then, the authors post-dated the gang's rampage in order to make it contemporary to Brant's visit and allow interaction with their main characters. It remains assured the self-styled London Mohocks still derive their name from the Four Indian Kings who visited Queen Anne in 1710, just as the real rogues did, but it is not clear if they are epigones to an older group of Mohocks or have banded together recently, as the events seem to suggest.

There is a great deal of difference between the fictional scoundrels and their real prototypes: the collective envisioned the Mohocks not as alleged aristocratic scions, but as common lowlifes banded together by the charisma of their Emperor, the only memorable figure among them. Not by chance, he is the first one to be mentioned when the authors introduce the gang, relating a coach assault where the driver is knocked down unconscious:

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23 Wu Ming, "Indian Kings. II Prolegomenon to *Manituana*" (April 2006) [*www.manituana.com/documenti/76/8097*]

24 Marco Amici, "Fra narrazioni di trasformazione storica ed etica del mito: intervista a Wu Ming 1" in *La Libellula. Rivista di Italianistica* (2010) 2: 9. Translation mine.

> As [the coachman] felt gravity getting the better of him and light making way for the darkness of unconsciousness, he managed to grasp one final waking image: a big Turkish crescent tattooed on the forehead of a brute with a painted face and a single tuft of hair in the middle of his head. (168)

Apart from the obvious *Spectator* borrowing (the tattoo), it is interesting to note how the leader's Indian look is reinforced through the mention of the Mohawk haircut and, later, the imaginative scalping of the wig to which the coach's unfortunate passenger is subjected. Such a concentration of imaginative elements on him is justified by his role in the novel: he is the only one among his fellows who pretends to be a real Mohock, claiming his grandfather was one of the Four Kings [25] and boastfully presenting himself as Taw Waw Eben Zan Kaladar II, Emperor of the Mohocks of London and Westminster.

His associates are definitely less impressive: they are common criminals, first portrayed in a damp cellar while they adulterate some wine. They are soon joined by their boss, which exposes his plans for the future: since they have been forced to move from Covent Garden, home of the historical Mohocks, to Soho, they need to assert their territorial hegemony at the expense of Dread Jack's gang, based in One-Eyed Fred's tavern. [26] They achieve their aim through a violent incursion, whose scenes, however, appear to be almost carnivalesque thanks to the comic language utilised and the Emperor's theatrical moves: at the peak of the brawl, indeed, he jumps on the table and delivers an impassioned speech in which he declares the Mohock year open and informs all the present thugs and prostitutes they will work for him from now on.

With these misdeeds, the Mohocks of Soho ("Sohocks") obtain also some recognition from the media: Wu Ming includes extracts from its fabricated eighteenth-century newspaper, the *Daily Courant* [27], whose essayist Panifex comments the Indians' visit and the rogues' crimes. Apparently, being in the news was one of the gang's aims from the beginning: the Emperor knows media scaremongering could nothing but help their business, and thus promotes their menacing image through blatant actions. Similarly, when he decides to deliver a letter to the outlandish visitors, he gives in a copy also to the *Courant*, because his true goal is to see it printed and diffused to the larger public. Although the message appears to be directed to Brant, the appeal it contains is meant to cause stir in the whole British society, exploiting the press market's dynamics. In the leader's

25 While the Emperor's lineage is purely fictional, it should also be noted that Joseph Brant's grandfather was really one of the Four Mohawks Kings of 1710.

26 Dread Jack's figure appear to have been modelled on the aforementioned Jonathan Wild, as "he thieves and he thief-takes, he steals and sells on, grasses up the buyers and pockets the takings" (202).

27 Actually, there was a real *Daily Courant*, founded by 1702 by Elizabeth Mallet, but by 1735 it had ceased its operations; it was considered the first English daily newspaper.

words:

> Giving [the letter] to the prince is the purest humbug, it’s a way to get the marks gandering. The marks gander, they tattle, they take an interest. The scribers tattle, they print, they fill their pockets. The ruffers shit themselves, the whores get fucked, everyone gets to work. The Emperor and his cronies shovel the shekels like there’s no tomorrow. (226)

The missive's content, by Wu Ming's own admission, suggests one of the reading keys for the entire novel but, before examining its thrust, it seems appropriate to search a little longer the Sohocks' characterisation, which goes far beyond the simple recycling of eighteenth-century sources. In fact, elements derived from *The Spectator* or Swift's journal are employed mainly to build the historic background, but the rogues' depiction is by no means limited to the traditional features Gay and the pamphlets established. Actually, the collective introduces several nuances which are typically modern and come from their personal experiences, and could thus be considered a valuable addition – and a partial diversion – from the Mohocks' traditional lore.

A first trait to be highlighted is the Sohocks' affinity with the youth subcultures of the Seventies, and particularly with the punk movement. Indeed, two centuries after their exploits the streets of London still saw “strange guys, with Indian haircut and painted faces, who made clear [...] their distinction from the orderly British society” [28], just as the 1775 novelised rogues did. Although the authors later downplayed this link [29], it is not unlikely the idea probably came up in their minds because of their long-lasting interest in those topics: two Wu Ming members have previously studied street lifestyles, such as the skinhead wave in the Seventies, whilst the whole collective comes from Bologna, a city traditionally considered a countercultural hotspot.

The fascination for the punk culture was already present in their debut novel, *Q*, where the character of Jan of Leiden was treated as a “proto-punk” and forerunner to Sex Pistols' Johnny Lydon, according to the interpretation critic Greil Marcus gave him in *Lipstick Traces* (1989). Here, the punk elements of the Sohocks are reduced to their non-conformism and rebellion to the society's restraints: thus one may understand the scene in which the gang frees the inmates of Bedlam asylum because “[t]he Mad are the victims par excellence” [30], and government cannot keep them detained. While it will be flawed speaking of the London Mohocks as proto-punks or anarchists – they do have a political project, which will be discussed further – it seems evident their representation have been influenced by such subcultures; all of them are marginal groups which have been subjected to

28 Wu Ming, interviewed by Alessandro Bertante, *Pulp Libri*, 66 (March/April 2007). Translation mine.
29 Marco Philopat, "*Manituana*, il punk è pellerossa", *La Repubblica XL*, 20 (April 2007). Translation mine.
30 *Manituana*, p. 273.

social stigma and sometimes caused, in Cohen's words, “moral panic”.

Many commentators have recognised another source which seemed to have a significant impact on the Sohocks' depiction. Alessandro Gazoia, commenting the early *Indian Kings*, underlined how it featured also an image from Stanley Kubrick's classic A *Clockwork Orange* (1971), linking “the droogs, and therefore any available youth disorder and likely repression between nineteenth and twentieth century, with the Mohocks”. While claiming that “Burgess' hooliganism owes much to rakes and beggars of the eighteenth century”, he praised Wu Ming for “making the connection explicit”, albeit he could not imagine how it will be included in the novel. [31]

From a scholarly perspective, the writer's claim needs to be challenged: Anthony Burgess knew English literature quite well and was an admirer of Defoe and Swift, and thus might have been aware of the Mohocks, but there are no proofs he used them to model Alex and his fellows. On the other hand, the collective itself overlooked a direct relation between the Sohocks and the droogs; they preferred stressing how events perceived as modern and ground-breaking were rooted in the past, just as the violent youth gangs Burgess took inspiration from trace back to the Augustan rakes. Finding these consonances, alongside a particular attention to the “urban population's lifestyle”, has always been typical of the collective's style, which often employs anachronisms in the belief that “an unusual juxtaposition often tells something true”. [32]

In fact, a reader may be tempted to link the Sohocks' graphic violence, especially in the tavern raid, to the droogs' similar habits. However, if one looks carefully at these scenes, a main difference comes up: while Burgess shows his characters' misdeeds simply reflect their love for “ultraviolence”, the Sohocks use the force only when necessary. When they capture the coach, they do not kill the coachman nor the passenger, who is instead subjected to the traditional, yet harmless prank of “sweating”. Even the apex of brutality – Dread Jack's murder at the hands of the Emperor – is somewhat justified by the circumstances, as the leader has to assert his authority in the district; once done, no more blood is shed and, subsequently, he even elects One-Eyed Fred's hovel as his gang's hideout.

Nonetheless, Gazoia was right in forecasting the dystopian novel's presence in *Manituana*: although the Sohocks are not copies of the droogs, their scenes and dialogue are written in an argot directly mirroring Burgess' renown *nadsat*. According to Wu Ming, the starting point for its creation has been Floriana Bossi's Italian translation of *A Clockwork Orange*, although Bruce Alexander's historic crime novels, which deal with Judge John Fielding's investigations, are indicated as inspirations as well. [33] Developing these hints, the group was able to build a language that, albeit

31 Alessandro Gazoia, "A proposito dei 'Prolegomeni' a *Manituana*", *Giap*, 8, 1 [online]. Translation mine.
32 Wu Ming 2, interviewed by the author.
33 Wu Ming, interviewed by Alessandro Bertante.

often trivial and hard to understand, seemed suitable to convey the London underworld's atmosphere and accompany the rogues' criminal exploits.

The development of this language was not an easy task. As the collective is eager to remark, “there's nothing of unconscious in [their] disposition of words and sentences”: every word of the metropolitan slang they made up has been thoroughly discussed and weighted. The final aim, in their words, was producing “sentences which “vibrates” and hover […] one millimetre above the page”, and still remain “functional to what [they] want to narrate, and discreet as much as possible”.[34] This last point is at the core of their linguistic elaboration: one of Wu Ming's guidelines is Ignacio Paco Taibo II's notion that any kind of textual experimentation should be an “invisible sewing” which keeps together the parts of the story. Therefore, the laborious work behind the Sohocks' slang should remain concealed in order to maximise its impact: it is exactly the opposite of Gay's blatant parody of Miltonic verse in *The Mohocks*' first scene.

Beyond their modern characterisation, however, the Sohocks do play a significant role in the novel's unfolding: the letter they deliver to Brant, as mentioned, contains one of the interpretative keys for the whole story. It is indeed a raving missive, in which the London Mohocks ask to join the Iroquois confederacy as its seventh tribe; they relate their alleged history of humiliation and submission to the British government and propose themselves as ambassadors and speakers for the Indians in the capital. In exchange, they require a formal recognition which would give them diplomatic status, including exemption from military conscription and reserved “hunting zones” alongside the Thames' banks.

Actually, the Sohocks draw a close analogy between them and the Indian natives: according to the rogues, both of them are seen as savages and authors of cruel misdeeds by the empire, until they became somehow useful and are consequently exploited. The missive portraits a sort of golden age in which the actual lowlifes lived as the Iroquois still do in North-American forests; only the intervention of external agents broke the idyll:

> For a while we too were a proud and courageous people, dedicated to hunting and agriculture, desirous to live in peace, but the honest men stole our land, and with it forests, trees, animals and waters, forcing our grandfathers to live in unhealthy districts and become servants, soldiers, beggars or thieves. (246)

The passage seems to conceal a reference to the enclosure, the much-debated process of

34 Loredana Lipperini, "Manituana, lo scontro di civiltà degli antenati di George Bush", *Il Venerdì di Repubblica*, 23 March 2006. Translation mine.

fencingcommon lands and grouping them into bigger, more efficient agricultural units which took place in Britain from fifteenth century onwards; as a consequence of the phenomenon, mass of landless peasants unable to sustain themselves were forced to move to the cities, where they eventually formed the Industrial revolution's working class. The eighteenth century saw a marked increase in this process, and therefore the Sohocks' older relatives could well have been victims of this legal exploitation; furthermore, it is historically proved that the mass urbanisation worsened the conditions of the lower social strata, whose only ways out were serfdom, conscription or crime.

One could easily identify the "honest men" as the bourgeois class which profited most of the enclosures; Wu Ming, a highly politicised author, shares the Marxian view of the process as a form of proto-capitalism but emphasises also its colonial features. According to its vision, capitalism first exploited the "local savages", the "different people" it had within its reach, and then set out to replicate the same mechanism globally. Therefore, the Sohocks' message to the Indians is that there is no advantage in siding with British major capital because it will steal the Indian's lands, as it did with the rogues' progenitors, and leave them depleted; it will apply to them the same colonial logic it applied with the urban underclass.

In order to illustrate this "indisputable truth" [35], Wu Ming mixes the narration of the Sohocks' lunatic enterprises with the meetings of a group of wealthy gentleman who comments the political situation and the rogues' exploits; among them there is a journalist, Richard Whitebread, who publishes the *Daily Courant* articles under the pen name of Panifex and is likely to represent the partisan media subservient to the business. Its pieces offer a prejudiced vision of the Indian delegation, reflecting the businessmen's conviction that it would be better to sign a peace with the American rebels instead of enlisting the natives' aid: the ongoing war is damaging their trades and they hope, through Whitebread's newspaper, to point it out to the public.

There is little doubt these gentlemen, in Wu Ming's narrative, embody capitalism: the link is immediately made clear when, in their first apparition, they agree to finance the distribution of Adam Smith's newly-printed *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). More specifically, they represent its worse aspects, such as its voraciousness; in this regard, it should be enough pointing at the transparent allegory contained in this passage, which describes their club's dining room after a meal:

> There was something sinister about the leftovers as a whole: the orderly arrangement of the bones on the plate suggested lucid brutality. The head of the biggest bird looked toward the southeast, as if regretting a truncated migration to a better fate. The other skeletons inertly awaited inhumation between the jaws of the cats to the rear of the club. (240)

35 Wu Ming 2, interviewed by the author.

Their conversations, which usually precede and direct the *Daily Courant* pieces, are rich of insights about their Weltanschauung. They initially regarded the Sohocks as a mere nuisance, a bunch of lowlife scum without goals, but they soon came to realise they may be a danger because of their political claims. Indeed, a possible allegiance between Indians and rogues, although unlikely, is a risk to be assessed with the utmost care: after all, also the American insurrection began with "[b]rawls, fights, a few local gang leaders who know how to read and write". [36]

Particularly meaningful are the words of the group's informal leader, which believes "[d]regs are dregs, whether they assemble in the stinking taverns of the East End, on the quays of Boston, or in the forests of Canada". In his vision, anyone who opposes his capitalistic ventures is to be labelled under the same denomination and represents a threat to the system itself: "when the dregs come together, the Empire bleeds. [… R]emember that man Spartacus". [37] Accordingly, Panifex's comment to the Sohocks' missive reflects his capacity of spokesperson for the ruling class:

> [A] letter written by these people in itself constitutes a serious crime, because, by the rhetorical device of analogy, drawn between the Indians of America and the Lower Classes of England, they are clearly inciting a vast number of subjects to join in their rebellion. (247)

The gentlemen's fears, however, are soon dispelled by the Sohocks' seizing at the hands of a press gang, one of military squadrons eighteenth-century government employed to forcibly enlist men into service in the army. With an ironic twist, the self-proclaimed London Indians will probably end up in North America, fighting perhaps the real natives. In Wu Ming's ideology, this is probably a further prove of the hypocrisy of capitalism, which finds a way to exploit even its opponents: as innkeeper One-Eyed Fred comments, "the savages of London were too base to form a nation, but fake enough to put on a uniform". [38] This character, whose tavern has been the centre of the late Sohocks' operations, seems eventually to have been chosen by the authors to deliver the final words on the question – and, again, it is an ironic one.

Now that the rogues have been transported, this petty, caricatural capitalist needs a strategy to regenerate his business, and eventually keep off further harassing: therefore, he decides to rebrand his tavern's name, inserting some reference to the rogues, their Emperor or the scalping he was used to doing. It is indeed deeply ironic the Sohocks' metamorphosis from public danger to marketing ploy: one could see here another depiction of the exploitation of any different voice

36 *Manituana*, p. 243.
37 *Manituana*, p. 242.
38 *Manituana*, p. 292.

operated by dominant culture. As Wu Ming 2 puts it, “capitalism always tries to co-opt rebellious elements in the society”: in the scoundrels' case, “it is just annexing 'pieces of imaginary' instead of lands”. Ultimately, One-Eyed Fred is just applying the Emperor's golden rule that “fear is the soul of trade”: the whole Indian imagery will keep his activity sure and successful for many years.

The innkeeper actually relies on the fact that the people, seeing his pub's new name, may think it is where “the Seventh Nation still me[e]t up, pretending that the Emperor was coming back from America with beaver skins and strumpets for all”. This sort of mock-messianic attendance of the gang leader, according to the character, seems analogous to the ecclesiastic trust in the Saviour's second coming: with quite a polemic intent, the authors point out that “[i]f fear was the soul of trade, trade had a lot to learn from the Church of Christ.” [39] Beyond this superficial anticlericalism, however, one could also give a positive meaning to the persistence of the Emperor's memory: it may signal, in Wu Ming 2's words, that “no battle is ever concluded”, and there is always room for opposition to the dominant values.

The entire Mohocks' parable seems not to have an immediate repercussion on the story: Guy Johnson and Joseph Brant, once secured the monarchy's support, return to America and resume their war against the insurgents. However, the Indian interpreter has been touched by the letter's content: although he disregards its extensors as insane, he listens to the warnings it contains because, as his companion Philip Lacroix comments, “often the Master of Life speaks through the voice of the mad”. [40] Brant comes to realise that no one will fight on his behalf, and British allies could at any moment turn against the Indians, or withdraw their support: therefore, it is required he takes the burden of leadership, and fight for his people – most of the novel's third part will indeed relate his brave, sometimes bloody expeditions against the enemies.

Ultimately, if one had to assign a role to the Sohocks, it appears they have been featured to warn the Indians about the true nature of capitalism, which finds its graphic depiction in the filthy streets Lacroix, reflecting on the missive, goes through. The depressing picture of poverty and abjection is so striking it inspires the man a sort of dystopic daydream, which seems to sum up all the criticism to capitalism developed to that moment:

> As he watched the progress of [a funeral] procession, Philip had a vision: A London as big as the world. A single vast excrescence, made of low buildings and soaring towers, hovels, scenic boulevards, fountains and gardens, mazes of alleyways that the sun never reached. A man-made world, in perpetual motion, paved, cobbled, propped up; a world in continuous

39 *Manituana*, pp. 293-94.
40 *Manituana*, p. 249.

> construction, stratified, violent, rotting; a world of artificial light and a great deal of darkness, salvation for the few and damnation for the majority: the noble cities of London and Westminster. (253)

Considering the Sohocks staunch opponents to the system, however, could be misleading. Surely, they do not comply with the capitalistic model the British Empire was spreading on both sides of the Atlantic, but their request to the Iroquois is more a publicity stunt than an actual political project. As the novel shows, the Emperor finds himself at ease in the capitalistic market: he knows which cards to play to consolidate his gang's position in the underworld and keep the public attention on them. If one trusts his words, the letter's real recipient is the London public, not the Indians, and the aim is not giving sound advice to the natives, but adding to the scaremongering about the Sohocks in order to “shovel the shekels like there's no tomorrow”.

This could be a final, probably unintentional consonance between Mohocks and Sohocks: both the groups, inside their respective narrations, are perceived as bearers of a strong political message, generally in opposition to the *status quo*, but this characterisation soon proves inconsistent. A closer look to the eighteenth-century rakes showed they were not Whig plotters, but rather aristocratic pranksters; similarly, their novelised epigones, despite their raving proclamations, appear as entangled in the capitalistic market as the authority they seem to oppose. In Wu Ming's case, however, this does not affect the message they bring forth: although it comes from an unreliable source, the criticism to capitalism remains a core element of the novel, influencing many characters' subsequent choices.

Appendix 1

Conversation with Giovanni Cattabriga (Wu Ming 2)
(April 13, 2017. Translation mine)

1. My dissertation deals with the persistence of the Mohocks' myth. How did you learn about them? Upon reading the Indian Kings *prolegomenon, one cannot fail to notice a deep historical research, which ranges from* The Spectator *to Swift and Gay.*

Many know the two visits made by representatives of the Six Nation to London, the first one by Hendrick and the second, which we narrate, by Joseph Brant. While researching these visit we stumbled upon a phrase about the fascination for the Indians spread by the first embassy, and the subsequent Mohocks' rampage – probably it was in Swift's *Journal to Stella*. We loved the story to the point that, in order to include it in the novel, we decided to post-date the phenomenon and make it coincident with the second visit we spoke of. Although we are not archivists or literature scholars, we did extensive research; the more we dig deep into a topic, the more historical data offer us narrative hints.

2. Let's talk about the novel's specific features. Speaking of the Sohocks, you have declared: "If one change the year's first two numbers, transforming 1776 in 1976, he could have found in the streets of Soho strange guys, with Indian haircut and painted faces, whose dressing manifested their difference from the ordered British society Ultimately, it is just "dynastic casualty" that Johnny Rotten sang "God save the Queen" instead "...the King" ". Did British subcultures, such as the punk the Sex Pistols embodied, inspire your Sohocks?

Surely there is a kinship. Some members of our collective have researched British street styles: both Wu Ming 5 and Wu Ming 1 were interested in the skinhead culture and its reception in Italy, where they were associated with the far right through the Naziskin movement. Furthermore, we come from Bologna, a city traditionally considered a countercultural laboratory. Youth subcultures were always interesting topics for us, starting from works such as Greil Marcus' *Lipstick Traces*. We used it also in Q, which features a version of Jan of Leyden, indebted to the analogy Marcus makes between him and Johnny Lydon – namely, Jan the Anabaptist as a proto-punk. We also liked the "urban legend" status of the Mohocks: as Luther Blisset, we dealt with these questions, spreading fake news and hoaxes and seeing how the media exploit and boost them. The Mohocks affair

reminded us of many hoaxes we made.

3. Critic Alessandro Gazoia named another source of inspiration for your novel when he commented Indian Kings *in such terms: "There are also two clear actualisations quite strange for Wu Ming, who disregards forthright winks. The first one is the frame in page 4 from* A Clockwork Orange*, which links the droogs, and therefore any available youth disorder and likely repression between nineteenth and twentieth century, with the Mohocks. Needless to say, Burgess' hooliganism owes much to rakes and beggars of the eighteenth century, but the point is that Wu Ming makes the connection explicit". Here Gazoia makes a risky claim because there is no proof Burgess knew the Mohocks – although he graduated in English and admired Defoe and Swift. However, he rightly underlines your choice to insert the image. After all, you admitted the Sohock's slang is modelled on the Nadsat. How much did* A Clockwork Orange *influence the rogues' depiction?*

The link is mainly linguistic. Furthermore, we always had an interest in showing how phenomena perceived as "new" or "contemporary" did exist, in some forms, in the past. It is the same which happened with the debate around "post-truth" and "fake news": Robert Darnton makes clear there were fake gossip and hoaxes already in the Enlightenment. We used to focus our attention on the urban population's lifestyles, which are largely ignored by master fiction and official historiography. We enjoyed showing that London, under Indian eyes, is far more similar to the actual city than one could think. On the other hand, there was a willingly anachronistic aim: we believe an unusual juxtaposition, such as the droogs/Mohocks link, often tells something true.

4. You have also said: "Within the novel, the Mohock Club plays a central role: its raving writings suggest one of the story's reading keys". I think you are referring to the letter where the Sohocks ask to join the Iroquois confederacy and warn the Indians about the slavery they may bear. Quoting from the missive: "for a while we too were a proud and courageous people, dedicated to hunting and agriculture, desirous to live in peace, but the honest men stole our land, and with it forests, trees, animals and waters, forcing our grandfathers to live in unhealthy districts and become servants, soldiers, beggars or thieves" . Here, it seems to recognise a sharp critique to the enclosures' protocapitalism and subsequent mass urbanisation.

There is obviously an internationalist reading key: capitalism first colonises and exploits the different people it had within its reach, and later finds other victims upon expanding at a global level. The relation between state and urban underclass is as colonial as the one with the Indians:

therefore, the Iroquois have not strategic convenience in allying themselves with the major capital. Capitalism always uses the same methods, such as making profit out of everything it finds; it has no limits and does not restrain itself. The same mechanisms are applied in different contexts: the Indians' lands will be seized just as it happened, centuries before, with the enclosing of the British farmers' lands. We liked the idea that the most raving, absurd characters in the novel expressed an indisputable truth which represents the story's core.

5. Eventually, the Mohocks got caught, enlisted in the army and sent overseas, where they are co-opted by the colonial system. One-Eyed Fred rebrands his tavern with the Emperor's name: ironically, it seem capitalism still finds a way to exploit the already-disbanded rogues.

Although it does not always succeed, capitalism always tries to co-opt rebellious elements in the society, just as it happened with the punk movement. It is all part of the capitalism's voraciousness: at this time, it is just annexing "pieces of imaginary" instead of lands". We always try to show what capitalism fails to incorporate, but our recovery of these elements differs from the Situationists' stance: while they end up in self-absolution and nihilism, in the belief that capitalism will always win and make a profit out of everyone, we try to find a space of autonomy. In this case, One-Eyed Fred is just a small businessmen who exploits popular imagination for his goals.

6. One may find these seeds of rebellion to capitalism in the innkeeper's passing thought about the Emperor's unforeseeable, yet possible comeback. Albeit ironic, inserting this messianic image may be part of this opposition strategy to the dominant system.

One-Eyed Fred is undoubtedly playing with the fire: when one plays on the people's fears, the same fears may assail him. We often employed this device of hinting to someone's unexpected comeback in order to show that no battle is ever concluded, and there is always room for a further word.

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