

John Gay (1685-1732)

5 *A Ballad*

Sung by Susan, from *The Beggar's Opera*, Act II, Scene 8.

I

'Twas when the seas were roaring  
With hollow blasts of wind;  
A damsel lay deploring,  
All on a rock reclined.  
Wide o'er the rolling billows 5  
She cast a wistful look;  
Her head was crown'd with willows  
That tremble o'er the brook.

II

Twelve months are gone and over,  
And nine long tedious days. 10  
Why didst thou, vent'rous lover,  
Why didst thou trust the seas?  
Cease, cease, thou cruel ocean,  
And let my lover rest:  
Ah! what 's thy troubled motion 15  
To that within my breast?

III

The merchant, robb'd of pleasure,  
Sees tempests in despair;  
But what 's the loss of treasure  
To losing of my dear? 20  
Should you some coast be laid on  
Where gold and di'monds grow,  
You 'd find a richer maiden,  
But none that loves you so.

IV

How can they say that Nature 25  
Has nothing made in vain;  
Why then beneath the water

Should hideous rocks remain?  
No eyes the rocks discover  
That lurk beneath the deep, 30  
To wreck the wand'ring lover,  
And leave the maid to weep.

V

All melancholy lying,  
Thus wail'd she for her dear;  
Repaid each blast with sighing, 35  
Each billow with a tear;  
When, o'er the white wave stooping,  
His floating corpse she spied;  
Then like a lily drooping,  
She bow'd her head and died. 40

*1715*

(From *Poems of John Gay*. Ed. John Underhill.  
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