

## Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

David Miller

### Sea Robber Jenny (Annotated)

*Recent scholarship has established that Bertolt Brecht based "Die Seeräuber-Jenny" (English: "Pirate Jenny") from Die Dreigroschenoper on an ancient prototype in a forgotten Silesian dialect.*

*An initial foray in translation of the Ur-Jenny follows.*

Gentlemen, today you see me washing the glasses<sup>1</sup>  
And I make the beds for all.  
And you must give me a dime  
And I thank you right away<sup>2</sup>  
And you see all this rubbish, my rags and this paltry hotel.  
And you don't know who you're talking about.  
But one night there's a cry in the harbor.  
Crying, crying.  
And you ask: what's the crying for?<sup>3</sup>  
And you'll see me smiling at my glasses<sup>4</sup>  
And you ask: what's to smile about?  
And a ship with eight sails  
And fifty cannon  
Will lie on the dock.

They say: you said you were going to clean your glasses<sup>5</sup>,  
My girl,  
And they gave me back the dime.  
And the money will be transferred, and lie on the bed.  
And the king-size bed is done.  
(The bed is no longer there for sleeping overnight.)<sup>6</sup>  
And this hotel doesn't know who you're speaking to,<sup>7</sup>  
But I know.  
But one night there will be an explosion in the harbor

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1        *In some sources: Two gentlemen were very surprised to hear me*

2        *Alt. quickly enough*

3        *Or What is divine?*

4        *Lit. I have a smile in my goggles*

5        *Ambig.: Also wash the windows*

6        *Alt. There is another one of the bedrooms for this final night [archaic]*

7        *Or You don't know who's talking garbage / You don't know that you are with the language*

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And you asked for the explosion.<sup>8</sup>  
And you'll see me in the back window  
And you'll be asked: Why don't you laugh?  
And the ship with eight candles  
And with fifty water cannon  
Will enter the city with fire.

And there come from a hundred lands of the South,  
Accompanied by shadows,<sup>9</sup>  
Walking in the dark.  
And all the people will go out of their doors  
And put themselves in chains before me  
And ask: what should we kill? What, are we dead?<sup>10</sup>  
And the clocks will be quiet in the harbor  
While you ask me, are the people better dead.  
And then I have to talk to them!<sup>11</sup> I say, everyone!  
And when the heads fall<sup>12</sup>, I say: Oops!<sup>13</sup>  
Unfortunately.  
And the ship with fifty guns<sup>14</sup>  
And eight in the canvas  
Is no longer with me.

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8        *Lit. blast took place?*

9        *Highly idiomatic in orig. May also be And he will come to the South to get a hundred on land and in the shade or And the land of the South, with ghosts*

10       *Alt. What are we, dead?*

11       *Alt. I have to listen to it!*

12       *Or when the head is shocked*

13       *Unexplained, but lit. in orig: And then, when the head falls toward the camera, I would like to say she's getting her own Oops!*

14       *Redundant in orig.: with with with with the sound of fifty cannon*