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Classifying Gilbert and Sullivan

Joshua D. Rutsky

Honors Thesis

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The musical comedienne Anna Russell once said that it seemed to her that everywhere she was traveling, there was always someone in the process of staging a Gilbert and Sullivan opera. While she was joking, her claim is not that far from the truth. Until the D'Oyly Carte Company ceased its operation in February 1982, due to termination of its government funding, a professional company devoted solely to producing these shows existed in England. In the United States, amateur Gilbert and Sullivan societies abound; even at Oberlin College, Gilbert and Sullivan operas have been presented nearly every year for a century. Despite this persistence, however, these operas are often brushed aside as unworthy of serious attention.

I do not believe that these operas should be so easily dismissed. Consider that Gilbert and Sullivan's works have remained popular for over a century now. Which of their contemporaries can make that claim? Few persons outside the academic community could name another opera produced in England at the turn of the 19th Century. Why have Gilbert and Sullivan operas remained popular, when works of their contemporaries receive only sporadic attention at best?

Although I hope to answer that question in this paper, it needs to be put aside, at least for the moment. In order to explain the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan, it is necessary to examine the literary form which Gilbert uses in his librettos. Gilbert's works have been characterized as satire, burlesque, parody, and farce by various scholars; I maintain that the form of the operas plays a significant role in their popularity. Hence, clearly identifying the form Gilbert uses is crucial to my analysis.

Once I have established the form Gilbert's libretti take, I will proceed with a close analysis of a single opera, *Princess Ida*, and its sources. Analyzing a single work will highlight Gilbert's particular style as an author,

and will thus allow us to consider what sets his works apart from other works within the same form. *Princess Ida* gives us an excellent opportunity to examine Gilbert's process of composition; by comparing the completed opera to both the original source of the story, Tennyson's poem *The Princess*, and the intermediate stage of Gilbert's work, a play called *The Princess* which parodies the Tennyson poem, we can see where Gilbert's efforts were directed.

Once I have located Gilbert and Sullivan within a form and provided examples of Gilbert's technique and intentions, I will return to the question of the popularity of the operas. In the concluding section of this paper, I will argue that Gilbert and Sullivan's success springs from Gilbert's ability to avoid anchoring his work completely in his own time, as well as his choice of themes. A comparison of the successful Gilbert and Sullivan operas to those works by the two which have not enjoyed frequent revivals will help demonstrate this point.

I.

One of the problems facing anyone trying to label a text as an example of a particular form is coming up with a clear definition of that form. Almost every source one turns to for a definition has different standards by which it judges the form of a work. This poses the obvious problem of selecting a particular definition over others; there is no guarantee that the definition one chooses will be acceptable to every critical reader. How, then, can one approach the problem of classifying Gilbert and Sullivan operas?

Perhaps it would be wise to take a step backwards first, and define what I mean when I use the term "form." First, a form is a particular style of writing for which a body of texts exists written in that style. Those works are

unified by a set of characteristics or conventions that define the form. For example, Harlequin Romances all operate under the same plot formula and use similar language. Taken as a group, they constitute a form.

Second, a form name is the lowest label which can be applied to a text that encompasses the entire text. By this I mean that a form is a label that represents a single set of characteristics; thus, poetry is not a form because the body of texts which make up poetry contain many different characteristics, and those texts cannot be represented by any but the sketchiest unifying characteristics. Poetry is simply too broad a term to be a form.

Forms, under my definition, are thus narrower categories that are subsets of broader categories such as poetry or drama. In this manner, a miracle play is a specific form of drama; a haiku is a specific form of poetry. It should be noted, however, that there is no reason why a single work cannot fit more than one form, if the forms overlap sufficiently. Considering the ambiguities in the current definitions of forms, such an occurrence would not be particularly surprising. Nevertheless, it is much more common for a work to fit a particular form, but have several characteristics of another form. Leon Guilhamet calls such partial matches to a form modes.[1] A work such as Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure*, then, might be considered a comedy, but contain scenes which are written in the tragic mode. The various modes contained in the work create the classification difficulties which result in the label "problem play."

With these definitions in mind, let us turn to the question of how to categorize Gilbert and Sullivan's works. In my early research, I ran across several possible classifications, including satire, burlesque, parody, and farce.

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[1] Leon Guilhamet, Satire and the Transformation of Genre, p. 7-13

Each term has merit, and can be used, at least to some extent, to describe these operas. Nevertheless, I believe that of the terms, farce is the best choice to describe the form Gilbert uses in his libretti.

Satire was defined by Francesco Sansovino in 1560 as a form dealing with a low subject matter (as opposed to magnificent or high), humble persons such as sinners or servants, and the use of direct imitation of a form.[2] This early definition is not one we would agree with now, but indicates that satire as a form has changed over the years. Perhaps this accounts for much of the variation in the definitions of forms; it seems fair to say that as authors experiment within a form, the boundaries that define that form are slowly altered.

Satire's definition has altered substantially from Sansovino's conception. Guilhamet, in his book *Satire and the Transformation of Genre*, classifies satire according to several characteristics. First, he delineates several subcategories of satire. There are two historical subcategories of satire according to Guilhamet: Formal verse satire, which is composed of "verse dialogue between a satirist speaker and an *adversarius*,"[3] who impels the satirist to his attack on vice,[4] derives primarily from the works of Horace and Juvenal, while Menippean satire, a mixture of prose and verse, is the namesake of its reputed founder, Menippus. Formal verse satire is markedly rigid in form, focusing on a single vice which becomes the target of the satire's rhetoric. Such satire also provides a virtue to counter the vice. Menippean satire, on the other hand, is much less well defined, with the mixture of styles such as prose and verse apparently being the major

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[2]Ibid, p. 2-3
[3]Ibid, p. 4
[4]Beckson, Karl and Arthur Ganz, Literary Terms: A dictionary, p. 223

characteristic.[5] Within both forms, there is "a considerable range of tone from restrained mockery to violent denunciation."[6]

The modern version of satire, however, is less focused on these divisions, according to Guilhamet. The satiric form, he says, presents the ridiculous to the reader for evaluation. The difference between the satiric view of the ridiculous and other forms using the ridiculous is in the audience's perception of the presented materials:

> If comedy presents its ridiculous objects as things of no importance, the harmlessly ugly or base, satire interprets the ridiculous as harmful or destructive, at least potentially. This harm may come to others, or even to the object of the satire himself.[7]

In other words, the object of the satire is not just a fool—he or she is a dangerous fool. Unlike the comic fool, whose actions tend to cause trouble, but who is never perceived as a threat to the "good" characters in the work, the satiric fool is likely to bring suffering to everyone near him, possibly even to the audience.

Because of the potential for destruction inherent in the satiric object, there is an ethical element of satire which cannot be avoided. The object of the satire, by his or her destructive potential, is "implicated in some evil"[8], and thus becomes the subject of an ethical judgment by the reader or viewer. From this perspective, satire becomes a far more weighty form than is implied by its presentation. For instance, Fielding's *Shamela* is, on first reading, an extremely funny satire of the morals espoused in Richardson's *Pamela*. After the laughter subsides, however, the reader is left with some serious implications to consider; Fielding's text unflinchingly outlines the

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[5]Ibid, p. 5-7
[6]Beckson and Ganz, p. 223
[7]Guilhamet, p. 7
[8]Ibid

realities of class divisions in 18th century England, and suggests that the virtuous are few and far-between.

Beckson and Ganz do not explicitly state that satire makes an ethical judgment, but their definition of satire does not preclude that condition as a distinguishing characteristic. In fact, the examples which they give to support their definition are excellent examples of the role of ethics in defining satire. Beckson and Ganz define satire as "the ridicule of any subject...to lower it in the reader's esteem and make it laughable."[9] They agree that satire can appear in a work without the work being primarily satiric: "It is the treatment and attitude rather than the subject matter that mark the presence of satire."[10] As an example, Beckson and Ganz point to the difference between the character Corbaccio in Ben Jonson's *Volpone*, who "fiercely ridicules the greed and vanity" of a foolish old man, and Falstaff, who "fat and old, exclaims...'They hate us youth.'"[11] The ethical difference between the objects of the satire is clear from the description alone; the old man is vain and greedy, vices which can affect other people in their pursuit, while Falstaff's foolishness is self-destructive only.

Satire, then, I define as a form which consists of an attack on some person, institution, or vice intended to ridicule that object. The object of the satire is portrayed as dangerous or destructive to anything associated with him/her/it. Finally, there is an ethical component to satire; this component can be implied or stated outright. It should also be noted that satire does not have to appear as the form of a text, but can also appear as a mode within another text. Perhaps it is the appearance of the satiric mode in texts which leads to some of the confusion between parody and satire. Indeed, much of

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[9]Beckson and Ganz, p. 222
[10]Ibid, p. 223
[11]Ibid

the confusion may be due to the frequent appearance of modal parody within satire, a relationship I will address momentarily. A definition of parody, however, is first required.

Parody, although often found with satire, is a very different literary concept. Beckson and Ganz define parody as a style which "ridicules a serious literary work or the characteristic style of an author by treating the subject matter flippantly or by applying the style to an inappropriate, usually trivial, subject."[12] Barnet, Berman, and Burto agree to some extent with this definition, but note that parody "need not make us devalue the original [text]."[13] This general definition of parody is reiterated by George Kitchin in *A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English.* Kitchin calls specific attention to the necessity of a sense of "ridicule or at least sportiveness" in the modern definition of parody, although he acknowledges that some examples of parody from early English literature do not meet this definition.[14]

Guilhamet argues that parody is more a mode than a form. He claims that parody is an important tool by which satire is achieved in a text. Nevertheless, he too distinguishes parody from satire, saying, "The method of imitating another form in satire is parody. Parody itself, though, does not constitute satire."[15] Guilhamet identifies several characteristics associated with parody, including an inconsistent or unreliable narrator, illogical shifts in intention or design, introduction of a variety of literary or rhetorical structures, and extreme hyperbole.[16]

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[12]Ibid, p. 28
[13]Barnet, Sylvan, Morton Berman, and William Burto, A Dictionary of Literary, Dramatic, and Cinematic Terms, p.13
[14]Kitchin, George, A Survey of Burlesque and Parody in English, p. xx-xxii
[15]Guilhamet, p. 14
[16]Ibid

The definitions of parody are more uniform than those of satire, but this is to be expected. Parody is primarily modal; it is rare to find a text which can be described primarily as a parody. A mode has a narrower definition than a form, and therefore there should be less room for dissension. Despite its relatively narrow definition, however, parody is a sketchy enough term to have at least one other term, burlesque, regularly substituted for it in dictionaries of literary terms.

Indeed, in my research I have used three such dictionaries, and all three of them have the same entry for parody—"see burlesque."[17] The line of distinction between the two is a narrow one. Abrams claims that burlesque is best considered the generic name for a style which ridicules some object, be it person, action, or text, "by an incongruous imitation," and that terms such as parody are best used to describe specific types of burlesque. Abrams identifies parody as requiring a text as its subject.[18]

Beckson and Ganz agree with Abrams' definition of burlesque, but extend the definition of parody somewhat. Rather than requiring a specific text as subject, they accept ridicule of an author's "characteristic style" as equally valid. They also clarify the somewhat hazy notion of incongruous imitation—using the author's style while "treating the subject matter flippantly or...applying the style to an inappropriate, usually trivial, subject."[19] Barnet and her colleagues give a similar definition of both parody and burlesque, but add that "in distinction from satire it [burlesque] can be defined as a comic imitation of a mannerism or a minor fault (either in style

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[17]Barnet et al, p. 80, Beckson and Ganz, p. 176, M.H. Abrams, <u>A Glossary of Literary Terms</u>, p. 63
[18]Abrams, p. 9-10
[19]Beckson and Ganz, p. 27-28

or subject matter), contrived to arouse amusement rather than contempt and/or indignation."[20]

The only person whose definitions of parody and burlesque do not mesh with the remainder of the group is George Kitchin. Kitchin defines parody as a term restricted to "direct imitations of an individual work with humorous or critical intention." This is a narrow definition, but not far at all from Abrams'. On burlesque, however, Kitchin strikes out on his own: "Burlesque then is the wider species in which an author's work generally or that of the school to which he may be attached is imitated with comic intention."[21] Perhaps Kitchin's definition is so author-specific, rather than including actions, because he presents it in the context of a study of literary burlesque and parody.

Given the general conformity, however, of these definitions, it seems reasonable to accept them as legitimate. Burlesque, then, is the ridicule of some person, action, or text, accomplished through the application of a style incongruously or in a flippant manner. Parody is a specific form of burlesque, using either a particular text, an author, or an author's characteristic style as its subject. With these terms defined, there remains only one term to examine—farce.

Farce is defined by Beckman and Ganz as "any play which evokes laughter by such devices of low comedy as physical buffoonery, rough wit, or the creation of ridiculous situations, and which is little concerned with the subtlety of characterization or probability of plot."[22] The characters of farce are often considered "one-dimensional,"[23] a fact I consider particularly

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[20] Barnet et al, p. 13
[21] Kitchin, p. xxii
[22] Beckman and Ganz, p. 79
[23] Abrams, p. 14

important when combined with the theories Eric Bentley sets forth in his essay "Farce."

According to Bentley, farce embodies the innermost wishes of the viewer, "wishes to damage the family, to desecrate the household gods." Farce achieves this desecration of household gods primarily through ridiculous situations, but violence often plays a large part as well. "If farces are examined," says Bentley, "they will be found to contain very little 'harmless' joking...Without aggression farce cannot function."[24] Farce also, however, achieves success (in Bentley's view) by playing out the inner desires of the viewer on stage, permitting the viewer to enjoy from the safety of an anonymous audience those desires we would have to condemn in the everyday world. The viewer is freed of any sense of responsibility or guilt for the desecrations.

It is at this point where the importance of one dimensional characters becomes evident. These characters play a large part in the freedom the viewer feels from responsibility for the desecrations s/he witnesses; while the audience might be squeamish about violence towards, or cuckolding of, a realistic character (one with a developed, multidimensional personality), it is more likely to accept such violence or cuckolding happening to a one-dimensional character. Such characters, being less "real", produce less guilt when one enjoys their woes, just as we laugh without guilt at one clown bashing another clown with a club at the circus. The ridiculous nature of the situation plays a similar role in suspending guilt; since the audience "knows" that the events on stage wouldn't (or perhaps even couldn't) "really happen," they are willing to accept them as fantasy and therefore harmless.

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[24]Ibid, p. 203

Bentley makes two other key points regarding farce. First, farce uses coincidence shamelessly. Chains of impossible coincidences are accepted by the audience of a farce as part of the form—Bentley puts it less politely when he says that "people have such a low opinion of farce that they don't mind admitting it uses such a low device."[25] The existence of these coincidence chains is not pointless, however; aside from providing an author a plot device, the chains give the audience a sense that when fate is helping so amiably, the happy outcome must be inevitable. The audience can thus relax and enjoy the struggle.

Finally, Bentley notes that in farce the characters are played "straight" by the actors; the delivery of the lines is performed seriously, and the words and plot are relied upon to amplify the humorous effect. This contrast of surface gravity and sub-level gaiety is only one of the contrasts which make up farce. "Farce characteristically promotes and exploits the widest possible contrasts between tone and content, surface and substance..."[26]

In a related essay, John Dennis Hurrell extends Bentley's definition of farce in some important dimensions. Farce, according to Hurrell, "ignores both the moral and social laws, not because it denies their existence, but because it sees an alternative to this constant reference to laws..."—a clear contrast to the ethical concerns of satire. The characters in farce use ingenuity to solve their problems; unlike their counterparts in tragedy or comedy, farce characters are not concerned with the morality of their position, but rather with escaping from or concealing their position and returning life to 'normal.' "One sentence might sum up the action of any

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[25]Ibid, p. 205
[26]Ibid, p. 204

successful farce: a situation or relationship gets out of hand and somehow, inefficiently perhaps but eventually successfully, it is put right."[27]

Hurrell also points out that farce very rarely presents the impossible or fantastic. It is the improbable that makes up most farce; not improbable situations, but rather "...the fact that those situation are carried to their logical conclusions. Taken this far, they are, in terms of everyday life, absurd." By this Hurrell means that a character or characters become committed to a single solution to a problem, to the extent that they will follow this 'practical' solution or 'reasonable' behavior long after it is either practical or reasonable.[28]

Bentley takes a similar position to Hurrell; he believes that farce unifies a directness of action and characters with everyday appearance acting within the everyday world. In his view, farce "does not present the empurpled and enlarged images of melodrama."[29] This appears to be a contradiction of the idea of one-dimensional characters, but can be resolved by examining the next line of the essay. "No," says Bentley, "farce can use the ordinary unenlarged environment and ordinary down-at-heel men of the street."[30] I read Bentley here as saying that farce is not limited to the realm of one-dimensional characters, but I do not believe he is actively excluding them, especially in light of his use of Charlie Chaplin's Tramp as a frequent example. While I do not consider the Tramp a one-dimensional figure, he is certainly not an average man on the street, and is very much the buffoon.

To sum up, farce can be described as a form in which the ridiculous is often used as a platform to attack so-called sacred institutions such as

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[27]John Dennis Hurrell, "A Note on Farce", in Comedy, Meaning and Form by Robert W. Corrigan, p. 213
[28]Ibid, p. 215
[29]Bentley, p. 203
[30]Ibid, emphasis mine.

marriage, the family, and authority structures. In carrying out these attacks it often satisfies the repressed desires of the audience, desires which could not otherwise be gratified without significant guilt. Unlike satire, farce is not tied to ethics in any serious manner; the characters are less concerned with finding the ethical solution than with finding the quickest way to return life to 'normal.' The lack of ethics also allows such normally restricted activities as violence or adultery to occur without requiring the condemnation of the audience. Finally, farces consist of characters played seriously, but using words or acting plots which create the humor of the production. The characters are one-dimensional, and while they behave in what they perceive to be a rational manner, their persistence in following a certain course of action, or using a particular method to try to reach a goal, produces an effect of absurdity.

Having now defined satire, burlesque, parody, and farce, I can at last attempt to place Gilbert and Sullivan's works in one of these categories. I believe that the best approach to this problem is to consider each form in turn, and its applicability to the operas. It would be reasonable to place the operas in the category which produces the closest match.

The easiest term to eliminate from the running is parody. There is no question that Gilbert uses parody in his opera *Princess Ida*, as I will demonstrate a little later. Nevertheless, one cannot consider Gilbert and Sullivan parody for the simple reason that parody is a mode, not a form. While parody does occur within the Savoy operas, it acts as a device which helps define a form, not as a form itself. Nor does it occur frequently enough to be considered as a primary identifying characteristic of the operas, even if it were a form. Gilbert seldom draws more than a line from an external text

not his own; *Princess Ida* and *Patience* are, in this regard, exceptions to the rule.

For similar reasons, I must reject satire as the form best matching Gilbert and Sullivan. While there is satire in some of the operas, Gilbert's work lacks several of the key identifying characteristics of the form. First, satire requires the identification of a specific object of satire. In this regard, there are no problems; Gilbert targets in his various operas such diverse subjects as aestheticism, republicanism, women's education and equality, and social class. That object, however, must be portrayed as dangerous in some way to the world, and an ethical judgment must be passed upon it. This requirement is rarely met in Gilbert's work. Although Beckson and Ganz claim *Patience* is a satire of aestheticism,[31] at no time does Gilbert give the viewer any sense that aestheticism is dangerous. Foolish, yes; dangerous, certainly not. Society, in Gilbert's view, will not fall as a result of the aesthetic movement, but a lot of people will make themselves look very silly, and Gilbert, while he has no qualms about poking fun at those caught up in that turn of fashion, is not making an ethical judgment regarding the movement or those who participate.

The same argument holds true for many of the other Savoy operas, such as *The Pirates of Penzance, Utopia Limited,* and *Ruddigore.* The serious issue which satire requires is simply absent. What could Gilbert be satirizing in *Pirates* ? The idea of apprenticeships? Honor and duty? Of course not. *Pirates* is no satire; it has no axe to grind. Satire, then, while occasionally present in modal form within Gilbert's works, fails to match up well as the form of the Savoy operas.

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[31] Beckson and Ganz, p. 28

This leaves two options to consider, burlesque and farce. Here the question becomes much more difficult. There is a great deal of burlesque in Gilbert and Sullivan; almost every opera is intended to ridicule or poke fun at some part of English society. *Patience*, as earlier pointed out, is not a satire; instead, the presence of ridicule without ethical judgment or weighty subject indicates burlesque. *Princess Ida* is a burlesque for similar reasons; while there is ridicule of the opera's topic, it is very mild ridicule, and there is no danger inherent in the topic.

Yet burlesque falls short of covering all the operas. Again, consider *The Pirates of Penzance*. There is no real topic in *Pirates* ; although several elements of the opera, such as the police and the pirates, are comic, inept versions of their real-world counterparts, the sum of these elements yields no single theme. The same problem appears in *The Sorcerer* ; without a topic for ridicule, the burlesque form is not possible.

Farce, on the other hand, requires no topic. As a form, farce often involves the "desecration of household gods," one-dimensional characters, wild coincidences, and inefficient and logically perverse solutions to problems facing characters, with the solvers more interested in resolving the problem than in the ethics involved. All of these points match up extremely well with Gilbert and Sullivan's works. *H.M.S. Pinafore* makes fun of the pride of England, the Queen's Navy. Love and marriage, two sacred institutions, are the targets of *Patience*'s barbs. The parliament is lampooned in *Iolanthe*. The "desecration of household gods" aspect of farce is a Gilbert specialty.

There is little question that Gilbert's characters are, on the whole, one-dimensional. I explore this in more depth a bit later; a few examples, however, should suffice to make this point. Consider the "Rapturous Maidens" and "Heavy Dragoons" of *Patience* —both groups are based on

single principles. The maidens are always in love with whoever is in fashion at the moment; the soldiers are always in love with the maidens. The three soldier brothers in *Princess Ida* also possess one dimension only—they are concerned solely with the opportunity to fight, and nothing else has meaning to them. A last example might be the "Chorus of Professional Bridesmaids" from *Ruddigore*, whose only purpose is to ask if Rose Maybud is getting married. It doesn't make a difference to them who she marries; during the finale of Act One, in which she pledges herself to three different men, the chorus sings with equal enthusiasm for each match.

Wild coincidences are commonplace in the Savoy operas. Consider *Princess Ida*, in which the entry of Prince Hilarion's party to Ida's women's college is made possible by the fortunate discovery of a pile of academic robes left lying on the ground just inside the walls. If one such coincidence isn't enough, try a second: the first person they meet within the women's college happens to be the sister of one of the companions, who had no notion of her presence there. Another excellent example of coincidence is the resolution of *Pirates* , where the captured pirate band can be forgiven and permitted to marry the Major-General's wards because Ruth reveals that they "are all noblemen who have gone wrong."[32]

Logical points taken to extremes are also typical in Gilbert and Sullivan. In *Pirates*, Frederick is forced to desert his love Mabel and fight with the pirates again when the Pirate King and Ruth point out that the terms of his indenture require him to serve until his twenty-first birthday. Since he was born on a February 29th, a date occurring once every four years, he has only reached age five and a quarter, and has over fifteen years of indenture remaining. Similar perversions of logic are used to resolve

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[32]*Pirates of Penzance,* Act II, line 583

Ruddigore, where each Lord of Ruddigore must commit one evil deed a day or die in agony. The solution is a typically Gilbertian proof: To refuse to commit the evil deed, knowing it means certain death, is suicide. Suicide is a crime, and hence an evil deed. Thus, by refusing to commit an evil deed, the Lord meets his requirement. This logic is stretched even further by Gilbert; if the refusal to commit a crime meets the requirements the Lord lives by, all of the ancestors of the current Lord, who each died after eventually deciding they could sin no more, must therefore be alive, since they never really broke the rules. This sort of logical leap is an excellent example of the logical perversion Hurrell attributes to farce.

It seems clear to me that Gilbert and Sullivan's operas fit extremely well into the category of farce. I also believe that many of them can be categorized as burlesques, enough to make such a categorization a valid one. Either of the two forms can be said to represent the operas; both have advantages and disadvantages in describing individual operas, but together they appear to span all fourteen. If this classification is accepted, then, the next step to understanding Gilbert and Sullivan's enduring popularity is to examine a particular opera closely, observing where Gilbert's efforts are directed and to what purpose. Hopefully, this analysis will permit us to draw some conclusions regarding the operas and their continued success.

II.

With these basic definitions now in mind, we can examine a particular work of Gilbert and Sullivan's, *Princess Ida*. In this section I hope to analyze Gilbert's use of burlesque in this opera; specifically, the wide range of parody that the collaborators introduced into their work, and the effects of that parody on the classification of the work's form. This analysis will create the

basis of the final section of this thesis, in which I will draw some conclusions about the purpose of Gilbert's style and the effects that result.

Princess Ida is a particularly interesting work to consider because it is the only work of Gilbert and Sullivan's which is an acknowledged parody of an existing text. Prior to Gilbert's efforts with Sullivan, the aspiring writer published *The Princess* in 1870, subtitled "A Whimsical Allegory (Being a Respectful Perversion of Mr. Tennyson's Poem.)"[33] Gilbert had decided to test his skills with blank verse, and chose the Tennyson text as his source. He called his work "A picturesque story told in a strain of mock/heroic seriousness."[34]

The Princess was primarily a play, but contained several songs which give a glimpse of Gilbert's future mastery. While his creative ability was somewhat hampered by the need to match his lyrics to already existing popular tunes, much in the style of Gay's *Beggar's Opera*, his work was still impressive. Gilbert was later to return to this work, and convert it to *Princess Ida,* the comic opera which met with limited success.

Princess Ida has not been frequently produced in recent years. It is widely considered to be Gilbert's most overtly misogynist work; the 1991 Oberlin College production required a great deal of cuts to make the show "acceptable" for presentation to the college community. Although best known for that misogyny, *Princess Ida* also provides a unique opportunity to examine Gilbert's work in a developmental stage. Examining the parody in the work in its original form and in its final version reveals a great deal about the author's intent, as well as where he felt focus was most needed. *Ida* also

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33From the title page of the Samuel French, Ltd. Acting Edition, which has no date, but the cost of the script is listed as 15 cents, with a performance royalty of 63s. per show.
34Leslie Baily, Gilbert and Sullivan, Their Lives and Times, p. 33

has the additional benefit of containing several different forms of parody, including political and social, as well as literary. While the question of Gilbert's misogyny and its role in his work is certainly one worth considering, extensive work has already been done in that area. I will thus leave such discussions to those who have investigated them more thoroughly. That being said, it is with political and social parody that I will begin this analysis.

While the military and its position and status also produced many questions about social status in the 19th century, England's armed forces were the source of its political prestige. The British Navy, so ably parodied in *Pinafore*, was still extremely powerful, and England still ruled colonies across the globe. To question the ability of England's military, however insincerely, was to enter the political arena. This truth of this danger was underlined by the first reaction to *H.M.S. Pinafore*, which was notably cool, primarily because Gilbert "actually dared to poke fun at class distinction in the Senior Service"[35] in the form of Sir Joseph Porter. Despite a letter from Gilbert that stated "of course there will be no personality in this - the fact that the First Lord in the opera is a radical of the most pronounced type will do away with any suspicion that W.H. Smith is intended,"[36] that First Lord was subjected to the joke ceaselessly. Disraeli, says Baily, even referred to him as "*Pinafore* Smith."[37]

The military was a regular target of Gilbert's pen; *Ida* was no exception to this rule. The three sons of King Gama—Arac, Guron, and Scynthius—are professional soldiers. In the original poem, these soldiers appear first in Part V, when the Prince's father (unnamed in the Tennyson) is considering going to war with Gama over Ida's refusal to yield to the

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[35]Baily, p. 32
[36]Gilbert quoted in Baily, p.52
[37]Ibid

marriage contract. Arac has a twenty-one line speech in which he speaks of how he has sworn to take her side in the argument, "right or wrong, I care not" (Part V, line 280). The "genial giant," as he is described (line 264), is more concerned with keeping his vow than with the circumstances, reflecting the military's "death before dishonor" ideals.

This military single-mindedness is parodied in *The Princess* as Gilbert portrays the three soldiers as more interested in the battle than in the outcome. Arac, far from the almost likable lout that appeared in Tennyson, is now so anxious for the fight that when Prince Hilarion asks if Ida will permit the outcome of a battle between the three brothers and Hilarion and company to determine her fate, he replies: "There's my hand; If she consents not—sister though she be/We'll raze her castle to the very ground!" The change is one which moves Arac along the continuum of what would be considered by the average viewer as normal behavior for his character, bringing him closer to a single-trait caricature. This transformation from rounded to one-dimensional character is a certain sign of parody.

Gilbert continued that transformation, to excellent effect, in *Princess Ida*. In the opera Arac becomes even more bloodthirsty and even less intelligent than he was in Gilbert's play, and his lines have been cut back to a single one—his challenge to the trio of heroes. Gilbert did, however, add a song ("We are Warriors Three") which introduces the soldiers; it continues the movement away from a fully-rounded character which the author had begun in *The Princess*. After first indicating the brothers are near-mindless with the verse "Politics we bar/They are not our bent/On the whole we are/Not intelligent/No, no, no/Not intelligent," he leaves no doubt as to the mercenary nature of the trio:

Bold and fierce and strong, ha! ha!

For a war we burn,
With its right or wrong, ha! ha!
We have no concern.
Order comes to fight, ha! ha!
Order is obeyed,[38]
We are men of might, ha! ha!
Fighting is our trade,
Yes, yes, yes,
Fighting is our trade, ha! ha![39]

Gilbert even limits his wide vocabulary to produce a near completely monosyllabic song which further underscores the soldiers' role as brainless brawn.

I do not argue that Arac and his brothers represent a direct parody of the British military. Gilbert had just finished mocking the Navy in *H.M.S. Pinafore*, the Army in *Patience*, and, of course, the Police in *Pirates of Penzance* ; there was little military left in England which he could poke fun at without repeating himself. More significantly, *Ida*'s setting is left highly ambiguous, with no hints or clear indications of the period or location until the very end of the opera, when the chorus sings, "Oh, doughty sons of Hungary" in reference to the brothers.[40] The Romanesque names of the brothers would seem to indicate a more general parody of the military mind at work, but this should not be seen as lessening the impact such a portrayal might have had on a British public which was extremely proud of their soldiers. It is not the subject of the parody that is important in this case, but rather the effect, and it is a strong one. Gilbert was constrained by

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[38]An interesting story regarding this particular song appears in Ian Bradley's Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan. Apparently the words "Order comes to fight, ha! ha!/Order is obeyed," were the last words heard on the BBC radio service just prior to Neville Chamberlin's speech informing the public that Britain had declared war on Germany.

[39]*Princess Ida*, Act I, lines 188-197

[40]*Princess Ida*, Act III, line 335. Bradley quotes one reviewer regarding this sudden odd revelation who expresses deep regret that so great a librettist must resort to such a tactic to produce a rhyme for "ironmongery." (p. 304)

Tennyson's original text to have a battle at this point, but he turns this constraint to his advantage. In Tennyson's poem, Hilarion and company are defeated, as is logical when courtiers are facing professional soldiers in combat. Gilbert, however, applies his sense of the topsy-turvey by allowing the Prince and his companions to defeat Arac and company.

The unshakable faith of Gama in his sons, and their ultimate defeat, may very plausibly be seen as Gilbert's warning to the populace that the British military, however potent, is not infallible (as perhaps it believed, considering the extent of its conquests.) In any case, Gilbert's treatment of Arac, Guron, and Scynthius serves two purposes. First, the use of scenes such as the battle between Hilarion's company and the brothers represent literary parody; Gilbert imitates an existing text, but perverts it into a humorous, illogical version of the original. Second, and more importantly, however, Gilbert's transformation of Tennyson's three-dimensional characters into one-dimensional caricatures is performed with emphasis on humor, not ethics. The brothers are bloodthirsty, dense, and violent, but never made truly threatening, characteristics which fit well within the definition of farce.

More prominent in *Ida*, however, are Gilbert's parodies of Victorian society. Social parody makes up the majority of Gilbert's work, and this opera is no exception to that rule of content. *Ida*'s plot turns on the issue of women's education, as does the Tennyson. The poet's Princess believes that the only way for women to achieve equality is through education and thus sets out to create a place where education is paramount.

Tennyson takes the position that "Men and women are not alike in endowment or function,"[41] and that the Princess's plan is doomed from the

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[41]Franklin T. Baker, Introduction to Tennyson's The *Princess*, p. xxii

start. While he portrays her philosophy and aims as ill thought-out, the poet clearly presents the Princess herself as a character of much dignity and virtue. At the poem's conclusion, the Princess, having tended the wounded Prince at length, admits her mistake and gladly gives herself to him, thus restoring the natural order of things.

Gilbert's *Princess* takes Tennyson's vision of the Princess and alters it considerably. Rather than a dignified woman with a reasonable goal, Gilbert's Princess Ida is portrayed as an eccentric zealot whose intelligence is somewhat in question. Her address to the new students of the college, added by Gilbert, is a masterwork of choplogic and perversion. Ida points out that women outstrip men in mathematics, since men still believe that two and two are four. Women, however, can show "that two and two make five—/Or three—or...five-and-twenty, as the case demands!" Even on the subject of logic (Gilbert here twists the knife a bit), Ida asserts that "tyrant man himself admits/Its a waste of time to argue with a woman!"[42] Ida is obviously not meant to be taken seriously as a scholar.

Ida's character, like Arac's, also undergoes further transformation from Gilbert's *Princess* to *Princess Ida,* additions primarily in the form of music which enhance the effectiveness of Gilbert's parody. Prior to her address to the undergraduates, which appears with only a single alteration from Gilbert's play,[43] the chorus of students sings in praise of Ida:

> Mighty maiden with a mission,
> Paragon of common sense,
> Running fount of erudition,
> Miracle of eloquence,
> We are blind, and we would see;

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[42]Gilbert's *The Princess,* p. 22 [Scene 3]
[43]The number of students at the University has dropped from 500 to 100 in the Opera; the line in Ida's speech was changed to match the change earlier when Gama informs Hildebrand and his company that Ida is now in a country house with "Full one hundred girls".

We are bound, and would be free;
We are dumb, and we would talk;
We are lame, and we would walk.[44]

Ida's oration, following on the heels of such an address, appears all the more comic for its nonsensical nature. The absence of common sense is underscored by the reference to it. Similarly, at the close of the opera, when Ida's brothers have been defeated by Hilarion and his friends, the Prince points out to the despondent Ida that if she had succeeded in her aim to "make them [women] all abjure tyrannic Man," there would be no future children to applaud her choice. Ida's response, "I never thought of that!" unquestionably makes her look foolish, even childish; this character is a far cry from Tennyson's Princess, who falls in love with the Prince after nursing him back to health.

This change in Ida is accompanied by a similar change in her charges. The students in Tennyson's poem are serious about their studies; after visiting their classes, the Prince tells his friends, "Why, Sirs, they do all this as well as we."[45] Just as he parodies the Princess with Princess Ida, however, Gilbert parodies the serious women of Tennyson's poem with his version of the students. These students are first encountered in Scene Three, which opens with several of the women discussing the new robe for the doctors of divinity. One disappointed student complains, "It's much more lovely than the legal gown—/Green grenadine, with rûchings down the front,/That we shall wear." Her companion replies (pouting, according to the stage direction), "I shall give up the law/And go into the church! I've always felt/A serious longing for a pastor's life;/Besides, I'm dark, and look a fright in green!" The portrayal of the 'serious' students of Ida's academy as less

[44] *Princess Ida,* Act II, lines 66-73
[45] Tennyson, p.35 (Part II, Line 367)

concerned with their future occupation than with their garments is the capstone of Gilbert's "respectable perversion."

Gilbert's original parody was more timely than his opera in regard to women's education; by the time *Princess Ida* was produced in 1883, several women's colleges were in existence. Nevertheless, the establishment of those schools was a recent event, and was not as yet indicative of a widespread acceptance of the women's education movement of the time. *Ida* contains modifications that once again further the parody begun in the first play. For example, the students have far less dialogue, but they maintain their questionably academic appearance. When asked what the students should read to learn their Classics, Lady Psyche replies with an impressive list: Anacreon, Ovid, Aristophanes, and Juvenal. Of course, there is a caveat— "But, if you will be advised,/You will get them Bowlderized!"[46] Not only are the students deprived of the opportunity to study uncut works, the authors recommended by Psyche all wrote obscene or erotic texts. Gilbert here uses parody to "dig at classical education and the difficulty of extending it to the fairer sex."[47]

Ida's educational aspirations, however, are only part of a larger theme at work in *Princess Ida* and its parent play, a theme which is far less evident in Tennyson's poem. The theme of sexual roles and equality plays a significant part in the humor of Gilbert's two works. Tennyson's poem does encompass the subject of equality for women, but it concentrates on the academic setting; hence, his version of the story loses much of the luster and energy that the broader theme contains—an observation which I will return to later.

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[46] *Princess Ida*, Act II, lines 12-21
[47] Bradley, p. 238

Gilbert's version of *The Princess* , however, as a parody, depends on inflating the various conflicts between the Prince and his allies and Ida and her supporters, including the conflict between the sexes. Tennyson's poem is light in tone, but earnest; the transformation of that earnest tone into a farce is accomplished by the inflation of both the characters and the conflict into overblown caricatures. As I pointed out earlier, the soldiers, Ida, and her students all undergo that transformation. The issue on which the sides disagree is also inflated by Gilbert. Where the Prince and his companions had previously entered the college by application to a "buxom hostess,"[48] they now are admitted by a dirty, rumpled porter named Gobbo who is paraded in front of the students once a year "that they may see/What sort of thing's a man."[49] Nor does Gilbert offer much to contradict this image of men; Gama is described as a twisted creature who is proud only of his sons, and his sons are more interested in war than women. Hildebrand is not much better; he warns Hilarion that although Ida may speak in a hundred tongues, he will find "one, of average length, enough."[50] Cyril and Florian, though friends of the 'hero,' also dismiss women as mere sex objects. Only Prince Hilarion seems to have any respect for Ida's goals, and even that seems condescending. His final speech includes the rather brutal assessment, "Madam, you placed your trust in woman—Well,/Woman has failed you utterly—try man."[51] Even Ida herself is no longer questing for equality, as she did in Tennyson's work, but is instead aiming for a complete split from tyrant man. The combination of caricature and values carried to the absurd—that is, farce—acts to convert the serious tone of the subject to comic.

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[48]Tennyson, Part I, line 225
[49]Gilbert, *The Princess*, Scene 2 (pg. 13)
[50]Ibid, Scene 1 (p. 7)
[51]Ibid, Scene 5 (p. 43)

Princess Ida extends this parody still further by pressing the two sides of the gender controversy to even further extremes. Lady Psyche, who appears somewhat eager to re-embrace men in Gilbert's play, sings the two most anti-male songs of the opera. When asked by a student to explain what man is, she replies:

> Man will shout and Man will storm-
> Man is not at all good form-
> Man is of no kind of use-
> Man's a donkey—Man's a goose-
> Man is coarse and Man is plain-
> Man is more or less insane-
> Man's a ribald—Man's a rake-
> Man is nature's sole mistake![52]

Later, after learning the identities of Hilarion and his friends, Psyche sings to them that "Darwinian man, though well-behaved/At best is only a monkey shaved"[53]

These rather strong sentiments are counterbalanced by the cavalier and somewhat vulgar sentiments of Cyril and Florian. Cyril needs little embellishment; he is already treading dangerously close to the line between merely dense and thoroughly obnoxious. Florian, however, like Psyche, becomes more polarized through the addition of a song. His recitative in the trio "Gently, Gently" is one of Gilbert's most lewd:

> A Women's college! maddest folly going!
> What can girls learn within its walls worth knowing?
> I'll lay a crown (the Princess shall decide it)
> I'll teach them twice as much in half-an-hour outside it.[54]

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[52]Bradley, Pg. 241 (Act II, lines 25-32)

[53]Although Bradley gives this line as being "While a man, however well-behaved...", I prefer the version currently printed in the Kalmus vocal scores, as well as most current printed editions. Even so, the jab at Darwin is contained in the refrain which follows in all existing editions. (Act II, lines 464-65)

[54] Bradley, pg. 251 (Act II, lines 219-22)

Though Hilarion quickly admonishes his friends, there is still a vague feeling that he is less than totally sincere in his admiration for the efforts of Ida and her students. Indeed, he participates gleefully in the mocking trio which follows, in which the three don academic roles and ape (!) stereotypical women—that is, the image of women as empty-headed flirts whose sole goal is to capture as many hearts as possible. One might even consider this parody within parody, as the campiness that pervades that trio only serves to reinforce the idea that these men have no respect whatsoever for women, especially those who choose (for some strange reason) to shun their company in favor of education. Gilbert has not only transformed the serious women of Tennyson's poem into mocking caricature, but also transformed the poet's heroic Prince into a chauvinistic, somewhat hypocritical leading character. By attacking both the subject of Tennyson's admonition, the Princess and her philosophy of women's education, and the hero who represents Tennyson's own opinion, the Prince, Gilbert effectively ridicules Tennyson on two fronts. More importantly, by mocking all of Tennyson's characters and refusing to give his audience a character without flaws who they can support unreservedly, Gilbert avoids any semblance of an ethical judgment in his opera. In *Princess Ida,* no one is judged completely right or wrong, and thus his text is extremely effective, as literary parody (and therefore burlesque), as well as farce.

Gilbert's modifications to Tennyson's text are at both stages constructed to produce a farcical effect. The means by which he accomplishes this effect, however, is parody. Gilbert disrupts the idyllic world of Tennyson with brash, bold, noisy characters, and in doing so he naturally amplifies the comic effect of the work. The use of parody also results in the themes of women's education and equality being much more prominent in the story;

Gilbert's wisecracks are far more memorable than the romantic solos he writes for Hilarion. At the same time, the flawed logic that forms Ida's philosophy and the comic violence of the opera, combined with Gilbert's careful avoidance of ethical judgment, clearly delineate the use of farce. *Princess Ida* lacks, however, the "desecration of household gods" which would firmly plant the opera within the realm of farce. Gilbert's attacks on women's education, or more broadly on the issue of equality of the sexes, might be considered prime candidates for such a desecration; neither, however, was a single, uniformly held viewpoint of Gilbert's original audience. If the entire audience doesn't share the god, the effect of its desecration is limited to those who do. The result of this lack of uniform audience viewpoint on these issues is a work which may be classified as a farce for a limited number of viewers. For others, *Princess Ida* must be considered primarily a parody containing farcical elements. This ambiguity is impossible to resolve without generalization; nevertheless, it seems reasonable to say that while the concept of equality between the sexes lacked widespread support in Gilbert's day, it is a far more widely held viewpoint today. In this sense, *Princess Ida* may now be classified as a farce.

III.

We have now examined a particular opera and its development, paying particular attention to the way Gilbert constructs it as farce and parody (and again, more generally, as burlesque). Accepting for the moment, then, the argument presented in section one that the Savoy operas can all be similarly classified, it becomes reasonable to consider the role that this classification plays in the continuing popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan's works. What draws an audience to a production of century-old material, a production

perhaps given by an amateur company such as Oberlin's own, and without the frills traditional to opera?

I believe that Gilbert and Sullivan's popularity comes from several sources. First, the Savoy operas avoid the trap of datedness. This is not to say that they are not decidedly Victorian in nature; Gilbert's libretti capture the spirit of Victorian England extremely well, from the morals and social classes to the military pride and the fashions. Nevertheless, as Arthur Quiller-Couch rightly points out, Gilbert was "extremely wary of topical allusions that might date him,"[55] a wariness which produced the desired result through careful (and often dictatorial) implementation.

Gilbert was always extremely careful to avoid accusations that he was directly satirizing a particular person. He created in *Patience* an opera which attacks a fashion, but despite the popular notion, his rival poets are not by any means clear burlesques of any two particular persons; several essays exist that argue persuasively that Oscar Wilde, traditionally considered the model for Bunthorne, is a far less preferable candidate than Algernon Swinburne, and that William Morris is a better choice than Swinburne for the Grosvenor model.[56] Such debate, however, is (pardon the pun) academic. Whatever intent Gilbert had in creating the rivals, however, was overwhelmed by his stage manager, Richard D'Oyly Carte, who arranged that Wilde "turned up at *Patience* at the Standard Theater, New York" and was "suitably recognized." He managed a similar stunt in England at a performance which also marked the first use of electricity to completely light a public building.[57]

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[55]Arthur Quiller-Couch, "W.S. Gilbert", in W.S. Gilbert: A Century of Scholarship and Commentary, Ed. John Bush Jones, p. 160
[56]See John Bush Jones, "In Search of Archibald Grosvenor: A New Look at Gilbert's *Patience*", in his W.S. Gilbert for a summary of these arguments.
[57]Leslie Baily, Gilbert and Sullivan: Their Lives and Times, p. 71

Even when he could not avoid the accusation of satirization, as in the case of Sir Joseph Porter, Admiral of the Navy in *H.M.S. Pinafore* , Gilbert took care to state for the record he had no such intent.[58] Quiller-Couch in his essay claims that it is obvious that he was poking fun at W.H. Smith,[59] but obvious to whom? To the viewer of the period, perhaps, but not through any direct effort of Gilbert's. Indeed, Gilbert went to great lengths to prevent the actors from deviating from his libretto; according to George Grossmith, the actor who first played many of Gilbert's most popular male roles, he demanded "that his words shall be delivered, even to an inflexion of the voice, as he dictates." It does not seem fanciful to me to accept Quiller-Couch's assertion that Gilbert was well aware of the dangers of dating his material.

Few present viewers, however, would recognize the rival poets as anything but broad caricatures of two schools of poetry, and still fewer would have any reason to think Sir Joseph was modeled on any particular person. This fact is certainly part of the reason for the surviving popularity of the Savoy operas; Gilbert's care in keeping topical allusion from his work makes it possible to enjoy his operas thoroughly without knowledge of the Victorian era. While jokes entirely based on topical allusion might have done well in their first few years, one hundred years later they would be meaningless and empty. Surely, Gilbert's conscious decision to avoid this trap is, as Quiller-Couch suggests, indicative of "one writing for posterity."[60] He had his sights set higher than a brief success and a disappearance into history.

The avoidance of topical allusion can also be used to explain Gilbert's choice of the burlesque and farcical forms over the satiric. Consider the nature of satire—it requires a subject of some sort which it attacks through

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[58]The letter is quoted earlier in Section II of this thesis.
[59]Quiller-Couch, in Jones, p. 161
[60]Ibid

ridicule. The subject of the satire is most often topical by nature, however, and therefore will likely date its subject or limit its audience to some extent. A satire on a particular person dates the work by requiring familiarity with the subject of the satire; without that familiarity, the satire loses its significance and becomes far less meaningful. While we can appreciate Pope's *Dunciad*, it cannot be simply picked up, read, and appreciated completely. Without an understanding what Grub Street represented, or who Cibber was, the reader merely sees a witty commentary. There is not enough information in the satire alone for the reader to make the ethical judgment which satire depends on. Similarly, a satire on a text requires the knowledge of the original to appreciate thoroughly. Without that original text, the satire is a work of fiction and nothing more.

Granted, there are exceptions to these rules. Certain works of satire have topics so broad and so familiar to readers that they avoid the problems of dating or historical obscurity. Nevertheless, by avoiding topical satire, Gilbert not only avoids dating his work, but also the limitations which a broader form of satire might create for him.

Topical satire also carries another danger which Gilbert does well to avoid. In bringing an ethical element into play, satire becomes a form which naturally condemns that which it is ridiculing. Gilbert's operas, however, are mostly based on his observations of Victorian society, and the behavior of those who comprise that society. Those same persons, however, and through them the society's institutions, are the audience of the operas. To satirize in his works, then, would effectively require Gilbert to condemn his audience, a tricky feat to pull off without the viewers taking offense; an offended audience naturally translated to a very quick closing of the offensive opera. By eschewing satire in favor of forms without the moral weightiness or

requisite condemnations, Gilbert allows the audience to laugh freely at the action on the stage without forcing them to associate themselves with it. The freedom provided by farce to "desecrate the household gods" is augmented by the absence of the forced moral judgments of satire.

While the careful choice of genre and the avoidance of topical allusions allow Gilbert to avoid dating his work, they cannot alone account for the large sustained popularity of the Savoy operas. Some other factor, or factors, must exist which keep audiences coming back to century-old shows. By looking at the operas which have "survived" the century and are regularly produced, and comparing them to the works which have faded into obscurity, I believe that it is possible to identify one of the most important of the remaining factors in the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan.

When one examines the Savoy operas which still appear on stage, the common bond between them is the applicability of their themes to modern society. Gilbert's most successful operas are those which have incorporated themes which a modern audience can relate to. For example, *H.M.S. Pinafore* uses the traditional theme of love conflicting with social class. *The Mikado* still stands as a burlesque of the western world's obsession with the Far East. *Iolanthe*'s political humor, though no longer directly relevant, strikes a chord with anyone who has watched an actual government legislate, often with results more comic than Gilbert ever could have conceived of. *Princess Ida*, as we have discussed, takes as its major theme the question of equality of the sexes, a theme which appears frequently in modern literature and which is especially popular in television. *Trial By Jury*'s burlesque of marriage, divorce, and the courtroom is, sadly, accessible to a great number of modern viewers.

Gilbert's original theme is not necessarily the one which the modern viewer sees in the opera. *Patience*, for example, was originally a burlesque of the aesthetic movement, but a present-day viewer can watch the show without any understanding of that movement and still appreciate it as a lampooning of those who blindly follow fashions or fads. Even *The Pirates of Penzance* which, unlike most of Gilbert's other operas, lacks a specific theme, can be seen as continuing a farcical tradition which later produced the Keystone Kops and Blake Edwards' Inspector Clouseau.

This thematic element which connects the modern viewer to the work from the past is distinctly lacking in those Gilbert and Sullivan operas which have fallen into obscurity. *The Grand Duke*, in addition to being widely considered the worst of the Savoy operas, pokes fun at Queen Victoria's accent and at minor royalty, two topics with which the present-day viewer has no connection. *Utopia Limited*, though it contains political humor which is still apt ("One party will assuredly undo all that the other Party has just done," says Zara), plays on the idea of a limited company, a concept which is again foreign to most modern audiences. *The Sorcerer* is a good opera, but what distinguishes it from other love-potion-gone-awry stories is its play on the quack remedy salesman and his sales patter, a figure who developed into the famous "patter baritone" parts such as Major-General Stanley, Sir Joseph, King Gama, and Reginald Bunthorne. In *The Sorcerer*, however, the patter of John Wellington Wells is not enough to distinguish the opera in the present-day audience's mind. Though it has not fallen quite as far into oblivion as *Utopia Limited* or *The Grand Duke*, its lack of a solid theme has left *The Sorcerer* short of the popularity which its more famous cousins achieved.

Perhaps the popularity of Gilbert and Sullivan will never be fully understood. To actually quantify the reasons why one enjoys the operas is a difficult task. In my analysis I have neglected the role of Sullivan's music in preserving the popularity of the operas; there can be no question that the composer's skills play a tremendous part in the success of the duo's works. When combined with Gilbert's carefully crafted libretti, the resulting operas have achieved a timelessness which any aspiring writer or composer must envy. I believe that Gilbert's choice of form and avoidance of topical allusion play an important part in creating that timelessness, but there are doubtless many other factors which contribute as well. We may never be able to explain fully the success of Gilbert and Sullivan. Like children watching a magician (or a Sorcerer), however, I believe that generations to come will enjoy these finely crafted works—perhaps appreciating them more for not knowing all the secrets of the crafter.

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