GILBERT AND SULLIVAN OPERAS

BY MAURICE HUTTON

& GILBERT AND SULLIVAN

BY MAURICE BARING

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Included herein are two lengthy essays which seek to analyze the famous operas of the Victorian duo Sir William Gilbert and Sir Arthur Sullivan. These are meant to complement the essays focusing on Gilbert contained in another of my online books:

W. S. Gilbert - A Mid-Victorian Aristophanes, 1927 by Edith Hamilton
The English Aristophanes, 1911 by Walter Sichel
A Classic In Humour, 1905 by Max Beerbohm

Maurice Hutton's *Gilbert and Sullivan Operas* is from his 1930 book *The Sisters Jest and Earnest*. Hutton presents an interesting insight, though perhaps not in accordance with present day Gilbert & Sullivan experts:

"The opera *Patience* shows Gilbert at his best, full of wit as well as of mockery. Gilbert himself knew that it was his best work. He modestly said it was the best because the music of *Patience* was the best, but was not the music the best because the libretto was the best, and by far the best? Gilbert shows in *Patience* a genius for mockery, and a genius for the choice of just the right word. This is what makes *Patience* Gilbert's best work, though it be as well, thanks perhaps to the words, the best as music also."

Maurice Baring's *Gilbert and Sullivan* is from the September 1922 issue of *The Fortnightly Review*. Baring's insight is:

"I remember once, when there was a fair going on, seeing a little old man hawking about some gold-fish in a very small bottle. He kept on piping out in a high falsetto, 'Fish, fish, fish, fish, little gold-fish. Who will buy?' he piped, as he walked up and down between the bookstalls and the booths. But the people bought toys and sugarplums, clothes and books, but no gold-fish. No one would buy the little gold-fish; for men do not recognise the gifts of Heaven, the magical gifts, when they see them. In the case of Gilbert and Sullivan they bought at once; but they thought that these gold-fish were as common as dirt. It was only when the sellers were dead that they recognised that what they had been buying so easily and so cheaply was magical merchandise from fairyland; that there was nothing to match it and nobody else to provide anything of that kind any more."

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What are the distinctions between humorist, satirist, misanthrope, cynic, comedian, and wit?

(1) The HUMORIST is the man who makes play with *contrasts*, EITHER with the contrast between a man's professions and his practice, this is the humorist-moralist: Dickens, Thackeray (who was called a cynic but was not a cynic), Lowell and sometimes Goldwin Smith; OR ELSE with the contrast between a man's ideals and the facts and laws of life, this is the humorist-cynic and is more intellectual than moral: the Saturday reviewers and the other conservative humorists of all ages and times, whom Plato has painted. Gilbert is often, on occasion at least, in this class, as in *The Sorcerer* and *Pinafore* and *Patience*. Even Miss Austen is occasionally in this class, but without ceasing to be still a moralist, as in Sense and Sensibility; and Cervantes in *Don Quixote*, and Horace with his "naturam furca expelles tamen usque recurret et mala perrumper sensim fastigia." [Though you drive out nature with a pitchfork yet it will come back all the way, and wickedly break through and slowly conquer idealism.]

(2) The SATIRIST is the man who shows up the seamy side of life, with hatred and horror of it: the satirist is a moralist of the type of Juvenal.

(3) The MISANTHROPE is the satirist "writ large" who hates the seamy side of life and expresses his hatred of it but without hope of altering it: the satirist without the satirist's moral purpose; he is just a "realist" who sees only the seamy side of life and hates life. Swift was a misanthrope.

(4) The CYNIC is the other man who sees only the seamy side but who laughs at it or scoffs. The cynic has always been the man who snarled or laughed at what other men valued. Values have changed, and cynics with them. The ancient Greek cynic was a moralist who snarled at what other men put first — wealth, comfort, luxury, civilization; these things are no longer, theoretically at any rate, the first things in life. They have given place to character, conduct, Christianity. The cynic has therefore changed also and is now the man who snarls or laughs at character, conduct, Christianity. He snarls at different objects to-day, that is, but the meaning of the word cynic remains the same, only he is no longer a moralist. The cynic may be a comedian, but all comedians are not cynics.

(5) The COMEDIAN is just a mirth-maker: "What fools these mortals be!" is his theme; all comic papers are of this school. They are not necessarily humorists of any school, or satirists or cynics. They need not raise a laugh at what are called "serious things." Some do and others don't; they just raise a laugh. Lewis Carroll was a comedian, but being also very serious, even over-serious, his seriousness and his conscience came into conflict very soon with his love of fun and his love of pun; and ultimately ended that love and that laughter. Every one has met hundreds of other men and women, whose love of fun comes into conflict sooner or later with their tender conscience; and carries on an internecine warfare with it. These tender-hearted people think that humour, as Canon Ainger says, should be always sympathetic with human nature and full of reverence for it. Canon Ainger, very properly, though he loves humour, is of two minds about comedians. He does not love Gilbert; there is a great gulf fixed between a good Christian and a mere comedian, just as there is often a great gulf between good literature and a good man.

(6) WIT, finally, is chiefly verbal and literary. It is the neat expression of some analogy or some contrast. Douglas Jerrold was at once a wit and a cynic when he said, "Are we not all men and brothers? All Cains and Abels?" Goldwin Smith was wit as well as humorist and moralist when he coined his epigram about Patrick Henry: "'Give me liberty or give me death,' cried Patrick Henry and bought another slave."

These six classes of HUMORIST, SATIRIST, MISANTHROPE, CYNIC, COMEDIAN, and WIT, overlap of course and interfuse, and a man may belong to more than one class; to which does ARISTOPHANES belong, and to which does GILBERT? Each perhaps to the very large, very nondescript and vague class of comedians. It seems to be taking them too seriously to call them humorists or satirists or misanthropes or cynics; they are, however, of course not comedians only but also wits. Gilbert is, I conceive, on the whole neither humorist, satirist, misanthrope or cynic, so much as comedian and wit. He loves to turn everything into laughter; his object is to raise a laugh and nothing more; the mock heroic is generally his line; vivacious persiflage is his forte; banter is his long suit; moralists object to him for this reason; they doubt if he is ever serious.

Is he ever serious? I am not sure; there seems to be an approach to serious sentiment in the song of Iolanthe to the Lord Chancellor, almost to pathetic sentiment; a note never before heard in Gilbert and never heard afterwards, unless it be once in *The Yeomen of the Guard*. Sullivan, at any rate, seems to have thought that there was serious and pathetic sentiment in the song of Iolanthe to the Chancellor, for the music of the song, as a visitor to that opera in Toronto recently said to me, seemed curiously beautiful and rather out of place. It was church music, said my critic.

You know the song; Iolanthe is pleading with the Chancellor for their love-sick son:

He loves; if in the bygone years
Tears, bitter unavailing tears,
If in the eventide of life
Then let the memory of thy wife
Thine eyes have ever shed
For one untimely dead.
Sad thoughts of her arise,
Plead for my boy who dies.

That touch of sentiment and pathos is, I suppose, part of the popularity of these operas. Sullivan apparently would not translate into good music mere persiflage all the time; he would introduce from time to time sentimental music; the sort of music suited for an ordinary sentimental song and for an ordinary English drawing-room — the English being the most sentimental of nations, or at any rate the most sentimental after the Germans. Gilbert insisted on the serio-comic, on the mock-heroic; his collaborator sometimes drowned the comic-mockery of the words in music which was just sentimental. Phoebe's song in *The Yeomen of the Guard* illustrates this, perhaps:

Were I thy bride,
Then the whole world beside
Were not too wide
To hold my wealth of love,
Were I thy bride.

Sullivan, in fact, inverted Dr. Johnson's question,
"Why should the devil have all the good music?"
"Why should the churches have all the good music?" asked Sullivan, and introduced church music into comic opera, especially into *The Yeomen* and *Iolanthe* and *Patience*.

I have quoted *The Yeomen* and *Iolanthe*, but the best illustrations come from the best of the operas — *Patience*; there is the song of Patience herself:

Love is a plaintive song
Telling a tale of wrong,
Tuned to each changing note,
Blind to his every mote,
Love that no wrong can cure,
That is the love that's pure,
Sung by a suffering maid,
Telling of hope betrayed.
Sorry when he is sad,
Merry when he is glad.
Love that is always new,
That is the love that's true.

Or take the delightful song of Lady Jane:

Silvered is the raven hair, Spreading is the parting straight,
Mottled the complexion fair, Halting is the youthful gait.
Hollow is the laughter free, Spectacled the limpid eye,
Little will be left of me In the coming by and by.

The mockery is broad and manifest even before one reaches that parody of English sentimentality "the coming by and by" and the broader farce of the second stanza:

Fading is the taper waist, Shapeless grows the shapely limb,
And although severely laced, Spreading is the figure trim.
Stouter than I used to be, Still more corpulent grow I,
There will be too much of me In the coming by and by.

And yet the music is pure sentiment. And the antithesis between the words and the music is at its highest and most luminous point. The words seem an affront to the music, just as they do in "The Magnet and the Churn" — "The music is worthy of the best of Heine's lyrics" (Baring). I will take one more illustration from *Patience*, to the same effect, another song of Patience:

I cannot tell what this love may be
That cometh to all but not to me;
It cannot be kind as they'd imply
Or why do these gentle ladies sigh?

A few more words about this music of Sullivan. I am not a musician or the son of a musician, only a susceptible outsider who knows what music he likes and who likes music that is fetching and catchy, and generally, as I am told by musicians, thoroughly cheap and trashy. That is the music for me, and I can hear it humming in my ears for some time afterwards, music with a lilt to it, such as "Twenty love-sick maidens we," or "I hear the soft note of the echoing voice of an old, old love long dead," or "Three little maids from school are we," or even, occasionally, some of the music of the great German composers, especially Mendelssohn's music to the second chorus of the Antigone "Many are marvels, nothing than man more marvellous happeneth." But there my capacity for music ends, and my candid friends said to me at once that it was absurd for a rank outsider to lecture on Gilbert, for Gilbert involved Sullivan. Very likely they were right. Anyhow, this is not the time or place to wade into metaphysics and philosophy and to ask whether the outsider has a right to his tastes and preferences in music or in poetry or in sculpture or in painting, or, for that matter, in politics either; whether all standards should not be set by the experts and humbly accepted by the vulgar.

Sullivan's has been called cheap music because it is popular, but I have read that Ethel Smith, who is a considerable authority on music to-day, has said that "Tipperary," the most popular tune of the war, would have delighted Schubert, and the same verdict applies, Mr. Baring remarks, *mutatis mutandis* [with the differences having been considered], to literature: to *Alice in Wonderland*, to the *Pilgrim's Progress*, to Gray's "Elegy." All this literature is extremely popular but passes also somehow as first-rate, and is it not first-rate?

The controversy is as old as the hills and more insoluble. Plato is for the experts and he counts with me; but Aristotle is for the vulgar and *he* counts with me; and no other two men in the world, no nor a wilderness of monkeys count against either of them or at all with me. Let the experts argue it among themselves whether Sullivan's popular music is good music or cheap music, they will probably never agree; meanwhile I can get on with my lecture by concluding that Sullivan will remain the best example in music to be quoted by the Aristoteleans against the Platonists, to show that the popular in art or politics or literature or music may also be the best or nearly the best. I will risk just one musical shot before dropping the musical question: the continued popularity of these operas is due more to Sullivan the musician, than to Gilbert the comedian and librettist, who was also the author of the Bab Ballads and many which are now only "unconsidered trifles." But perhaps it is ungracious to draw any comparisons between collaborators whose collaboration has been the happiest in the history of art; each seems to have inspired the other to his best.

I turn to Gilbert. Gilbert has been called the English Aristophanes; other critics have resented the title as too good or perhaps too bad for Gilbert. Inferences are great: Aristophanes is much broader than Gilbert, broader in every sense, broader in the idiomatic sense, more French than Gilbert. Gilbert wrote for the English, and though he mocked a little at English prudery, no doubt he deliberately preferred English reticence to French breadth, English restraint to French realism. The French call this reticence and restraint hypocrisy. That is, of course, just a French mistake; they are rather due to that political instinct which is the one great gift of the English people and which the French have never possessed. The Greeks and Aristophanes had none of this reticence because they were never a political success but a political failure. The Romans had something of it and were politically successful. Gilbert must mock occasionally, of course, at English prudery; what comedian does not? Even Bernard Shaw, the least French of English comedians, allows himself to mock a little.

Gilbert's mockery is very mild; things like these in *The Yeomen of the Guard* the clown Point says:

> It's a general rule,
> Though your zeal it may quench,
> If the family fool
> Tells a joke that's too French
> Half a crown is stopped out of his wages.

or better still, in *Patience*:

> Then a sentimental passion of a vegetable fashion
> Must excite your languid spleen,
> An attachment à la Plato to a bashful young potato
> Or a not-too-too French bean.

Gilbert makes fun of English reticence in these lines, but being an Englishman with the political instinct which keeps a nation sound, he on the whole very carefully observes it. None the less, but all the more that having no conscious philosophy about him, but only a store of common sense, he probably would have explained himself by saying that he made his operas so English and so reticent in order to attract the English and to pacify the Lord Chamberlain. He would probably have repudiated any deeper instinct than that, any even subconscious recognition that it is only by English prudery and hypocrisy (which Englishmen call aspiration) that the seamy side of life can be reduced to its minimum, and, so far as may be, sterilized; that directly you treat the seamy side frankly, as the Franks do, as Anatole France does, you magnify its seams, you multiply its poisonous germs. In short, you exaggerate the evil (exactly as a romancer exaggerates the good by idealizing his hero) and all the while though calling yourself a realist, a realist forsooth! a realist who has made his so-called realities tenfold larger in stature, and more serious in menace, than they need have been, by his romancing realism.

If they are plagued with realism in France it is their own fault. They have magnified the seamy side of life when they should have minimized it. They have treated it romantically and seriously when they should been silent about it, and so [would] have helped to keep it in the fly-blown and dirty corner where it belongs. It is hard enough to keep it there in all conscience, but it ought to be kept there; and the psycho-analysts, e.g., do no good but much harm in dragging it out. Psycho-analysis is one of the curses and evil signs of this generation which is always seeking after signs and miracles.

Anyhow, whatever be the cause, Gilbert is less broad than Aristophanes in the idiomatic sense. He also is much less broad in a deeper and broader sense. The titles themselves of the two comedians' comedies taken alone, illustrate this. You know Gilbert's titles; nothing in them except *Patience* with its literary and Shakespearian reference — which is after all conjectural [supposed] — some of them merely accidental titles: *The Yeomen of the Guard* was meant to be "The Beefeaters," but that seemed too undignified, too popular, to be quite popular with a hypocritical and sentimental people. So another name much less appropriate but more dignified was coined for it. Another title also was so dubious to strict conventionality that Gilbert half-repented and debated a change; I mean from *Ruddigore* to "Kensington Gore." None of the titles (except possibly *Patience*) have any artistic merit.

Contrast them with the breadth and suggestiveness of the best of Aristophanes' comedies: *The Clouds — The Frogs — The Wasps — The Birds — Peace — The Pacifist Woman — Women in Parliament — Women in Church*, etc., etc. There is no modern comedy like these except de Rostand's *Chanticleer* and his *L'Aiglon*. And there is so much in a title. Aristophanes' titles have a wealth of imagination and suggestion in them, and are only open to criticism, if at all, on the ground that they promise too much, that even Aristophanes cannot develop adequately the profound analogy which unites Socrates and all other philosophers with Cloudland, which unites lawyers and lawsuits with wasps, which unites company promoters and their castles in Spain, with Cloud-Cuckooborough and Birdland.

Indeed, if anyone wants to see what can be made of themes so high, perhaps he will have to go beyond Aristophanes himself to a modern adaptation of Aristophanes; certainly not to Gilbert but to Mr. Courthope and his "Paradise of Birds." I am not lecturing on his "Paradise of Birds," but if anyone is curious to see how much can be made out of Aristophanes and his title of "The Birds," let him read the "Paradise of Birds." He will thank me for recalling the existence of that exquisite and half-forgotten adaptation, full of poetry and happy satire with a touch even of imaginative reverence in it, which no one will seek or find in Aristophanes. But even apart from Mr. Courthope, Aristophanes' titles are full of promise, not wholly belied by the performance.

I was quoting some time back the lines from *Patience* about the not-too-too French bean. That opera shows Gilbert at his best, full of wit as well as of mockery. Gilbert himself knew that it was his best work. He modestly said it was the best because the music of *Patience* was the best, but was not the music the best because the libretto was the best, and by far the best? Gilbert shows in *Patience* a genius for mockery, and a genius for the choice of just the right word.

What can be better than this description of Bunthorne, the aesthetic *poseur* — the young Mr. Oscar Wilde:

When I go out of door,
All sighing and burning,
Will follow me as before.
I shall with cultured taste
And high-diddle-diddle
If I pronounce it chaste.

Of damozels a score,
And clinging and yearning,

Distinguish gems from paste,
Will rank as an idyll

Nothing can be better in its way; the lilt of the verses is first-rate, the words exactly suit the sense, and yet they are so far-fetched, so academic, so to speak, as to lift the stanzas quite out of the commonplace. Who could have rhymed Francesca di Rimini with niminy piminy, and greenery yallery with Grosvenor Gallery, except a poet with a Swinburnian gift for jingling rhymes, for rhymes as good as Swinburne in their jingle, and much more full of meaning and significance than most of Swinburne's lines "of sound and fury signifying nothing"?

This is what makes *Patience* Gilbert's best work, as literature of course I mean, though it be as well, thanks perhaps to the words, the best as music also. It is indeed the only opera which is abiding literature, which has a real subject of serious and permanent interest. It was all very well to mock in *Pinafore* a First Lord of the Admiralty who had never been on a ship, amusing but cheap and superficial; all very well to mock at the Peers and the Lord Chancellor in Iolanthe, amusing but a little cheap; too obvious and easy — to laugh at women's education and women's rights in *Princess Ida*, to laugh at Army and Navy and company promoters and party government in *Utopia* — it is just Punch set to music, and there's an end of it. But *Patience* — though Gilbert hardly knew it and originally did not intend it — is something better and much more academic. It is genuine humour of the cynical kind and illustrates each of the two forms of humour [cynical and moralistic — see HUMORIST on page 3]; you know the origin of *Patience*.

There arose in Oxford in the late seventies, through the posing of a clever young Irish poet — Oscar Wilde — and partly through the Greek cult of beauty, practised by William Morris the English Hellenist, and Burne Jones the artist, and the two Rossettis, a hectic and hysterical passion for the aesthetic, the beautiful, which embraced even the dons; at any rate one of the most accomplished of the dons, Mr. Walter Pater. All the men of the movement wore aesthetic ties, peacock blues, sage greens, olive greens, any colour that was not crude but subdued and soft and dreamy.

Every woman wore green and yellow garments and clothed her darkened rooms in similar hues, in the language of *Twelfth Night*,

> And with a green and yellow melancholy she sat
> Like Patience on a monument, smiling at grief.

Shakespeare apparently foresaw the movement and Gilbert presumably took the name Patience from this passage of Shakespeare, though it suits the twenty love-sick maidens better than it suits the milkmaid, but Gilbert cared nothing for such details; he had no literary qualms or artistic scruples, he was very crude and impatient.

Apparently he had intended — characteristically enough — something else, something infinitely poorer and cheaper, to write an opera making fun of two rival curates and their devotees and their slippers — the slippers are out of date to-day and are replaced by a bottle of gin — as before he had done in *The Sorcerer*; something in the vein of *The Sorcerer's* best lines over again, sung by a curate:

> Time was when love and I were well acquainted,
> Time was when we walked ever hand in hand,
> A saintly youth with worldly thought untainted.
> None better loved than I, in all the land;
> Time was when maidens of the noblest station,
> Forsaking even military men,
> Would gaze upon me rapt in adoration,
> Ah me! I was a fair young curate then.

This was apparently Gilbert's first idea for *Patience*, but either because he had done it all already, and done it to perfection, or because some one suggested religious society might be offended, that English conventionality and hypocrisy or aspiration might be annoyed, he turned from this banal and popular and superficial note, to a real satire on a most unpopular and most academic and far-fetched Oxford "fad." He hardly deserved his subject when it came to him so accidentally and as a *pis aller* [coping with a difficulty], but nevertheless produced some most amusing patter, almost perfect patter, in *Patience*, and therefore some considerable poetry.

Alice Meynell, herself a dainty and scrupulous poet, called Swinburne "the jingle man" more full of sound than sense, more sensuous than sober; more full of music than of meaning; and even "The Garden of Proserpine," musical though it be, corroborates her criticism. But in this light raillery of Gilbert's in *Patience*, sound and sense are perfectly matched and the stanzas are sound philosophy, as well as a first-rate squib [short satiric writing]. And they smashed the aesthetic fad, if it needed smashing, beyond direct revival. All the soft-headed and sentimental people in Oxford who were looking out for a new religion from the hands of the posing Mr. Wilde were laughed out of their idolatry. We have had the "cubists" since, but they never counted for as much nor were accepted as a religion.

I have been quoting from *Patience*, from Gilbert at his best, but there is good "patter" — that is the usual word and the right word, I think — in the other and inferior operas; in *The Yeomen*, in *Iolanthe*, in *The Gondoliers*, in *The Mikado*, in *Princess Ida*, in *Utopia*. And something even in the yet more trivial operas; in *The Pirates*, in *Pinafore*, in *The Sorcerer* (already quoted), *in Ruddigore*, and yes even in *The Mountebanks* (which is by Gilbert though not by Sullivan).

First from *The Yeomen*, the best of the inferior operas. Here is some lyrical patter, the ballad of Fairfax the condemned prisoner:

Is life a boon?
If so, it must befall
That Death whene'er he call
Must call too soon.
Though fourscore years he give,
Yet one would pray to live
Another moon.
What kind of plaint have I
Who perish in July?
I might have had to die
Perchance in June.

And here is a song of Elsie's, the bride of ten minutes, whose husband, married five minutes ago, is to die in the next five minutes; it is a trifle cynical, not unpleasantly cynical, at the expense alternately of women and of men.

Though tear and long-drawn sigh
Ill fit a bride,
No sadder wife than I
The whole world wide.
Ah me, ah me.
Yet maids there be
Who would consent to lose
The very rose of youth,
The flower of life,
To be in honest truth
A wedded wife,
No matter whose!

This same opera has the only character in it which almost seems pathetic; which Grossmith at any rate when he acted it made pathetic. Gilbert, like Lewis Carroll, rigidly eschews pathos (warned by Dickens's caricatures of it), but Grossmith when he played the part of the mediaeval jester Point, used the immemorial tradition which belongs to the mediaeval jester, and made him pathetic, a pathetic moralist and a weeping and a laughing philosopher at once; an English Heraclitus and Democritus in one. Here are some of his verses:

I've wisdom from the East and from the West
That's subject to no academic rule,
You may find it in the jeering of a jest
Or distil it from the folly of a fool;
I can teach you with a quip, if I've a mind,
I can trick you into learning with a laugh;
O winnow all my folly and you'll find
A grain or two of truth among the chaff.

Now come *The Gondoliers*. *The Gondoliers* has some of the best patter of any of the operas; it is mildly political, much milder than Aristophanes, but it ridicules in the vein of Aristophanes democracy and egalitarianism, and adds — as Aristophanes could not — some lawful jests at the British form of democracy, constitutional monarchy.
Here is the egalitarian patter; the democratic kings are singing:

For every one who feels inclined Some post we undertake to find
Congenial with his peace of mind, And all shall equal be.

Admirable, isn't it? And then come the verses poking fun at the role of our constitutional kings; our kings who reign but do not rule, who open churches and bazaars and hospitals and orphanages and British Associations and lunatic asylums and Parliaments and other trifles, and at the present time do it so well — both King and heir, both father and son — that it is safe to say that no other two officials of one and the same family throughout the Empire equal them in the fidelity, tact and intelligence with which they discharge their most useful but often tedious duties.
Here is how the *Gondolier* constitutional King describes his morning work:

First we polish off some batches Of political despatches
And foreign politicians circumvent; Then if business isn't heavy
We may hold a Royal Levee Or ratify some Acts of Parliament.

Then from *The Mikado*, here are the lines of Ko Ko, awaiting execution:

To sit in solemn silence in a dull dark dock,
In a pestilential prison with a life-long lock,
Awaiting the sensation of a short sharp shock
From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block.

And here are some lines as well known as any in Gilbert:

My object all sublime I shall achieve in time,
To let the punishment fit the crime, The punishment fit the crime,
And make each prisoner pent Unwillingly represent
A source of innocent merriment, Of innocent merriment.

From *Iolanthe*, which makes fun of the Peers, as *The Gondoliers* makes fun of the Bolsheviks, there are good songs; here is one from the Peer in love:

Spurn not the nobly born With love affected,
Nor treat with virtuous scorn The well-connected.
High rank involves no shame; We boast an equal claim
With him of humble name To be respected.

I have already read from *Iolanthe* the sentimental song of Iolanthe to the Chancellor. It seems, perhaps, that in that song sentiment for once has been much for Gilbert: I know no parallel case, unless it be in *Utopia*. Gilbert's friend, Mr. [H. M.] Walbrook, [Gilbert & Sullivan Opera-A History and a Comment] is of the opinion that the song in *Utopia* is serious, the song to the English girl:

A wonderful joy our eyes to bless
In her magnificent comeliness
Is an English girl of eleven stone two [156 pounds]
And five feet ten in her dancing shoe;
She follows the hounds and on she pounds,
The field tails off and the muffs diminish,
Over hedges and brooks she hounds
Straight as a crow from "find" to finish.

Mr. Walbrook says that this song is serious and not Gilbertian mockery of our national pride and conceit in our young women; not a part of that Gilbertian mockery of our pride and conceit, which we hear in *Pinafore*:

He is an Englishman,
For he himself has said it,
And it's greatly to his credit
That he is an Englishman.
For he might have been a Roosian,
A French or Turk or Proosian,
Or perhaps Italian,
But in spite of all temptations
To belong to other nations
He remains an Englishman.

Well, I am not quite sure if the song to the English girl be serious, because if Gilbert was in earnest, why in the name of common sense alike and art did he hang this song upon the lips of the company promoter, the most arrant humbug of an opera of humbugs?

I suppose the fact is that Gilbert's common sense was so common as to approach horse sense, which is only one degree better than jackass sense. I suppose that so long as he wrote a good popular song, even a song with a rare vein of sentiment beneath it, instead of his more usual vein of ridicule, he was satisfied with it, and had no time for artistic susceptibilities; but to me it appears that there is an artistic flaw in that spirited and patriotic song, on that account.

I have even been able, with some forgotten critic's help, to distil a few good lines from *The Mountebanks*, which ought not to be quoted here because Sullivan did not collaborate in this opera, and yet in justice to Gilbert they must be quoted; they are worthy of Thackeray's ballads:

Ophelia was a dainty little maid — Who loved a very melancholy Dane,
Whose affection of the heart, so it is said, — Preceded his affection of the brain.
Heir-apparent to the Crown, — He thought lightly of her passion,
And he wandered up and down — In an incoherent fashion.
When she found he wouldn't wed her — In a river, by a medder
Took a header, and a deader — Was Ophelia.

From *Princess Ida* — a better opera — come the following lines; the song in honour of university women:

They intend to send a wire — To the moon, to the moon,
And they'll set the Thames on fire — Very soon, very soon.

From *The Sorcerer* I have already quoted the best things about the pale young curate. The only other verses worth quoting are the Sticho-Muthia, the dialogue-verse between Lady Sangazure and the plebeian apothecary, Mr. Wells. The lady has taken the love philtre and is in love with the unwilling Mr. Wells. And this is the dialogue in alternate lines, Mr. Wells protesting against her ladyship's love, and her ladyship urging it:

W. Hate me. I drop my "H's," have through life.
L. Love me, I'll drop mine too!
W. Hate me, I always eat peas with a knife.
L. Love me, I'll eat like you.
W. Hate me, I spend the day at Rosherville.
L. Love me, that joy I'll share.
W. Hate me, I often roll down One Tree Hill.
L. Love me, I'll join you there.

Then the lady begins in turn and pleads for his love, and Mr. Wells rebuffs her:

L. Love me, my prejudices I will drop.
W. Hate me, that's not enough.
L. Love me, I'll come and help you in the shop.
W. Hate me, the life is rough.
L. Love me, my grammar I will all forswear.
W. Hate me, abjure my lot.
L. Love me, and I'll stick sunflowers in my hair.
W. Hate me, they'll suit you not.

Utopia, his last opera practically, has some curiously anticipative satire, it might have been written yesterday; it is a satire on all the progress and the civilization of Europe, especially on the ironclad steamships, which have made war so terrible that all armaments are soon to be abolished; but also a satire on the other progress of peace, which has made life so sanitary and peaceful that lawyers and even doctors in Utopia cannot make a living any more; the prisons have all become model lodging-houses for working men, and the working men are too healthy to need doctors.

The only way to rescue doctors and lawyers it is suggested is to introduce the English party-system of government, which will soon destroy all these reforms and bring back law-suits and disease and war again; it is a cheerful programme. There is not much to quote from Utopia, but here is a cynical trifle:

First you're born, and I'll be bound you
Find a dozen strangers round you.
"Hallo" cries the new-born baby,
"Where's my parents? which may they be?"
Awkward silence, no reply,
Puzzled baby wonders why.
Father rises, bows politely,
Mother smiles but not too brightly,
Doctor mumbles like a dumb thing,
Nurse is busy mixing something.
Every symptom seems to show
You're decidedly de trop.

You perceive that Gilbert was growing older and his wit more acid. After this opera, which demolishes everything, he practically did not try again. Time had had its little joke with him; the stroke of its thunderbolt had curdled the milk of his human kindness. His cynicism and satire — unlike Lewis Carroll's fun — were increasing obviously with his age at the expense of his sympathy and good humour; it was time for him to stop, and he stopped like the man of common sense that he was.

It must be obvious after all these quotations that nothing could be more futile or more scholastic and academic than to seek a clue, a principle, for Gilbert's ridicule. To treat him, for example, just as a cynical conservative of the school against whom Plato protested, just as an unbeliever in new and radical and revolutionary doctrines; he does *not* believe, of course (it is true), in such things. He ridicules equality and democracy and even constitutional monarchy in *The Gondoliers*. He ridicules equality and indiscipline and anarchy in *Pinafore* and *The Sorcerer*. He ridicules marriage outside one's own class — *mésalliance* — in *The Sorcerer*, in *Pinafore*, in *The Pirates*. But he ridicules equally aristocracy and the Peers in *Iolanthe* and in *Patience* and in *The Pirates* and *The Sorcerer*. He ridicules educational and academic fads and idealisms in *Patience* and *Princess Ida*. He ridicules high-flown and high-falutin unselfishness, the vaulting ambition of unselfishness which over leaps human nature, in *Patience*, *Ruddigore*, and *The Sorcerer* and *The Pirates*.

Only in *The Mikado* and in *The Yeomen* he ridicules nothing in particular and is content with amusing patter set to charming music; but then at the end in *Utopia*, practically his last opera, he ridicules everything and everybody. Everything in modern civilization: the Court, the Army, the Navy, the Law, Medicine, and the Church, Parliament and the Party System. The inference is obvious, this is *Punch*; this is good fun, meant for laughter, not serious satire of any sort, not even conservative satire, which is only half-serious, not didactic propaganda of any kind, not the humour of a moralist, but the jests of a comedian.

Gilbert is hardly a humorist; so far as he is, he is one of the cynic humorists who mark the contrast between man's ideals and the facts of life, between man's conscience and the possibilities of the world. He is one of the conservative humorists who mock high-falutin Bolshevism, and revolutionary philosophy. For example, he makes Patience refuse perfection as she knows it in Bunthorne, because love — true love — must be quite unselfish and she would be selfish in accepting him. I have known young women who so refused a happy marriage; they thought they would be too happy. He makes her accept at last Grosvenor, when he has become commonplace, because love for a man so vulgar will not be selfish love, will at least be unselfish love; this is the style of Gilbert's humour, another name for common sense and practical realism. No smaller name will cover it. Moralist and humorist generally go together, but these words or names are too narrow to fit Gilbert well.

When the humorist Jane Austen, for example, wrote *Sense and Sensibility* as a study of the contrast between the romantic idealism of an ardent girl, and the facts of life, she was also a moralist and she had a purpose in view, to diminish and discredit sensibility. She was, in fact, only too serious. She subordinated her humour to her serious purpose, to the great detriment of that novel. It falls far below the level of the more humorous novels: of *Mansfield Park*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Emma*. But Gilbert never misses success through lack of humour and excess of purpose. The difficulty with him is of the opposite character; to find a purpose in his verse, to find that element of moralizing and sympathy with human nature which we generally expect from the best humorists.

We don't find much sympathy with human nature in Gilbert; a good deal of these operas consists of ridicule of elderly ladies enamoured of young men; there is Ruth in *The Pirates*, little Buttercup in *Pinafore*, Katisha in *The Mikado*, the Queen in *Iolanthe*, Dame Carruthers in *The Yeomen*, and Lady Jane in *Patience*, the best of the six, as the opera is the best of the six, the best of them all.

I suppose this theme belongs to the rather common-place vulgarity of Gilbert. We English are a vulgar people in our humour, which matches the American vulgarities about mothers-in-law; and those American vulgarities perhaps derived ultimately from Lewis Carroll and his *Sylvie and Bruno*, that is, from Great Britain. Some good people have been offended by these scoffs at ageing ladies; it is scarcely worth noting them. Gilbert was nothing if not a commonplace Englishman in mind, with more sympathy for the national and vulgar humour of England, than scrupulous refinement of any kind. Necessarily he has the defects of his qualities; this unsavoury subject was Fielding's before Gilbert butted in; it was Juvenal's before Fielding borrowed it from Juvenal, from that ancient Rome which was London in embryo.

And now about all this Gilbertian "patter"; is it poetry? and what is poetry? Mr. Baring has observed that if Gilbert had been a greater poet, a real poet, a Shelley or Shakespeare, or even a Swinburne at his best, or even an Aristophanes at his best, the words of his verses would not have needed their musical setting; nay, one would even have grudged [given reluctantly] his words to a musician. It is not necessary to set [Tennyson's] "Sunset and Evening Star" to music; though it has been set, the music does not improve it; it is rather a gratuitous impertinence. It is not necessary to set Kipling's "Recessional" to music, though it has been set, the music does not improve it. The best poetry does not need music, any more than the best wine needs a bush [advertising].

This seems sound criticism, though damaging to Gilbert as a poet. But what is poetry? The absurd writers of *vers libre* [free verse] maintain that poetry is not mechanism, is not form, does not involve rhyme or rhythm or scansion, but is the spirit and soul of language; anything is poetry which has this spirit and soul, it does not matter about the body of language; *vers libre*, they say, is disembodied poetry. It differs from prose because prose has not the spirit and soul of language, *does not express, as poetry expresses, the highest truths in the shortest and most inspiring words*. "I shall go to him but he will not return to me" is poetry, though the words be without rhyme or rhythm or scansion.

Well, what do you think of it, all of you here? I have certainly chosen, I think, a fair illustration of *vers libre*, an illustration more than fair. If much *vers libre* were on a par with those words of David about the dead child — "I shall go to him but he will not return to me," **or** "I shall see them in my dreams by the banks of the Ganges, I shall see them by the banks of a darker and a deeper stream" (*Jane Eyre*); **or** John Locke, "Our ideas are like the children of our youth who die before us, and our minds resemble those tombs to which we are approaching, where though the brass and the marble remains yet the inscriptions are effaced by time and the imagery moulders away." (vol. 1, chap. 10);

or, "I never fell in love but once and then it was with a girl who always wore her handkerchief pinned tight around her neck, with a fair face, gentle eyes, a soft smile, real auburn locks. My passion was not a raging heat, a fever in the veins, but it was like a vision, a distant joy, a heaven, a world that might be. The dream is still left and sometimes comes confusedly over me in solitude and silence and mingles with the softness of the sky and veils my eyes from mortal grossness.' (Hazlitt on Malthus, vol. iv of *Collected Works*, p. 103).

If *vers libre* were like these passages we should read *vers libre* with more pleasure and profit than we read regular poetry, and not complain, as we do now, that it is printed in plaguey fashion, in short lines and separate lines, instead of being printed in continuous lines and paragraphs like other prose. And, besides that, inasmuch as short lines and separate lines are part of the body, of the form, of poetry, after all, *vers libre* has no right to these devices and ought to be able to stand on its own feet as poetry even though it were printed as prose.

Can it so stand? How much *vers libre* will most of us try to read, if it be printed as honest prose? That will depend entirely on its merits as inspiring language. It will have hard work to pass as poetry, but if it is inspiring language, like the four passages above, it will be read; and we can agree to waive the metaphysical question, whether it is poetry or not. We are not a metaphysical people, and we don't care whether it is poetry or prose, so long as it reads well, but how much of it does read well?

But now about the "patter," which is in itself poor poetry generally, as we shall all admit; but is *it* also not poetry of a kind, and how does it pass for poetry? It passes for poetry, and it *is* poetry, for a very good reason; we are not merely soul and spirit, we have bodies as well, and the bodies have ears, and the ears are susceptible to the body of poetry, to alliteration's artful aid; to rhyme and rhythm — our ears are tickled pleasantly with the mechanism of poetry. That is why even philosophy was written in poetry by the early Greek philosophers. It appealed by its metre and scansion to the memory, where prose would have failed to appeal; it had even a sensuous value of a kind. And "patter" in the same way fixes itself in the memory, besides tickling the ears. Patter is at least embodied poetry, even though it be poor poetry and second-rate; its body helps to preserve it; whereas disembodied poetry, that is to say *vers libre*, is as unreal and as unsubstantial as a ghost unless it have the passion and inspiration of a few and rare ghosts. It has not even that sort of glorified body, which the disembodied spirit of man is assumed by the Apostle to receive when he leaves his mortal body.

Patter, therefore, *is* poetry of a kind; even when it is only of a poor kind, since it has the necessary body and makes the necessary appeal to the ears; the force of the appeal of course depends on the ears which hear it, and no two persons have the same ears for rhyme and rhythm, for metre and scansion. Some persons are only annoyed by rhyme and rhythm, for example, and others are delighted and importunately [overly persistent] insist upon them. I have seen a young child, who had ears for rhyme and rhythm, stamp her little feet with rage at the first and rather exasperating line of Wordsworth's "We are Seven." You remember that first lame line:

A simple child Who lightly draws its breath
And feels its life in every limb, What should it know of death?

To her one was obliged perforce to amend that first halting line, and recite it with amendments; if one was mystically inclined, one amended thus:

A simple child, with instincts dim, Who lightly draws its breath
And feels its life in every limb. What should it know of death?

If one was prosaic, one was content to recite to her:

A simple child, dear brother Jim Who lightly draws its breath
And feels its life in every limb, What should it know of death?

The simple child in question was content with either amendment, mystical or prosaic, brother Jim or instincts dim, but amendment she was bound to have, or you couldn't recite that stanza to *her* peacefully.

As a final illustration of "patter," I have disinterred a stanza from a very young and unknown poet, Meyerstein. It is about a woman keeping a tavern apparently, and selling pale ale; a man who owes arrears and owns an ass has been killed in a tavern brawl, and the ale wife is lighting candles for his wake, and a priest is ready to officiate:

The ass obeyed, and saw the man
From whom his bitterness began Calm as a sleeping child.
The stubborn chin none could mistake,
The eyes that would to pardon wake Were shut, not reconciled.
The cloth of gold was torn in parts By greedy topers' clutch;
Of coin, in pockets, through their arts, There was not overmuch.
A pale wife, the ale wife, Was lighting candle wicks;
The priesthood in creased hood Held up a crucifix.
The ale wife, the pale wife, Was lighting candle wicks;
The priesthood in creased hood Held up a crucifix.

How does it strike you? I like it for the quaint and unexpected rhymes. I can remember it easily, though it may be very thin poetry; or, I had better say, very pale poetry, as pale as the wife, or as her ale.

And now to sum up. Canon [Alfred] Ainger [1837-1904, English biographer and critic] is offended with Gilbert's operas, not unnaturally. Canon Ainger is interested in humorists who are moralists, and Gilbert is scarcely ever of this school. A humorist is a moralist also, the Canon thinks, so long as he is trying to teach and guide, as Jane Austen teaches and guides, whether he takes the higher road of tracing the gulf between men's creeds and men's practice, and of painting men's hypocrisies; or whether he takes the lower road of tracing the gulf between men's ideals and this world's possibilities, as Horace or as Jane Austen in *Sense and Sensibility* and Canning in the "Needy Knife Grinder" or Cervantes in *Don Quixote*; in either case he is still a moralist, so long as he is trying to teach and guide.

But Gilbert rarely takes the higher road, nor even very seriously the lower. He is rather comedian and *farceur* and mirth-maker, and the Canon is very properly offended. He wants us all to take life more seriously and more sympathetically. But Gilbert is an impenitent follower of the first Greek comedian Epicharmus. Said Epicharmus, "Be sober, be vigilant, be unbelieving." Gilbert is unbelieving, he sees chiefly the topsy-turviness of life and its insolubility. He has none of the faith in life and human nature which marks the sympathetic humorist, which marks even the philosopher and the student and the man of science.

Said Aristotle, "A man must have faith in life and in human nature and in the laws of outward nature, if he is to be a serious student of any kind, if he is to have any serious purpose." What more can be said about it? The lights are just going out, so to speak, and the curtain is just going down; it seems like breaking flies on a wheel to take comedians like Aristophanes and Gilbert seriously. Socrates on trial for his life referred to Aristophanes' fooleries about him in court, but he never quoted them, except for a single word, nor took them seriously.

Plato is always quoting Homer; often, but with less approval, Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. He takes them all more seriously than he takes the politicians and Pericles (even as Mr. Harold Spender takes George Meredith, Browning and Swinburne more seriously than he takes the great Marquess of Hartington, President Roosevelt and Lord Cromer). But Plato never quotes Aristophanes. The utmost he will concede to him is to imagine him remaining awake and in serious conversation with Socrates into the grey dawn of morning, long after the rest of the company are peacefully disposed under the table. But he never quotes him. Why should he? Aristophanes is to Plato just one of the unbelieving conservative jesters, who find life insoluble and its creeds unbelievable, but *especially* its reformist and its revolutionary creeds; especially these creeds, because after all no one believes quite in the same sense in the old and the established creeds, but takes them *cum grano salis* [with a grain of salt] as part of the existing order of things, *faute de mieux* [adopted for lack of something better] as occupants in possession and having therefore in their favour nine points of the law.

To Plato Aristophanes (or Gilbert) is the jester, who finding all creeds incredible, turns to laughter and to comedy and spends his strength and wit in mockery of all creeds, but especially of the new creeds, because in them, somehow or other, many people seem to place a new, a real, a fanatic, fantastic, and a most preposterous faith.

Such was Aristophanes to Plato, and Gilbert to Canon Ainger — just comedians and makers of laughter, identical in one point at least with Kipling's Sons of Martha, with the men of action. "To them from birth is belief forbidden; from them till Death is relief afar" says Kipling, in one of his most powerful and pregnant lines. By birth, by temperament, by their practical turn of mind, by their iron-bound common sense, the Aristophanes' and the Gilberts of this world must make laughter and comedies and farces or make nothing.

They have done their duty, if they make us laugh, if they wile away a weary hour or more (not a bare fifty minutes), if they kill some seventy-five long minutes of tedious time. If only they answer those importunate widows of the world — duty, creeds, religion, conscience, science, scholarship — by dodging their importunate questions and requests, until each widowed lady relaxes into a smile, and forgets her importunities for a moment, in harmless and wholesome laughter, why then they have played their part, they have fulfilled their *métier*, they have done their duty.

And the rest of us have done our duty by them, if we laugh a little; it was all they asked of us, little enough for us to give to them, yet much for us to receive from them "a source of innocent merriment," "of innocent merriment" in a world so full of cares and insolubilities and importunities.

> Try we life long we can never
> Straighten out life's tangled skein;
> Why should we in vain endeavour
> Guess and guess and guess again.
> Life's a pudding full of plums,
> Care's a canker that benumbs,
> Wherefore waste our elocution
> On impossible solution,
> Life's a pleasant institution,
> Let us take it as it comes.

Stanzas such as these from *The Gondoliers* — and there are many of them in Gilbert — did not require Sullivan's music to pass them.

THE END

GILBERT AND SULLIVAN BY MAURICE BARING

The late Arthur Strong, who was librarian of the House of Lords, and not only a scholar of encyclopedic knowledge, but who also had a rare appreciation of all the arts and an appreciation based on knowledge, used to say that the greatest English composer England had produced since the days of Purcell was Arthur Sullivan, the Sullivan of *Pinafore* and *Ruddigore,* and not the Sullivan of the *Golden Legend,* and that compared with him most of our modern composers were but the grammarians of music. He may have been right or wrong about modern composers; he may have been unjust; he was not speaking on oath. But it is certain that Sullivan carried on the true tradition of English music, or rather that in his work the English musical genius that produced tunes like "The Girl I Left Behind Me" and "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington" was born again and flowered once more in a glorious spring-tide. The melodies in Sullivan's comic operas are as English as those older tunes, that is to say, as English as a picture of Constable, a lyric of Shakespeare, as English as eggs and bacon.

No foreigner, however painstaking, or however assimilative, can cook eggs and bacon, just as no Englishman can make French coffee. No nation can learn to make something which is peculiar to the genius of another nation. The most striking instance of this I can recall was the case of aeroplane manufacture during the war. When the French made English machines from English designs, and the English made French machines from French designs, the results were never satisfactory. A French designed machine made by Englishmen was never the same as a French machine, and an English designed machine made by a Frenchman was never quite like an English machine. And when the Germans copied either, the copy though accurate and faithful was Teutonic.

It is perhaps because Sullivan's lighter music is so essentially English that it has taken years to obtain serious recognition. The tunes achieved instant popularity because they were English, but it was probably because of this instantaneous and widespread success that people failed to perceive the rarity and the value of the gifts which were being so freely bestowed upon them.

They knew the tunes were catchy. They kept on humming them. They admitted them to be pretty; but they did not realise their inestimable, their unique artistic price. They felt as people feel when they see the work of a great water colourist, or, indeed, of any great artist. "Oh, anyone could do that! We could do it ourselves if we knew how to paint or to compose." It seemed so simple, so easy. The essentially English quality of the stuff made them feel this all the more strongly.

The tunes seemed as easy to produce as the improvisations of a schoolboy playing with one finger. It was only when Sullivan was dead, and after many years of experience of the barren fruits of English musical comedy, that the public began to wonder whether after all the matter was quite as simple as they had thought. And when, after many years, there was two years ago a revival on a large scale, in London, of the greater number of the operas, many of us experienced a shock surprise [1919: D'Oyly Carte "New" Opera Company]. The tunes were as catchy as ever, but the daintiness, the elegance, the finish, the workmanship, the beautiful businesslike quality of the work, its ease and distinction, its infinite variety, forced themselves upon the attention of everybody. The large public recognised at once that here was something which not everyone could do; and that nothing at all like it was being done, or had been done, by anyone else for years.

The revival of *The Beggar's Opera* underlined the fact. That garden of English melody enhanced the authenticity of Sullivan's gift. It endorsed the credentials and the lineage of his music, and of his charm. It proved that he was no bastard and no pretender, but a rightful heir of Purcell, and a lawful representative of Merry England. What a joy it was, we all felt, when Gilbert and Sullivan and *The Beggar's Opera* were revived, to hear real English music once more! Not the slosh of ballad concerts, nor the jangle and rattle of ragtime and of modern revues, with their grating metallic tang and twang, their exasperating hesitations and their alien languor, but the music of the English soil; so noble, so gay, so debonair, so beautiful. The music that grew in England like wayside flowers, of which Purcell wove garlands, which the Cavaliers put in their velvet hats, and the soldiers of the Georges wore as a cockade or flung to the girls they left behind them; flowers which were then neglected for many years, until Sullivan planted his rollicking border; flowers which were forgotten, buried under rubbish, and artificial and tawdry exotics, until the war at moments cleared those weeds away, and the soldiers in Flanders and France marched once more to the old rhythms, and invented preposterous but entirely English words to the native airs of their country. Now it is extremely doubtful whether we should ever have been enriched with this precious legacy of English music if Sullivan had never met Gilbert. It is to this marvellously fortunate conjunction and collaboration that we owe this exuberant and entrancing revival of English dance, rhythm and song.

It was Gilbert's rhythms, Gilbert's wit and fancy, Gilbert's fun and quaint mockery, Gilbert's whimsical poetry that played the part of the blue-paper packet of the composite Seidlitz powder, and when mingled with the white-paper packet of Sullivan's music produced the enchanting effervescing explosion. It is this which makes it impossible in talking of these operas to dissociate Gilbert from Sullivan, and to judge either, as far as the comic operas are concerned, separately.

The Gilbert of the operas has been compared to Aristophanes; and the comparison has been said to be a wild one. To place Gilbert in the same rank as Aristophanes, it is said, would mean he should have written lyrics as beautiful as those of Shakespeare. But to compare Gilbert and Sullivan with Aristophanes is not, I think, a wild comparison, for the lyrical beauty which is to be found in the choruses of the Greek poet, is supplied, and plentifully, by the music of Sullivan. I once heard Anatole France say that, speaking in an exaggerated way, the texts we possessed of the plays of Aeschylus were in reality librettos of operas of which the music was lost, as if, for instance, we only had an operatic libretto of *Hamlet* or *Faust.* If the Greek music was as good as the words we must have lost a good deal; but we can't tell. It has perished. Fortunately, Sullivan's music has not perished and Gilbert's text is complete. It does not for its purpose need to be any better. For its purpose not even Aristophanes could have improved on it, because the point about Gilbert's lyrics and Gilbert's verse is that it is just sufficiently neat, lyrical and poetical, besides being always cunningly incomparably rhythmical, to allow the composer to fill in the firm outline he has traced with surprising and appropriate colour.

Take these four lines of a trio from the First Act of *The Mikado*:

> To sit in solemn silence in a dull dark dock
> In a pestilential prison, with a life-long lock,
> Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock
> From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block.

There is nothing very remarkable about this happy jingle, but Sullivan's handling of it makes one think of Bach.

If Gilbert had been a greater verbal poet, a poet like Shelley or Swinburne, there would have been no room for the music; the words would have been complete in themselves; their subtle overtones and intangible suggestions would have been drowned by any music, however beautiful. As it is, the words have just enough suggestive beauty, and are always unerringly rhythmical, and this is just the combination needed to enable the composer to display his astonishing musical gift. I don't pretend to any musical knowledge whatever, but it is not necessary to be a trained musician to recognise and to feel the amazing powers of musical rhythmical invention which Sullivan displays throughout these operas. His rhythmical invention seems to be inexhaustible and infinitely various.

You have exquisitely funny and appropriate rhythm like his setting to Ruth's song in the First Act of *The Pirates of Penzance*:

When Frederic was a little lad he proved so brave and daring,
His father thought he'd 'prentice him to some career seafaring.
I was, alas, his nurserymaid, and so it fell to my lot
To take and bind *the* promising boy apprentice to a pilot.
A life not bad for a hardy lad, though surely not a high lot.
Though I'm a nurse, you might do worse, than make your boy a pilot.
I was a stupid nurserymaid, on breakers always steering,
And I did not catch the word aright, through being hard of hearing;
Mistaking my instructions, which within my brain did gyrate,
I took and bound *this* promising boy apprentice to a pirate.
A sad mistake it was to make and doom him to a vile lot,
I bound him to a pirate — you — instead of to a pilot.

Or the lilt of the rollicking duet in *Ruddigore*, "Oh, Happy the Lily when Kissed by the Bee"; or, perhaps most surprising of all, the sad, endless tangle of the Lord Chancellor's nightmare in *Iolanthe*, as delirious as Tristan's fever:

When you're lying awake with a dismal headache
And repose is tabooed with anxiety,

with its transition at the end in which the notes seem to smell of dawn and dew:

But the darkness has passed, And it's daylight at last,
And the night has been long, Ditto, ditto, my song,
And thank goodness, they're both of them over!

But one need hardly say that the most salient and supreme of Sullivan's gifts is that of *tune*, the gift of pouring out a stream of beautiful bubbling melodies. Most of these tunes are part of the permanent furniture and limbo [consciousness] of our minds. They are on the mouths of all and chiefly on the lips of the young. They rise in the heart and gather on the lips unbidden. Let those who are inclined to think Sullivan's melodies too facile listen on the gramophone to the duet in *Ruddigore*, "The Old Oak Tree," or turn up the score of *Princess Ida* and play the quartette, "The world is but a broken toy," or "Free from his fetters grim" in *The Yeomen of the Guard*. This is such a beautiful tune that the public, when Mr. Derek Oldham sang it during the recent revival, never even encored it. They were too greatly moved to do so, too satisfied hardly even to applaud.

Sullivan has another gift which is the hallmark of great art, the gift of discretion, of leading up to an effect in such a way that the effect when it comes seems as sudden as an April shower and yet as inevitable as a flower opening. For instance, the way a famous song is led up to in *Pinafore*:

I am an Englishman, behold me.
He is an Englishman;
For he himself has said it, etc.

Or more striking still, in *The Mikado*, the music that precedes the phrase:

For he's going to marry Yum-Yum.

Gilbert's favourite opera is said to have been *The Yeomen of the Guard*, and certainly he never wrote more beautiful words than:

Is life a thorn?
Then count it not a whit! Man is well done with it;
Soon as he's born
He should all means essay To put the plague away;
And I, war-worn, Poor captured fugitive,
My life most gladly give; I might have had to live
Another morn!
Is life a boon?
If so, it must befall That Death, whene'er he call,
Must call too soon.
Though fourscore years he give, Yet one would pray to live
Another moon! What kind of plaint have I
Who perish in July? I might have had to die,
Perchance, in June!

And Sullivan never wrote anything more exquisite than the music to this, nor than the duet "I have a song to sing O," and the unaccompanied quartette "Strange adventure," in the same opera. But here both the poet and the composer enter into successful rivalry with other composers of the past. The lyric "Is life a boon?" might have come from an Elizabethan songbook; the duet "I have a song to sing O" from an Italian opera.

I would like to give one instance of something which only Gilbert could have written and only Sullivan could have composed. An instance of the kind is, I think, the quintette in the Second Act of the *Sorcerer*:

I rejoice that it's decided. Happy now will be his life,
For my father is provided With a true and tender wife.
She will tend him, nurse him, mend him, Air his linen, dry his tears,
Bless the thoughtful fates that send him Such a wife to soothe his years.

No poet except Gilbert would ever have thought of the phrase, "Air his linen, dry his tears." No composer could have clothed the words more appropriately or more exquisitely.

But it is, perhaps, in *Iolanthe* that Gilbert and Sullivan display, if not their highest, their most peculiar qualities. *Iolanthe* is, I think, the most Gilbertian of all the operas, and the music is peculiarly characteristic of Sullivan. Nobody but Gilbert could have imagined the Arcadian shepherd, who is half a fairy — a fairy down to the waist — but his legs are mortal and is engaged to a ward in chancery; the susceptible Lord Chancellor; the chorus of peers; the philosophical sentry who thinks of things that would astonish you, and the final departure of peers and fairies to fairyland:

Up in the sky Ever so high
Pleasures come in endless series.
We will arrange Happy exchange,
House of Peers for House of Peris.

In this opera we are in the centre and capital of the cloud cuckoo-land of Gilbert's invention, the headquarters of his fantastic fairyland.

That Gilbert lived in fairyland, or rather that he created a fairyland of his own, is a fact that is often overlooked. He is credited with the honours, the supreme honours, of topsy-turvydom, so that whenever anything peculiarly contrary to common sense happens in the public life or the Government of the country, we call it Gilbertian, but he is not as a rule credited with the glamour of magic. And yet that he possessed the secret key which unlocks the doors of that tantalising country is proved by the verdict of those who are the sole and only judges, namely, children. Children know that the land of *Ruddigore*, of *The Gondoliers*, of *The Mikado*, *Iolanthe*, and *Patience* is fairyland — the real thing. Only a few months ago I had the opportunity of comparing the opinions of some children who had been taken to see first *Jack and the Beanstalk* at the Hippodrome and then *Iolanthe*. Their verdict was that *Iolanthe* was a real pantomime, and that *Jack and the Beanstalk* in its modern shape, interlarded with political allusions and music-hall tags, was not. In Gilbert's world the impossible is always happening.

The Arcadian shepherd does marry the ward in Chancery. Private Willis, of the Grenadier Guards, does sprout little red wings, and the Fairy Queen sees to it that he is properly dressed. The pictures come down from their frames in *Ruddigore*, and the picture that hangs at the end of the gallery in a bad light, comes to life in obedience to Gilbert's inflexible and impossible logic, and marries his old love. Even in the operas where there are no actual fairies and no element of the supernatural, no pictures coming to life, no dapper salesman brewing love-philtres as in the *Sorcerer*; even in a plain satire such as *Patience*, we look at things through a coloured glass, or a glass that reveals hidden colours, such as that which the wizard gave to the Prince in the fairy tale, and through which when he looked at the stars, he saw that they were many-coloured instead of all of them being white. They would be many-coloured looked at through such a glass, of course. And constantly throughout this opera we hear the horns of elfland faintly blowing, especially when the twenty lovesick maidens languish vocal in the valley, or when they lead Bunthorne like a heathen sacrifice with music and with fatal yokes of flowers to his (and to their) eternal ridicule.

Or, again, when the Gondoliers embark on board the xebeque and set sail for the shores of Barataria:

Away we go To a balmy isle,
Where the roses blow All the winter while.

That is one of the most important factors in the power of Gilbert, who here again was able to find a purveyor of fairy music in Sullivan; and [in addition] I think that *The Mikado* has, perhaps, more than all the other operas, the quality of a fairy tale, although there are no fairies in it.

Another important factor in Gilbert's work is the quality of his satire. Some people detest it. It affects them like bitter aloes. But it owes its enduring permanence, not to bitterness, for it is never really bitter, but to a certain breadth and force which has two cardinal merits. Firstly, that of being dramatic, of getting over the footlights, of appealing to the component parts of a large and mixed audience, so that the stalls will smile at one line and the gallery be convulsed at another, and all will be pleased; and, secondly, of being general enough to apply to the taste and understanding of succeeding generations. Gilbert's satire, although directed at the phenomena of his own time, had a Molière-like quality of broad generalisation, which applied not only to the fashions and follies of one epoch, but to the eternal weaknesses of unchanging human nature.

So that when the First Lord in *Pinafore* sings:

Stick close to your desks and never go to sea,
And you may all be rulers of the Queen's Navee,

or when Private Willis says that "every boy and every girl that is born into the world alive is either a little Liberal or else a little Conservative," the words go quite as straight home to a modern audience as they did to the public which first heard them.

But although Gilbert's satire is not bitter, it is undeniable that it sometimes has an element not only of downrightness, but of harshness in it. It is not savage, like that of Juvenal or Swift, but it is not too squeamish for a knock-out blow. This may sometimes, and does sometimes, ruffle and jar upon the sensitive. But these easily ruffled persons should remember that Gilbert's harshness is an ingredient which is to be found in all the great comic writers; in Aristophanes, in Cervantes, in Molière, and indeed in any comic writer whose work endures for more than one generation. It is a kind of salt which causes the soil of comedy to renew itself; and in Gilbert's case it arises from his formidable commonsense. He never took his paradoxes seriously as so many of his successors did. He is as sensible as Dr. Johnson, and sometimes as harsh. Gilbert has often been blamed for gibing at the old. It is true that his jokes on the subject of the loss of female looks are sometimes fierce and uncompromising. But they are mild indeed compared with those of Aristophanes, Horace, and Molière; and on closer inspection, we find it is not really at the old he is gibing, but at the old who pretend to be young; at Lady Jane's infatuation for Bunthorne; at Katisha's pursuit of Nanki Poo. Such things exist, and if they exist we must not be surprised if satirists laugh at them and laugh loud. What is exceptional in Gilbert's satire is that he combined with this downright strong commonsense and almost brutal punching power a vein of whimsical nonsense and ethereal fancy which generally goes with more gentle and flexible temperaments.

The third cardinal quality of Gilbert's work is almost too obvious to dwell upon, namely his wit, both in prose and in rhyme; his neat hitting of the nail on the head, his incomparable verbal felicity and dexterity; and the peculiar thing about Gilbert's verbal felicity is its conversational fluency. He uses the words, the phrases and the very accent and turn of ordinary everyday conversation and yet invests them with a sure, certain and infectious rhythm, the pattest of rhythm; and rhymes that are always inevitable, however fantastic and far-fetched. For instance:

> When the coster's finished jumping on his mother, — On his mother,
> He loves to lie a-basking in the sun, — In the sun.
> Ah, take one consideration with another, — With another,
> The policeman's lot is not a happy one, — Happy one.
> [*Iolanthe*]

Or, again:

> But when the breezes blow,
> I generally go below,
> And seek the seclusion that a cabin grants,
> And so do his sisters and his cousins and his aunts.
> [*Pinafore*]

We find the same pat neatness in his prose. Take Ko Ko's explanation to the Mikado:

When your Majesty says "let a thing be done," it's as good as done; practically it is done, because your Majesty's will is law. Your Majesty says, "'Kill a gentleman!" and a gentleman is told off to be killed. Consequently that gentleman is as good as dead; practically, he *is* dead, and if he is dead, why not say so?

Another remarkable fact about Gilbert's satire is this. Just those subjects which, when he treated them, were thought to be the most local and ephemeral, have turned out, as treated by him, to be the most perennial and enduring. Take *Patience,* for instance. *Patience* was a satire on the aesthetic craze of the 'eighties. It was produced in 1881. It was aimed at the follies and exaggerations of the aesthetic school — the greenery-yallery, Grosvenor-gallery, foot-in-the-grave, hollow-cheeked, long-necked and long-haired brood of devotees of blue china and peacocks' feathers and sunflowers, who were the imitators, the hangers-on and the parasites of a group of real artists and innovators, such as Whistler, Burne-Jones and Rossetti.

Punch started the campaign of ridicule, and Du Maurier's pictures of the adventures of Maudle and Postlethwaite towards the end of the 'seventies, are amongst the most entertaining and delightful of his drawings. *Patience* is said to have killed the phase; but outside the pages of *Punch* it is doubtful if aesthetes were really very beautiful, and *Patience* was based on the legend of a few, of a very few, people. But in writing this satire, Gilbert, if he magnified the follies of his contemporaries, hit the bull's eye of a wider target. He struck the heart of artistic sham, so that his satire is appropriate to any time and any place.

Wherever there is real art there is always exaggerated imitation, and wherever there is real admiration there is false admiration, too. In Bunthorne and Grosvenor, Gilbert drew two types which sum up between them the whole gamut of artistic pretension and humbug. In every false world of art there is always a Bunthorne who has discovered that all is commonplace, and the burden of whose song is "Hollow, hollow, hollow." There is always, too, a Grosvenor, the apostle of simplicity, who is ready to write "a decalet, a pure and simple thing, a very daisy — a babe might understand it. To appreciate it, it is not necessary to think of anything at all." There is always a rapturous maiden ready to say "not supremely, perhaps, but oh so all but."

In the great flood of latter-day verse the school of Bunthorne still exists:

Oh to be wafted away
From this black Aceldama of sorrow.
Where the dust of an earthly to-day
Is the earth of a dusty to-morrow.

That is Bunthorne's "little thing of his own," called "Heart Foam."

I will not quote from a modern Bunthorne — that would be far too dangerous — but this is how the brilliant parodist of *Punch* who signs himself Evoe travesties the modern Bunthorne:

> Now while the sharp falsetto of the rain
> Shampoos the bleak and bistre square,
> And all seems lone and bare,
> A crimson motive floats upon the breeze.

I think Bunthorne would have been proud to sign these lines.

Grosvenor's poem began:

> Gentle Jane was as good as gold,
> She always did what she was told.

The twenty lovesick maidens are with us still. And this school of elaborate simplicity still has disciples. They read Freud and they paint cubes, and they listen with rapture to the music of Skriabin, and the more unintelligible they find it the better they like it. This doesn't at all mean that the art they admire is necessarily sham, any more than the art of Whistler and Rossetti was sham in the 'eighties; but it means that every school of art has always had and always will have foolish disciples who imitate and exaggerate the faults of the master without being able to emulate his excellences.

But there always comes a moment in the world of make-believe, whether it is the world of the *Précieuses-Ridicules* or the world of Dadists, when the voice of commonsense will come breaking in, like the chorus of Gilbert's heavy dragoons. The entry of these dragoons in *Patience* is one of those effects which show Gilbert's sure instinct for stage effect, his consummate stage-craft, his profound knowledge of the theatre. The sudden crash of the brisk music of commonsense and its clash with the Della-Cruscan world of vaporous nonsense is not only comic but dramatic and *scenic.* It appeals to the eye as well as to the ear and the mind. It is comic and dramatic by the contrast it makes, by the shock of surprise it gives, and the incongruous situation it creates; and it is scenic by the picture it presents. The very uniforms conspire with their brilliance and unabashed primary colours to, as Henry James would say, "beautifully swear" with the Whistlerian and pre-Raphaelite colours and arrangements in pink and mauve and sage-green of the rapturous maidens.

To some people the chorus of those heavy dragoons will recall a picture of an epoch that is as far away now as Nineveh and Tyre. The picture of London of the 'eighties; the bands playing "A magnet hung in a hardware shop" in the streets in the morning; the Park in the afternoon, crowded with elegant carriages, barouches, and victorias, a highly-perched dowager waving a small gloved hand; Rotten Row in the morning, crowded with top-hatted cavaliers and ladies witching the world with horsemanship and faultless habits; the photographs of Mrs. Langtry and the professional beauties in shop windows; the perfumed, padded, silken missives of St. Valentine's day; the little flat bonnets with bows; the Du Maurier ladies, haggard from adoration, green with love and indigestion at the classical concerts; and the Princess of Wales driving past in an open carriage as beautiful and as graceful as Queen Alexandra.

And before leaving the subject of *Patience*, I should like to end with one quotation which contains, I think, the whole essence of Gilbert and Sullivan, so that if this song alone survived we should know what was the best they could do, both of them:

Prithee, pretty maiden, will you marry me?
Hey, but I'm hopeful, willow willow waly.
I may say at once I'm a man of propertee,
Hey willow waly O.
Money I despise it,
Other people prize it,
Hey willow waly O.

Gilbert never wrote anything better than that, and Sullivan, as usual, rose to the occasion, and clothed these tripping syllables with a most delicate vesture of melody, in which a fairy-like pizzicato accompaniment falls on the thread of tune, like dewdrops on gossamer. If this song had had German or Italian words, and had reached us from Vienna or Milan, the critics would have made as much fuss over it as over any tune in Mozart.

Cannot you imagine it being warbled by an Italian welterweight prima donna and a luscious Italian tenor?

Non del mio amore Donna ti scordar,
Deh! esperanza, sorgi in cuore mio,
Dai miel soldi non ce da dubitar
O salice senza un Addio.

Or in German something like this:

Willst Du, hübscher Jungfer, nicht mein Weibchen sein
Bin Ich doch hoffnungsvoll, O weide Wehe,
Will es Dir gleich sagen Hab' ein Schloss am Rhein jai
O weide Wehe.

Or in French:

Charmante bergère, je demande ta main!
Tremble mon coeur comme un saule pleureur!
Sache sans mystère, je possède un moulin.
Oh la joie, la joie fait peur.

Or words to that effect. I don't pretend that they are correct. That tune, when *Patience* was first produced, was whistled in the streets and taken for granted as one of the popular airs of the day; but how few people at the time recognised its rarity as a gem.

You have only to look at the back numbers of *Punch* to see how niggardly critical opinion of all shades was of its praise of these masterpieces when they were first produced. And I remember myself hearing grown-up people talking of them as if they were so much scaffolding for the display of the actors of the day, who, we must not forget, were then, as they still are now, quite exceptionally remarkable.

It is seldom that one cast included two such exceptional artists as George Grossmith and the great baritone who has just left us, Rutland Barrington. They did more than perfectly fill their parts. They inspired Gilbert and Sullivan to create new characters; Grossmith with his perfectly natural fantasy, and Barrington with his suave imperturbable gravity.

It must be a comforting thought for modern musicians to think that it takes about thirty years for people to appreciate their music at its true value, even when, as not always happens, it wins instantaneous popularity. But when *Princess Ida* was first produced the verdict of *Punch* and of the public was "No Grossmith part," just as they now might say "No Leslie Henson or no Nelson Keys part." Sometimes, as in the case of Bizet, a masterpiece, and what was to prove one of the most popular of operas, namely, *Carmen,* was kept for years unacted in the drawer of a manager.

I remember once during Holy Week at Moscow, when there was a fair going on at the Kremlin, seeing a little old man hawking about some gold-fish in a very small bottle. He kept on piping out in a high falsetto "Fish, fish, fish, fish, little gold-fish. Who will buy?" "Who will buy?" he piped, as he walked up and down between the bookstalls and the booths. But the people bought toys and sugarplums, clothes and books, boots and old odd volumes of *Punch* and John Stuart Mill and Mrs. Humphry Ward, but no gold-fish.

No one would buy the little gold-fish; for men do not recognise the gifts of Heaven, the magical gifts, when they see them. In the case of Gilbert and Sullivan they bought at once; but they thought that these gold-fish were as common as dirt. It was only when the sellers were dead that they recognised that what they had been buying so easily and so cheaply was magical merchandise from fairyland; that there was nothing to match it and nobody else to provide anything of that kind any more.

Even now, it is doubtful whether Sullivan's music has received the serious recognition it deserves. Critical people, the serious that is to say, are always prone to despise a gold-fish because it is gold and looks pretty, and they are sometimes inclined to patronise tunes if they are gay, light and joyous. Anything in art that is ponderous, serious, complicated and unintelligible is at once respected; but if a tune is gay and easy, a poem rhythmical and well rhymed, a picture pleasantly coloured, with a subject that is perfectly plain, so that if it represents a field, the field looks like a field, and not like the forty-second proposition of Euclid, the serious are inclined to look at it askance. I remember in 1914 some academicals wrote indignantly to the newspapers, because "Tipperary" was a popular tune, and this roused Dr. Ethel Smyth, a judge of tune if ever there was one, to wrath; and she wrote to say she was certain that the tune of "Tipperary" would have delighted Schubert.

Some people will never forgive Sullivan for being popular, and never admit that a tune which can be as infectious as small-pox in a slum should be taken seriously. But the whole point of really great art is that while it satisfies the critical it pleases the crowd, that while children can enjoy it, it fills the accomplished craftsman with despair at being unable to emulate it. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Alice in Wonderland*, Gray's *Elegy*, and *The Midsummer Night's Dream* are instances in point.

But there is no reason to be despondent. Gilbert and Sullivan's operas, always popular, are now [1922] receiving the best kind of recognition, although there are still some dissentient voices and still some implacable high-brows. And they are as popular with the young generation as they were with the old. About this there is no possible doubt whatever; when they are given at the Universities now, they are even more popular than lectures on relativity, and the undergraduates crowd to them. About their popularity in London there can be little doubt when people are ready to sit outside the theatre for twenty-four hours to be present at the last performance of the season.

At the Prince's Theatre during the recent admirable revival of the operas, there was something in the atmosphere of the theatre which was different from that at all other theatres in London, except the "Old Vic." You felt at once you were forming part of an audience that definitely knew what they liked. They were there to enjoy themselves, and they knew that they *would* enjoy themselves. This in itself is to some people invaluable.

The operas were enjoyed by the old who saw them through mists of many memories, and who were not disappointed with their present-day interpretation. They were enjoyed by the young, and they came as a revelation to those who had never seen them before. Children found in them the most magical of pantomimes; politicians, the keenest and the most actual of satires; musicians, a treasure-house of skill and invention; writers and playwrights, an ideal of verbal felicity and stage-craftsmanship, far beyond their reach.

One night, during the recent revival of *lolanthe*, I was sitting next to a celebrated modern author and an extremely-accomplished manipulator of words. When the chorus sang:

> To say she is his mother is a bit of utter folly!
> Oh, fie! Strephon is a rogue!
> Perhaps his brain is addled and it's very melancholy!
> Taradiddle, taradiddle, tol lol lay!

he said to me, "That's what I call poetry," and he added that he thought that the most permanent and enduring achievement of the Victorian age would be neither that of Tennyson, Browning or Swinburne, or Gladstone, Disraeli and Parnell, or Darwin, Huxley and Ball, but the operas of Gilbert and Sullivan. I am inclined to agree with him; and I should not be in the least surprised if, in ages to come, people will talk of the age of Gilbert and Sullivan, as they talk of the age of Pericles. Perhaps they will confuse fact with fiction, and the children of the future will think that trials by jury in that amusing age were conducted to music; that pirates and policemen hob-nobbed at Penzance; that Strephon, the Arcadian Shepherd brought about the reform of the House of Lords; that the Bolshevik Revolution took place in Barataria; and the Suffragist movement happened at Castle Adamant.

In thinking of the triumph, and the permanent popularity, of these operas and the excellent manner in which they are produced and interpreted at the present day, it is impossible not to regret that we should only be able to hear them during a short season at intervals of two years. What we want is a permanent Opera House, where not only Gilbert and Sullivan, but all other English music, such as *The Beggar's Opera,* and foreign music too, should be done all the year round.

What a grand opportunity is here for a model millionaire such as Gilbert would have invented, to create a permanent Gilbert and Sullivan House, at which other operas might be acted, new operas produced, and old operas revived. Perhaps such a man will turn up one day; for although all millionaires are not model, some of them are musical.

THE END