

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

W.S. GILBERT AND VICTORIAN COMEDY, 1867-1877

by

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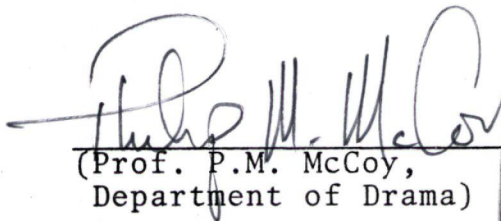
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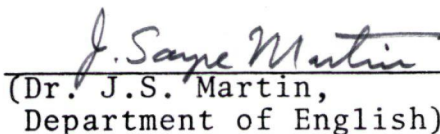
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "W.S. Gilbert and Victorian Comedy, 1867-1877" submitted by Charles Hayter in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

Chiefly remembered today for his comic opera libretti, Sir William Schwenk Gilbert (1836-1911) was also the author of a number of non-musical comic works written prior to his collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan. In this thesis, these early plays--farces, poetic comedies, and prose comedies--are studied and assessed against the background of Victorian comedy in general. While the farces, extravaganzas, and comedies of the mid-Victorian stage are largely trivial and mediocre in quality, Gilbert's work is innovative in form and theme. His early farces and comedies reveal that he was most at home in witty and fantastic satire, and the nature of this satire not only changes the direction of comedy in the nineteenth century but also makes Gilbert a significant figure in the development of modern drama.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the extraordinary aspects of the Victorian theatre is the monumental and diverse output of its chief dramatists. Dion Boucicault wrote over 150 plays between 1840 and 1880; Tom Taylor began his equally prodigious career in burlesque and extravaganza and later moved through the realms of comedy, melodrama, and poetic drama. It is only in the latter decades of the nineteenth century that dramatists begin to restrain their output and specialize in one or two genres.

Although his name today is generally associated with only one dramatic form, the comic opera, W.S. Gilbert is no exception to this rule of prolific output. For almost fifteen years before he began his profitable association with Arthur Sullivan and Richard D'Oyly Carte, Gilbert was one of the most popular and successful dramatists of his day. It is not certain when he wrote his first piece

for the theatre, but from 1863 to 1880 he wrote over fifty farces, comedies, dramas, burlesques, and extravaganzas.

These early works, like so much of Victorian drama, have largely been ignored or forgotten by theatre historians and critics. As with the plays of his contemporaries, most of Gilbert's work is available today only in the pages of original French or Lacy acting editions. In Gilbert's case, this neglect may be seen as at least partly due to the overwhelming and continuing popularity of the Savoy Operas, which possess the Gilbertian paradox of being a good and a bad thing at the same time: while, through the venerable D'Oyly Carte Opera Company and various amateur groups, they keep alive before us on the stage the Gilbertian world, they also distract attention from his early work and make it seem an inferior shadow of greater things to come. Much of what passes for criticism of Gilbert's early work consists merely of the game of tracking down characters, settings, situations, and themes which foreshadow those in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

These early works, however, have not been forgotten by practitioners of the theatre. In 1975, amid the celebrations of the centenary of the first Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, Trial by Jury, there were three productions of non-musical Gilbert works in Britain:

two of Engaged, at the National Theatre in London and the Octagon Theatre, Bolton, and one of Tom Cobb, by the Hammersmith Drama group. Of the National Theatre production of Engaged, one reviewer said:

Engaged is written in exactly the same style of dialogue as the libretti of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, but the plot is a hundred times as good as any of them ... This funny and original play has been neglected too long. I suspect it will now become a rep favourite.

(B.A. Young, The Financial Times)

The production caused as much controversy among critics in 1975 as the original did in 1877. "Bomb-shell under Victorian hypocrisy turns out a damp squib," proclaimed The Times' headline, while The Daily Telegraph spoke of "Comic Period Charms of Gilbert's Engaged." Similarly, the production of Tom Cobb demonstrated that the work is still lively and interesting, and fruitful for comment and criticism.

These productions suggest that the time is ripe for a reassessment of Gilbert's non-operatic work. Not only are many of his early plays still stageworthy, but they reveal aspects of Gilbert's thought not apparent in the Savoy Operas. Most important, when set in the context of Victorian drama in general, many of them are revolutionary in form and theme. These plays deserve closer attention than they have received in the past, and it is with this outlook in mind that this study is conceived and written.

However, it would be beyond the scope of this thesis

to try to examine all of Gilbert's early work, for from 1866 to 1877 (the year of The Sorcerer, the first lengthy Gilbert, Sullivan, and D'Oyly Carte collaboration), Gilbert wrote or adapted roughly forty-six works for the stage. During this period, he worked in nearly all the popular Victorian dramatic forms: melodrama, burlesque, extravaganza, comedietta, farce, pantomime, and comedy. In all of these areas, the quality of his work invites study and comment, but this thesis will be limited to a discussion of his work in three comic genres: farce, poetic comedy, and prose comedy. In these areas above all, Gilbert made significant contributions to the growth of nineteenth-century comedy. In the following chapters, then, little or no mention will be made of Gilbert's early musical works, his melodramas, or his adaptations and translations. The reader is directed to the Chronological Table of Gilbert's Early Plays on pp.6-7 where his early plays are listed in detail and categorized according to genre.

This study will focus on Gilbert's contributions to Victorian comedy from 1867 to 1877, the formative period of his development as a dramatist. The plays of this period will be approached from the point of view of Victorian drama in general: Gilbert's farces and comedies will be viewed against the background of the Victorian comic stage. In this way it is hoped to gain an insight into the nature of Gilbertian comedy and its place in the development of nineteenth-century drama.

Before discussing Gilbert's plays, it is worthwhile to note some of the theatrical conditions affecting playwriting, and particularly those affecting the writing of comedy, when Gilbert began his career in the 1860's. While it would be impossible to provide a detailed survey of the nineteenth-century theatre, some knowledge of the theatrical background is useful in assessing Gilbert's dramatic career.

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF GILBERT'S EARLY PLAYS

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>FARCES</u>	<u>POETIC COMEDIES</u>	<u>COMEDIES</u>	<u>OTHER</u> (See Key Below)
1866				<u>Hush-a-bye Baby</u> (P) <u>Dulcamara</u> (OB)
1867	<u>Allow Me To Explain</u> <u>Highly Improbable</u>			<u>La Vivandiere</u> (OB) <u>Robinson Crusoe</u> (B) <u>Harlequin Cock-Robin</u> (P)
1868				<u>The Merry Zingara</u> (OB) <u>Robert the Devil</u> (OB)
1869			<u>An Old Score</u>	<u>No Cards</u> (MP) <u>The Pretty Druidess</u> (OB) <u>Ages Ago</u> (MP)
1870		<u>The Palace of Truth</u>		<u>The Princess</u> (B) <u>The Gentleman in Black</u> (MP) <u>Our Island Home</u> (MP)
1871		<u>Pygmalion and Galatea</u>	<u>Randall's Thumb</u> <u>On Guard</u>	<u>A Sensation Novel</u> (MP) <u>Creatures of Impulse</u> (MP) <u>Great Expectations</u> (A) <u>Thespis</u> (E)
1872	<u>A Medical Man</u>			<u>Happy Arcadia</u> (MP)

CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE (CONT'D)

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>FARCES</u>	<u>POETIC COMEDIES</u>	<u>COMEDIES</u>	<u>OTHER</u> (See Key Below).
1873	<u>A Colossal Idea</u> <u>The Realm of Joy</u>	<u>The Wicked World</u>		<u>The Happy Land</u> (B) <u>The Wedding March</u> (A/T)
1874	<u>Committed for Trial</u> (A/T) <u>The Blue-Legged Lady</u> (A/T)		<u>Sweethearts</u>	<u>Charity</u> (M) <u>Ought We To Visit Her?</u> (A) <u>Topsyturvydom</u> (E)
1875		<u>Broken Hearts</u>	<u>Tom Cobb</u>	<u>Trial by Jury</u> (CO) <u>Eyes and No Eyes</u> (MP)
1876				<u>Princess Toto</u> (CO) <u>Dan'l Druce</u> (M)
1877			<u>Engaged</u>	<u>On Bail</u> (A/T) <u>The Sorcerer</u> (CO)

Key

A = Adaptation of Novel
A/T = Adaptation/Translation of French Work
B = Burlesque
CO = Comic Opera
E = Extravaganza
M = Melodrama
MP = Musical Play
OB = Operatic Burlesque
P = Pantomime

CHAPTER II

VICTORIAN THEATRICAL CONDITIONS: A BRIEF SURVEY

On September 28, 1868, the Saturday Review carried the following anonymous comment:

We are justified in concluding that the drama has reached a lower stage in its decline than at any former period of its existence, and that, as a peculiar institution, it closely approximates to utter extinction.

However false this judgement may seem to us now, it gives a good indication of the attitude of most educated Victorians towards the theatre. To the middle- or upper-class Victorian, educated at, say, Dr. Arnold's Rugby on a diet of classics, the melodramas of Boucicault and the extravaganzas of Planché seemed decidedly vulgar and coarse. Theatres and theatre people were considered disreputable, even immoral. The furthest a middle-class Victorian ventured from the propriety of his sitting-room was to attend musical "entertainments" such as those given by Mr. and Mrs. German Reed at their Gallery of Illustration. Upper-class society, in the eighteenth century the mainstay of the theatrical audience,

was to be seen at only one London theatre, the King's, the home of Italian opera in nineteenth-century London. An important question to be considered in any discussion of Victorian drama is: what drove the middle- and upper-classes, the classes of education and refinement, from the theatres in the nineteenth century?

To answer this, it is necessary to glance back to the social and economic conditions that were changing the face of Britain in the early years of the nineteenth century, and particularly to the phenomenon generally termed the Industrial Revolution. As England grew from an agriculturally-based to an industrial nation, the bulk of its population moved to the cities. Between 1831 and 1851 London's population grew from 1,900,000 to 2,600,000. By far the largest sector of this population was the working-class, which accounted for nearly one-half of the population.¹

Dickens in his Sketches by Boz, one of the best records of life in early Victorian London, gives us an idea of the effect of this sudden population growth on social conditions:

The filthy and miserable appearance of this part of London (around Drury Lane) can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it. Wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper: every room let out to a different family, and in many instances to two or even three - fruit and 'sweet-stuff' manufacturers in the cellars, barbers and red-herring vendors in the front parlours, cobblers in the back, - a bird-fancier in the first floor, three families on the second, starvation in the attics, Irishmen in the passage, a

'musician' in the front kitchen, and a char-woman and five hungry children in the back one - filth everywhere - a gutter before the houses and a drain behind - clothes drying and slops emptying, from the windows; girls of fourteen or fifteen, with matted hair, walking about bare-foot, and in white great-coats, almost their only covering, boys of all ages, in coats of all sizes and no coats at all; men and women, in every variety of scanty and dirty apparel, lounging, scolding, drinking, smoking, squabbling, fighting, and swearing.²

It is easy to deduce the effect of such social conditions on the theatre, for the inevitable requirement of these new masses of London was entertainment. Living in squalid, noisy surroundings, working at dull, tedious jobs, and lacking television, radio, and above all, literacy (compulsory education did not begin until 1870), the masses of London turned to the theatres for, one must presume, relief and escape from the world around them.

The phenomenon sketched briefly above - the rise in London of a huge, uneducated mass audience - was the major social condition which affected the theatres from 1800 to 1860. The theatres, in the age of Sheridan the homes of society, fashion, and wit, "succumbed to the rabble as a weakened constitution might to a virulent disease."³ What the rabble demanded chiefly as entertainment was spectacle, and spectacle the theatre managers quickly provided. At Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1804 the stage was replaced by a tank ninety feet long by twenty-five feet wide and five feet deep to accommodate 'water dramas' which featured miniature

navies engaging in sea battles. The Adelphi Theatre, opened in 1806, quickly became the home of melodrama which dealt in pure sensation only: murders, tortures, wicked baronets, imprisoned maidens, castles, spectres, and vampires thrilled audiences nightly. Even the two supposedly "legitimate" theatres, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, succumbed to the masses. Drury Lane was burnt down in 1809, rebuilt in 1812, and remodelled in 1821 to hold 3,590 spectators. Covent Garden was similarly enlarged after a fire in 1808. In these huge auditoriums, acting quickly descended to rant and raving. By mid-century, Drury Lane had become the home of pantomime, and the manager of Covent Garden was declaring that his theatre "had not made a single shilling on the regular drama from 1809 to 1821, but had subsisted entirely upon pantomime, spectacle, and melodrama."⁴

As the fare at most theatres deteriorated, so did the physical conditions. Dickens in Sketches by Boz gives us a picture of the interior of an early Victorian theatre:

The foot-lights have just made their appearance: the wicks of the six little oil lamps round the only tier of boxes are being turned up, and the additional light thus afforded serves to show the presence of dirt, and absence of paint, which forms a prominent feature in the audience part of the house. As these preparations, however, announce the speedy commencement of the play, let us take a peep 'behind,' previous to the ringing-up.

The little narrow passages beneath the stage are neither especially clean nor too brilliantly lighted; and the absence of any flooring, together with the damp mil-

dewy smell which pervades the place, does not conduce in any great degree to their comfortable appearance...This miserable room, lighted by candles in sconces placed at lengthened intervals round the wall, is the dressing-room, common to the gentlemen performers, and the square hole in the ceiling is the trap-door of the stage above. You will observe that the ceiling is ornamented with the beams that support the boards, and tastefully hung with cobwebs.⁵

To Dickens' portrait must be added the seedy quality of a large portion of the audience, made up of prostitutes, pickpockets, and other undesirables. Furthermore, far removed from the staid, reverent calm which pervades twentieth-century audiences, nineteenth-century audiences were talkative and noisily responsive to what went on on the stage, and often violently abusive to what they considered a poor performance or play.

The theatres thus became places at which no respectable Victorian gentleman or lady dared be seen. Moreover, just as the social elite avoided the theatre, so did the literary. However much some of them aspired to drama, all the great literary artists of the period - Tennyson, Arnold, Browning, Dickens, Eliot - either found conditions in the theatre unreceptive or restricted their output to the non-dramatic forms of the novel or poetry. The successful playwright was not the literary artist: it was he who sacrificed art to giving the audience what they wanted, which was easy laughter and tears, strong moral and patriotic sentiment, and thrilling spectacle. Drama was reduced to a kind of shorthand for the actor and stage machinist. In his

The Victorian Theatre, George Rowell says:

No other period in English theatre history illustrates so clearly the fact that a play exists only fully in performance. Many plays of the period, famous in their day, appear scarcely intelligible on the printed page ... To recreate from the text a performance of a Victorian play calls for an imagination strongly disciplined to the theatrical practice of the day.⁶

The quality of mid-Victorian playwriting may well be illustrated by the closing scene of Boucicault's The Corsican Brothers of 1852:

Chateau-Renaud and Fabien Dei Franchi close in mortal conflict. Chateau-Renaud overthrows him; but just as he is going to strike, Fabien plunges his weapon into his breast. Chateau-Renaud falls into Montgiron's arms, who places him under the tree where Louis Dei Franchi fell.

Fabien. Louis! Louis! I can weep for you now. Music. Throws himself into Meynard's arms - comes down and sits on stump of tree. Louis Dei Franchi appears rising gradually through the earth, and placing his hands on his shoulder.

Louis. Mourn not, my brother; we shall meet again.

Curtain slowly descends.⁷

Twenty years later, Leopold Lewis' The Bells demonstrated little advance in the level of playwriting. Here is the final scene from Act One:

Mathias. (alone - comes forward and listens in terror. Music with frequent chords). Bells! Bells! He runs to the window and, slightly drawing the curtains, looks out.) No one on the road. What is this jangling in my ears? What is tonight? Ah, it is the very night, the very hour! (Clock strikes ten) I feel a darkness coming over me. (Stage darkens)

A sensation of giddiness seizes me.
 (He staggers to chair) Shall I call
 for help? No, no, Mathias. Have
 courage! The Jew is dead! (Sinks on
chair; the Bells come closer; then
the back of the Scene rises and sinks,
disclosing the Bridge of Vechem, with
the snow-covered country and frozen
rivulet; lime-kiln burning in the dis-
tance. The Jew is discovered seated in
sledge dressed as described in speech in
Act 1; the horse carrying Bells; the
Jew's face is turned away. The snow is
falling fast; the scene is seen through
a gauze; limelight. Vision of a man
dressed in a brown blouse and hood over
his head, carrying an axe; stands in
an attitude of following the sledge.
When the picture is fully disclosed the
Bells cease.

Mathias. (his back to scene). Oh, it is
nothing. It is the wine and cold that
have overcome me! (He rises and turns;
goes up stage; starts violently upon
seeing the vision before him. At the
same time the Jew in the sledge suddenly
turns his face, which is ashy pale, and
fixes his eyes sternly upon him. Mathias
utters a prolonged cry of terror, and falls
senseless. Hurried Music).⁸

Of course, as George Rowell indicates, such passages are like the words of a song without music: they live only through performance, which explains why the nineteenth century, so deficient in outstanding drama, was nonetheless a great age of acting. In the hands of Charles Kean or Henry Irving the passages quoted above could be rendered in an effective and moving way, if we are to judge from contemporary newspaper accounts.

However, our concern here is not with acting, but play-writing, and we have seen how the domination of the theatres

by the working-class masses brought about a decline in English drama by the mid-nineteenth century. Another factor was the existence until 1843 of theatrical monopoly, by which Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and (in the summer) the Haymarket were the only theatres licensed to present "legitimate" drama. As difficult to define exactly today as it was in the early nineteenth-century, "legitimate" drama was basically distinguished from "illegitimate" drama in that the former involved spoken dialogue while the latter involved only pantomime, music, and dancing. The monopoly rights which permitted Drury Lane and Covent Garden to present legitimate drama extended back to the patents granted by Charles II to Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant in 1660, and to the Licensing Act of 1737, which attempted to suppress minor theatres by giving the Crown and the Lord Chamberlain powers of censorship on the theatres in London. Subsequent legislation allowed local magistrates to license minor theatres, but these theatres were restricted to presenting only the illegitimate forms of drama. Although by the 1820's and 1830's managers of minor theatres were circumventing the monopoly restrictions by presenting spoken dialogue to musical accompaniment (the original form of melodrama), it is clear that any playwright writing in the early nineteenth century would have felt enormously limited by the monopoly restrictions. Ernest

Watson in his Sheridan to Robertson states:

It is certain, at least, that all of those who during these years might have accomplished far more for the drama under free conditions, considered themselves bound absolutely by the monopoly restrictions. Such were ... Jerrold, who considered himself condemned by monopoly conditions to depend upon the minor drama for success; Planche, who was obliged to translate and adapt from the French only such pieces as the law would allow at the Olympic and other minor houses; and, more important than all others, Vestris and Mathews, who were ambitious to develop a new type of comedy, but who were limited to 'burlettas'.⁹

But what of the major theatres? Could not a dramatist write for Drury Lane and Covent Garden, supposedly the homes of true drama? Unfortunately not, for here an obstacle already mentioned stood in the way: the tremendous popularity with the masses of such illegitimate forms as melodrama, pantomime, and burletta. Drury Lane and Covent Garden practically gave up producing legitimate drama in the 1830's. By 1843, the year of the Theatre Regulation Act which freed London's theatres from monopoly restriction, illegitimate forms were so intrenched in the theatres that the death of legitimate drama seemed imminent.

Even after the lifting of the monopoly restrictions, there were yet other obstacles to the development of English drama. One was the total dominance, by about 1850, of English playwriting by French ideas and forms. In his The English Stage (1897), Augustin Filon remarks, "There was no getting along without us French between 1850 and 1865.

We were translated and adapted in every form."¹⁰ Rather than invent their own material, English playwrights took advantage of the absence of international copyright to mercilessly pillage the flourishing French drama for plots, characters, and settings. The first melodrama produced in London, Thomas Holcroft's A Tale of Mystery (1802), was an adaptation of one of Guilbert de Pixérécourt's mélodrames. The methods of Scribe's comédie-vaudeville and pièce bien faite were slavishly imitated by Boucicault, Taylor and other writers of comedy. Even such an apparently jolly English piece as John Madison Morton's Box and Cox of 1847 turns out on close examination to be an amalgamation of two popular French farces. Both of the plays referred to earlier, The Corsican Brothers and The Bells, are adaptations of French plays. In short, the safest and most effortless path to success on the mid-Victorian stage was through plagiarism from the French.

Although Black-Eyed Susan was one of the most popular and frequently revived pieces in the Victorian theatre, its author, Douglas Jerrold, received only seventy pounds for the original manuscript which he sold to its first producer. Clearly another adverse condition affecting playwriting was the meagre remuneration paid to dramatists for their work. Furthermore, authors had no control over when, where, and by whom their works could be performed. The "pirating" of plays continued well into the latter part of the century.

This lack of copyright protection prevented the publication of plays, which might have been a welcome added source of income for playwrights. Although a Dramatic Authors' Society was founded in 1830, it was not until the 1860's that the royalty system was first introduced by Boucicault, and even later that copyright laws came into being. In the 1840's and 1850's, a playwright could not hope to live upon the income from his plays alone, and had to have another profession, as Tom Taylor and Charles Reade had. At a banquet given in his honour in 1842, Sheridan Knowles said, "I stand before you a poor man, having produced fifteen plays, all of which, if I might judge from their receptions and criticisms upon them, have been successful."¹¹

The final significant factor which worked against the profession of playwriting in the Victorian theatre was theatrical censorship. Originally intended to protect the Crown from attack on the stage, by the nineteenth century the position of Examiner of Plays had become not only politically but morally and religiously oriented. John Larpent, who held the office from 1778 to 1824, was an ardent Methodist who would not tolerate the mention or depiction of religion or churchmen on the stage. His successor, George Coleman (1824-1836) was no less strident and expunged all references to "Lord", "God", and "Heaven" from plays submitted for his scrutiny. Even as late as 1875, W.B. Donne altered the title of James Albery's The

Good Samaritan to The Spendthrift. Gilbert's adaptation of Great Expectations (1871) was returned with the last word of Magwitch's line "Here you are in chambers fit for a lord" changed to "Heaven". As one writer observed, this archetypal Victorian behaviour "played its part in holding nineteenth century drama down to the level of mere ephemeral amusement, an entertainment for the eye and ear alone, isolated from the intellectual and imaginative life of the time."¹²

In approaching Gilbert's plays, then, it is well to keep in mind the state to which English drama had fallen by mid-nineteenth century. The shunning of the theatres by the social and literary elite, the demands of a mass audience, the effects of the monopoly restrictions, the dominance of French forms and ideas, the lack of a royalty or copyright system, and the presence of censorship all created a complex and interwoven net of circumstances hostile to the development of English drama.

In particular, comedy had fallen to its lowest ebb since the eighteenth century. This was due as much to the theatrical conditions outlined above as to the inhibitions of an age when laughter in general was considered improper and comedy frivolous and trivial. In drama, as in life, tears of sympathy, pity, or bliss were preferred to laughter of scorn or chastisement. As the following chapters will show, genuine wit and originality in comedy had died with

Sheridan in 1816: the most vigorous comic forms of the Victorian stage were noisy farces and frothy extravaganzas. The dearth of intelligent comedy made Meredith in 1877 cry out in desperation:

O for a breath of Aristophanes, Rabelais,
Voltaire, Cervantes, Fielding, Molière!¹³

It is the purpose of this study to see to what extent Gilbert revived the spirit of these writers on the English stage.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1. For discussions of Victorian social conditions, see J.F.C. Harrison, The Early Victorians 1832-1851 (New York: Praeger, 1971); Mary Lazarus, Victorian Social Conditions and Attitudes, 1837-1871 (London: Macmillan, 1971); Priscilla Metcalf, Victorian London (New York: Praeger, 1972); J.B. Schneewind, Backgrounds of English Victorian Literature (New York: Random House, 1971).
2. Charles Dickens, "Gin Shops," Sketches by Boz (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), p. 184.
3. Earnest B. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson: A Study of the Nineteenth-Century London Stage (New York: Blom, 1963), p. 6. The information about Victorian theatrical conditions contained in this chapter is derived largely from this work, and from W.W. Appleton, Madame Vestris and the London Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974); Augustin Filon, The English Stage: Being an Account of the Victorian Drama (New York: Blom, 1969); David Mayer, Harlequin In His Element (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); Ernest Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama (New York: Blom, 1965); George Rowell, The Victorian Theatre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); and Newell Sawyer, The Comedy of Manners from Sheridan to Maugham (New York: Barnes, 1971).
4. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, p. 13.
5. Dickens, "Private Theatres," Sketches, pp. 122-123.
6. Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, p. 2.
7. Dion Boucicault, "The Corsican Brothers," The Magistrate and Other Nineteenth-Century Plays, Michael R. Booth, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 240.
8. Leopold Lewis, "The Bells," Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century (New York: Dell, 1967), pp. 133-134.
9. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, p. 42.
10. Filon, The English Stage, p. 77.
11. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, p. 250
12. Sawyer, The Comedy of Manners, pp. 112-113.

13. George Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," Comedy, Wylie Sypher, ed. (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p. 34.

CHAPTER III

CURTAIN-RAISERS, 1867-1873

In an autobiographical article written in 1883 for the magazine The Theatre, Gilbert said:

Of the many good and staunch friends I made on my introduction to journalism, one of the best and staunchest was poor Tom Robertson, and it is entirely to him that I owe my introduction to stage work. He had been asked by Miss Herbert, the then lessee of St. James' Theatre, if he knew any one who could write a Christmas piece in a fortnight. Robertson, who had often expressed to me his belief that I should succeed as a writer for the stage, advised Miss Herbert to entrust me with the work, and the introduction resulted in my first piece, a burlesque on "L'Eliser d'Amore," called "Dulcamara; or, the Little Duck and the Great Quack".¹

This remark is the source of the much-repeated misconception that Gilbert began writing plays with Dulcamara in 1866.² In fact, his interest in playwriting stretched back to his school days: an article in Scribner's Monthly in 1879 says that the young Gilbert wrote many plays, including a melodrama on the story of Guy Fawkes, for performance by his schoolmates at Ealing School. The article goes on to say that after he graduated from the University of London and had become a clerk in the Privy Council office, and before he reached the age of twenty-four, Gilbert was the author of at least fifteen plays.³ That he began writing plays long before Dulcamara is corrob-

orated by Gilbert himself in an interview which appeared in the Strand Magazine in 1891: "I was always writing plays for home performance, and at eighteen wrote a burlesque in eighteen scenes," which was offered to "every manager in London."⁴

In addition, we now know that Gilbert certainly wrote a large part of a comediotta entitled Uncle Baby produced at the Lyceum Theatre in 1863,⁵ and had a large hand in a pantomime called Hush-a-bye Baby produced before Dulcamara in December of 1866.⁶ The theory that he suddenly began writing plays in 1866, then, does not hold much water. It is likely that in the Theatre article he chose to regard his first professional success in the theatre, Dulcamara, as his "first piece", and omitted mention of his earlier theatrical efforts.

However, the notion that the burlesque Dulcamara is Gilbert's first play has influenced many of his biographers and critics into thinking that because he entered the theatre through the door of burlesque, his burlesques are his central and most characteristic early work.⁷ However, as has been suggested above, Gilbert's beginnings as a playwright were broader than that: he had tried comedy, melodrama, and pantomime before the production of Dulcamara. Even after the success of Dulcamara and his subsequent burlesques, he turned his hand to other dramatic forms. One of these was the one-act farce. In 1867, for example, his theatrical output consisted not only of the burlesques La Vivandiere and Robinson

Crusoe and the pantomime Harlequin Cock-Robin, but also the two farces Allow Me to Explain and Highly Improbable.⁸ Gilbert continued to write farces all through his early career: A Medical Man (1870), A Colossal Idea (1873), The Realm of Joy (1873), Committed for Trial (1874), and The Blue-Legged Lady (1874). Although the quantity of these works is small, and the quality often mediocre, they represent a neglected area of his work which warrants examination before moving on to his more interesting three-act comedies.

Before examining Gilbert's farces, however, it is important to note the main features of that unique and much-neglected theatrical form, the mid-Victorian farce. Fortunately, the problem of definition is not as difficult with farce as with other Victorian dramatic genres, since the form remained quite fixed from about 1840 to 1870. The mid-Victorian farce was of one act and was played as either a curtain-raiser or afterpiece to the main item on the playbill (usually a melodrama), in much the same fashion that a short cartoon is appended to a longer film today. During the eighteenth century, one-act or two-act farces had been played as afterpieces, as the title of Mrs. Inchbald's anthology of 1809 suggests: "A Collection of Farces and Other 'Afterpieces, which are acted at the Theatres Royal."⁹ It is interesting to note the change of position on the playbill that farce underwent during the nineteenth century, for by the 1860's farces were generally

played as curtain-raisers, not afterpieces. A playbill from the Princess' Theatre in 1865 is typical:

This evening, the Performance will commence at Seven, with a Farce, entitled Quiet Lodgings! ... After which, at a Quarter to Eight, an Original Drama, in Four Acts ... It Is Never Too Late To Mend, by Charles Reade.¹⁰

One cannot indeed think of a more logical place for the farce than that of the curtain-raiser, since it relaxed and warmed up the audience for the main fare of the evening.

As mentioned above, the popularity of farce as a secondary item on the playbill began in the eighteenth century. However, the nineteenth-century farce was quite different from its eighteenth-century ancestor. In his English Comedy, Ashley Thorndike points out that while the other drama of the late eighteenth-century grew increasingly sentimental and melodramatic, farce retained many of the characteristics of the Restoration and early eighteenth-century comedy of manners.¹¹ But by the mid-nineteenth century the form had become, to say the least, eclectic in scope and material. The first aspect that is striking about the nineteenth-century farce in contrast to its predecessor is its generally lower- or middle-class setting. Instead of breathing the refined air of boudoirs, salons and apartments, the farce descends into the world of kitchens, shops, hotels, lodging-houses and front parlours. The characters too are generally drawn from the lower social strata of Victorian England. J.S.

Coyne's How to Settle Accounts with your Laundress of 1847 takes place in a tailor's shop and has a tailor and a laundress as its chief characters.¹² William Brough and Andrew Halliday's The Area Belle (1864) is set in a kitchen and features a maid, a policeman, and a grenadier.¹³ This movement of farce down the social scale clearly reflects the change in theatrical audience from 1800 to 1850 noted in Chapter Two.¹⁴

In characterization, the types of eighteenth-century farce are in the nineteenth-century replaced by figures delineated chiefly by humorous eccentricity. For example, the main character in William Brough's Trying It On of 1857 is Walsingham Potts, who is defined by his extreme nervousness and fidgetting.¹⁵ Fanny Jobstock, having seen Potts at the opera the night before, describes him to her mother:

What made me notice him was the extraordinary manner in which he kept fidgetting about. He could not sit still a moment. First I noticed him picking open a little hole in the back of the seat, where the stitches had begun to give way. As soon as he had succeeded in making this big enough to get his fingers in, he commenced scratching a speck of white, off a gentleman's coat in front of him. Well, the gentleman turned round to ask him what he meant by it: he was, of course, full of apologies, they entered into conversation, and all the while they were talking, I noticed him buttoning and unbuttoning the other gentleman's waistcoat, arranging his watch-chain; and, in fact, setting him generally to rights.¹⁶

When Potts enters, he pulls off the maid's ribbons and apron and picks apart her feather duster. Often the most eccentric

character in a Victorian farce is an older parent or guardian obsessed by a crackpot scheme or invention. Griffenhoof in J.B. Buckstone's Shocking Events of 1838 is a horse doctor who believes he can cure human deafness by firing pistols and exploding gunpowder to shock his patients into speaking.¹⁷ T.J. Williams' The Trials of Tompkins concerns the attempts of Peepington Sharpshins to test his daughter's suitors' punctuality, patience, politeness, appetite, temperance, affection, education, handwriting, and physique, among other things.¹⁸

The nineteenth-century farce embraced an enormous variety of original and ludicrous situations. In T.J. Williams' A Cure for the Fidgets (1867) Finnikin Fussleton accidentally exchanges clothes with Jack Johnston, a grenadier.¹⁹ The subsequent confusion, which involves Hercules Sparks, a fireman, and Cecelia Walkerjohn, Fussleton's fiancée, builds to a scene in which Finnikin pretends to be mad:

Fussleton. (aside) I'll teach them to spoil my holidays for me. (pretending to go suddenly "daft", he seizes broom, gets across it straddle-legged, and begins capering madly about the stage, singing)
 "Ride a cock horse to Banbury Cross," etc.
Walkerjohn. (amazed) Why, he's out of his mind!
Fussleton. (throwing away broom and striking a fantastic attitude) What sounds are those I hear? (idiotically) 'Tis the evening muffin man with the baked potatoes!
All. (in sympathetic surprise) the baked potatoes!!
Fussleton. (continuing, and tripping playfully across the stage) No, 'tis the paperhanger with the jam tarts!²⁰

In the same author's Found In A Four Wheeler (1866) Mr. Udulpho Holloway disguises himself as a cab driver to follow his wife, whom he wrongly suspects of carrying on an illicit affair.²¹ The accumulation of misunderstandings and deception seen in these two pieces characterizes the plots of nineteenth-century farce.

The ludicrous situations of farce are always reinforced by much physical stage business. To aid their deceptions, characters may disguise themselves, as in Charles Matthews' Patter versus Clatter (1838) where Captain Patter disguises himself as a German moneylender and as a barber to win the hand of Polly Perker.²² Ludicrous situations are often underscored by the use of properties, particularly those of a domestic or culinary kind. In J.M. Morton's Box and Cox (1847) the central comic situation of two men unwittingly sharing the same apartment is emphasized by the chop and bacon each man attempts to cook on the fire and which is discovered and removed by the other inhabitant.²³ The comic climax of a farce is often reached in an intensely physical scene involving chases, comic violence, suicide threats, duels, and general brouhaha.²⁴

Finally, all these elements - eccentric characterization, ludicrous situations, and physical stage business - are crammed into a time framework which pressurizes events to an absurd and bewildering level. Most farces are of one act and meant to be played in thirty to forty-five minutes.

Eschewing all logical unity, these pieces race along and only stop for breath at the one feature common to them all: the concluding "tag", in which the central character directly addresses the audience and invites its approval.

In addition to the entertaining quality of the scripts themselves, a large portion of farce's popularity came from the actors who specialized in this form. Many farces were written as vehicles for the leading comedians of the mid-Victorian era; some actors, notably Charles Matthews and Charles Selby, wrote their own.²⁵ The type of actor that farce required was the low comedian, who excelled in eccentric characterizations and stage business.²⁶ The following scene from Trying It On in which Walsingham Potts has a necklace stuck down his back is a good example of low comedian material:

Walsingham. Now for it. (he makes renewed efforts to reach the necklace.) Oh, lord! it's gone out of reach. Hah, the tongs! (he takes the tongs and puts them down his back) Ugh, how cold they are! Now - gently - gently - hah! I've got it. (draws out the tongs) Oh, it's gone again. There's no help for it, here goes. (he takes his coat off and tries to reach it beneath his waistcoat.) No. (unbuttons his waistcoat) Now I must get it. Yes - no, it's gone. (with a sudden thought) Pooh! What folly, putting myself in such a state about it, it's all right; now - of course - I ought to have tried that plan before. (shakes his leg so as to kick it out at the leg of his trousers) Yes, there it is - Oh! It's in my boot. Good gracious! and I wear straps.²⁷

In fact, if one was looking for a single term to define mid-Victorian farce, it is low comedy, which suggests the broadness and physicality of the form. There is nothing subtle in the nineteenth-century farce; it is a broad form, and often revels in it.

Something of the range and diversity of the Victorian farce within the general features outlined above will perhaps be indicated by a brief consideration of the individual work of three masters of the genre. As Michael Booth says, "the golden age of nineteenth-century farce was the forties, fifties, and sixties,"²⁸ and this period was dominated by the work of John Baldwin Buckstone, John Madison Morton, and Thomas J. Williams.

Buckstone, a leading actor, playwright, and manager in London during the mid-nineteenth-century, was a prolific writer of farces in the 'thirties and 'forties. In his A Dead Shot of 1830 Louisa and her lover Frederick outwit her uncle, Captain Connors, and her suitors, the pedantic Mr. Wiseman and the nervous Mr. Timid.²⁹ This farce is typical of hundreds of early nineteenth-century farces in its love intrigue and mildly eccentric characters.³⁰ In A Kiss In the Dark (1840) the virtuous Mrs. Pettibone revenges herself on her husband's suspicions of her infidelity by pretending to be in love with Frank Fathom. Her husband suitably chastized, she reveals all was a ploy to teach him a lesson, and he forgives her.³¹ In A Rough Diamond (1847), the country innocence

and simplicity of Margery Evergreen is demonstrated as being superior to the city sophistication of Lady Plato.³² Bob Ticket in An Alarming Sacrifice of 1849 renounces a handsome will in favour of Susan Sweetapple, who in turn bestows it on Bob again.³³ These last three examples are included to show the preponderance of moral sentiment in Buckstone's work. Amusing as many of his situations may be, Buckstone's intent is often to make a moral statement: in these three examples, about the virtues of trust in marriage, the innocence of the country compared to the city, and the virtues of the good heart. Michael Booth demonstrates that much of Victorian farce, particularly in the hands of Buckstone, shares the moral basis of melodrama in this period.³⁴

While Buckstone acted, produced, and wrote lengthier works in addition to his farces, the entire career of John Madison Morton seems to have been devoted to the one-act farce. With the production of Box and Cox in 1847, he became the unrivalled master of the genre for at least a decade. Box and Cox epitomizes nearly all the qualities of the mid-Victorian farce: a lower-class setting, a ludicrous situation, clever stage business. Onto this conventional framework Morton grafts his own special gifts of construction and sense of the absurd. Box and Cox is a gem of economical and balanced structure, both in its overall layout of scenes and in the tight, clean rhythms of such passages as this:

Mrs. Bouncer. What is the matter?

(Cox and Box seize Mrs. Bouncer by the arm, and drag her forward.)

Box. Instantly remove that hatter!

Cox. Immediately turn out that printer!

Mrs. Bouncer. Well, but gentlemen --

Cox. Explain! (pulling her round to him)

Box. Explain! (pulling her round to him)

Whose room is this?

Cox. Yes, woman, whose room is this?

Box. Doesn't it belong to me?

Mrs. Bouncer. No!

Cox. There! You hear, sir - it belongs to me.

Mrs. Bouncer. No - it belongs to both of you! (sobbing)

Box & Cox. Both of us?³⁵

It is only after this initial encounter between Box and Cox that Morton's sense of the absurd begins to manifest itself fully. Burlesquing of conventions of melodrama - particularly, of the coincidences and reversals with which melodrama abounds - provides Morton's launching-pad for an excursion into sheer nonsense. As the bizarre coincidences and reversals dealing with Penelope Ann accumulate with breath-taking rapidity, the mere parody of melodrama is transcended and the play creates its own absurd world crowned by that glorious non-sequitur:

Box. Cox! You'll excuse the apparent insanity of the remark, but the more I gaze on your features, the more I'm convinced that you're my long-lost brother.

Cox. The very observation I was going to make to you!

Box. Ah, tell me - in mercy tell me - have you such a thing as a strawberry mark on your left arm?

Cox. No!

Box. Then it is he!³⁶

Morton's sense of the absurd is displayed in at least

two other pieces, A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion (1849),³⁷ and Sent to the Tower (1850).³⁸ Unlike Buckstone, Morton never allows moral sentiment to enter his nonsense world, and in this way his work is a breath of fresh air in the heavily sentimental atmosphere of most Victorian drama. This is not to say that Morton did not write conventional pieces, for his most original work is balanced by such pieces as A Capital Match! of 1852, a standard love intrigue.³⁹ However, even in his most conventional pieces, he often introduces some unexpected element: at the close of Poor Pillicoddy (1848), for example, Pillicoddy begins munching on poppy seeds and falls asleep standing up.⁴⁰

Thomas J. Williams was the master of the farce in the 1860's, its last decade of great popularity. His strength lay in his ability to create memorable and amusing eccentric characters. The world of his farces is inhabited by a gallery of eccentric beings, often defined by some ridiculous idiosyncrasy of language. For example, in The Better Half (1865), Captain Percy Shrewsbury, a fop calling on Lady Manby, exclaims languidly:

'Pon my life, the vewy notion of having to get up at the unconsciousably pwecocious hour of ten, has pwevented my sleeping a wink all night. Stwange time for calling upon a lady; but she said this was her only disengaged moment, so I pwevailed upon myself to make an effort.⁴¹

Williams is the creator of many amusing cockney servants,

such as Milly Middlestone in Found in a Four Wheeler, who describes her existence as "that dull and dissoloot it's enough to make one do something desprit, just for a little wariety."⁴² His farces often centre around an eccentric parent whose wild schemes involve his family in ridiculous and embarrassing situations. Mr. Spriggins in Ici On Parle Français (1859), for example, has determined to rent all the rooms in his house, located at a seaside resort, to tourists, with the result that his family is crammed uncomfortably into the attic.⁴³ In Pipkin's Rustic Retreat (1866), Mr. Pipkin, obsessed by the apparent simplicity and innocence of country life, moves his family from their comfortable house in the city to a dilapidated, crumbling country mansion.⁴⁴

In addition to his gifts for characterization, Williams was the master of the "screaming farce" in which deceptions, misunderstandings, and reversals occur at a bewildering rate and reach a climax in a scene of frenzied physical action. For example, the climax of Pipkin's Rustic Retreat is reached in a scene in which Pipkin, believing his house is inhabited by bandits, appeals to the potboy, Shandy Gaff, for help:

Re-enter Perks (the maid), door L. 2 E.,
dragging in Shandy Gaff, very drunk, with
a bottle in his hand.

Shandy. (hiccupping) What prime bottled ale
that was, to be sure!

Pipkin. (rushing frantically to Shandy)
Respectable young man, I throw myself on
your protection.

Shandy. (recognizing Pipkin, and pushing
him back) Why, you're the wicked old

sinner as I seen cuddling my Betsy.
Mrs. Pipkin. (L., indignantly) Cuddling
 his Betsy?
Shandy. (sparring at Pipkin) Vy, you ought
 to be ashamed of yourself, at your time
 of life.
Pipkin. (running away) Don't believe him!
 He's one of the gang!
Mrs. Pipkin and Florinda. (screaming) Oh -
 o - o - oh!
Shandy. (following up Pipkin) I'll serve
 you out, you old hippopotamus! (strikes
Pipkin)
Pipkin. (roaring) Murder!
Rushes round table, and then out at door
L. in flat.
Shandy. (pursuing him, closely following
by Mrs. Pipkin, Betsy, and Florinda)
 I'll settle his elderly business for him!
Runs out after him, at door L. 1 E. -
crash outside - a tremendous noise heard,
as of two people bumping down stairs.
Mrs. Pipkin. (screaming) Aha! He's killing
 my husband!
Exit, running, at door L. 1 E.)
Florinda. (wildly, running across from R. to
L.) He's murdering my pa!
Exit, running, at door L. 1 E.)
Perks. (running from R. to L.) He's a vol-
 laping my master! (Exit, running, at
door L. 1 E.)
Robinson. (excessively bewildered) What the
 devil is the matter with them all? They
 are all going suddenly stark, staring,
 raving mad! (terrific noise continues to
be heard outside - loud crash.)⁴⁵

This last observation leads directly to the central comic vision of Victorian farce: an often nightmarish vision of a world gone mad. Michael Booth explains farce in the following way:

The best farce is the disciplined expression of moral and domestic anarchy, the plausible and logical presentation of a completely crazy world that all the characters take with the

greatest seriousness, a world in which extraordinarily absurd pressures on the ordinary individual drive him to the very limit of his resources and his senses, a world in which he can survive only by pitting the ingenuity of his own insanity against the massive blows of hostile coincidence and a seemingly remorseless fate.⁴⁶

However, what is most important about the Victorian farce is not its momentary rendering of order into chaos, but rather the benevolence with which the chaotic aspects of the human condition are treated. The centre of farce is the holiday from rationality, but they invariably close with a scene of reconciliation, good will, and affirmation of order. The Victorian farce's basic view of man is that despite his eccentricities and weaknesses he is still a lovable being: his faults can be forgiven. There is no malice in the comedy of the Victorian farce, no hint of mockery or ridicule in its presentation of human follies.

In this way, the farce partakes of that sentimental comic vision which dominated the first part of the nineteenth-century and which saw man not as an object of scorn or ridicule but of warm, friendly mirth. Robert Bernard Martin in his The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory postulates that the movement of comedy in the nineteenth century was from this sentimental humour to intellectual wit, and that this shift took place around 1870.⁴⁷ If this is true, it helps to explain the decline of the one-act farce around 1870, and Gilbert's relation to the form.

One critic has remarked, "Perhaps there has never been such a completely debased form of literature as the Victorian farce."⁴⁸ The preceding paragraphs, in addition to sketching the background for Gilbert's farces, have attempted to show that on the contrary the Victorian farce was a robust, lively, comic form, capable of expressing its comic vision with originality and artistry. In an age when most comic forms sank to a depressing low, it retained a surprising and refreshing vitality.

Before discussing Gilbert's contributions to the farce form, brief mention should be made of his earliest produced work, Uncle Baby,⁴⁹ since it is styled a "Comedietta", a comic form related to the farce in its one-act structure and secondary place on the playbill. Its chief differences from farce lay in an attempt at sophistication which avoided the grotesqueries of characterization and plot characteristic of farce.⁵⁰ Gilbert's early excursion into this field is an unfortunate one. The play is hardly worthy of the name "comedietta," since it contains little that is funny. It concerns Mary, a girl whose mother died, leaving her in charge of her brothers, sisters, and Uncle John. John recklessly squanders Mary's money on gambling and drink.⁵¹ In the play, both Mary and Annie, her sister, discover that they love the same man, Alfred Beaumont, and to solve the dilemma, Mary renounces her love for Alfred in favour of

Annie. As this brief synopsis indicates, the play might more aptly be termed a one-act melodrama. Gilbert's heavy-handed and obviously immature approach wrenches the utmost pathos and sentimentality out of the situation. This is best exhibited in the scene where, spurred on by her cousin Richard to one of those paroxysms of self-sacrifice in which Victorian heroines revelled, Mary renounces Alfred:

Mary. Deceived by everyone - by uncle and
by sister - oh, miserable me -

Richard. By sister?

Annie. Oh, Mary, Mary, - pardon me, pardon
me. Throwing herself at her feet. Why
did I not tell you all from the beginning.
Mary, dear Mary, forgive me.

Richard. Tell her all - tell her all what?

Mary, I don't know what your sister has
done, but I am sure she is unhappy and I
know that is enough for you. Look at her.
Look where she lies, so sorry and so tear-
ful - will you not raise her up?

Mary. I cannot, I cannot, she knows not what
she has done.

Richard. Nor I, but I know that your child
suffers and that you are loving and mer-
ciful - do not let her suffer in this
presence. He takes Mary's hand and points
to the picture.

Mary. Mother - oh! my mother!

Richard. They were so young, so little when
she left them to you - do as she would have
done, even if the forgiveness cost you more
than you have already given them.

Mary. It does. It does.

Richard. Then will your reward be much greater -
if not here - there. Points to heaven. Be
their mother to the last.

Mary. Turning to Annie and opening her arms.
Annie!

Annie. Springing into them. Oh my sister.⁵²

The play also contains some rather heavy-handed social
comment in the form of the dissolute Uncle John, whose presence

in the play enables the other characters to make such pronouncements as this:

Would that all who get themselves intoxicated could only see themselves - no longer men, but animals - no longer God's glorious handiwork, but the equal - no - not the equal, the inferior of the beasts of the world.⁵³

Gilbert thus makes his dramatic debut with a sentimental whimper rather than a bang. However, it is wise not to take Uncle Baby too seriously, for the play shows signs of having been extensively rewritten by someone other than Gilbert.⁵⁴

Gilbert's first one-act farce, Allow Me to Explain, was produced at the Prince of Wales' Theatre on November 4, 1867.⁵⁵ The plot concerns Mr. Cadderby, who has had an annuity settled upon him by a benefactor, with the one condition that the annuity is dependent on the life of a Mr. John Smith. As the play begins, Cadderby is attempting to locate John Smith so that he may protect him from imperilment to his life. With his wife Anna Maria, his daughter Amelia Ann, and her fiance Ferdinand Boker, he arrives at Mrs. Simpkins' Commercial and Family Hotel in the hope that John Smith is staying there. In a corridor in the hotel, Cadderby encounters a rude individual with whom he has an argument culminating in an agreement to fight a duel. Cadderby persuades Boker to fight the duel for him, but as it is about to commence, he discovers the individual is none other than John Smith. To remove him from danger, he persuades Boker to pose as a lunatic and

thus nullify the duel. No sooner has he done so than Smith points a pistol at his own head and declares he is about to kill himself for love of Mrs. Cadderby. Cadderby forces his wife to flirt with Smith to appease his love, but Smith's attentions shift to Amelia Ann. Ignoring Boker's remonstrances, Cadderby agrees to a match between Smith and Amelia. Suddenly a letter from the benefactor arrives which says the annuity is to be made dependent on Amelia Ann instead of Smith. Boker now reclaims Amelia Ann, but in a final twist she rejects him in favour of John Smith.

From this synopsis, it is evident that the play is constructed from conventional farce material. The plot, centering on an eccentric father who places his family in a number of ludicrous positions, might have been lifted from any of Williams' works. The suicide threats of Smith and the mock-duel are both well-worn farce devices.⁵⁶ The strongest influence on the play is Morton, and this reveals itself in the delightfully nonsensical dialogue, as in the scene where Cadderby is attempting to persuade Boker to fight the duel:

Boker. But hang it! I may be killed!

Cadderby. Of course you may. In the event of that disaster, Amelia Ann shall carve your epitaph upon your tomb with her own fair hand! What more could you want?

Boker. But I still don't see ...

Cadderby. And if that isn't enough, I will myself plant a willow over your grave - and water it with my tears. Come!

Boker. You will?

Cadderby. I will.

Boker. That decides me!⁵⁷

The most unconventional and interesting aspect of Allow Me to Explain is the absence of a normal requisite of Victorian farce, physical stage business. The setting -- "A corridor in a hotel. Doors numbered 12, 13, 14" -- raises expectations that are never fulfilled. Given this setting, one would expect the play to develop as a "screaming farce" and culminate in a wild scene involving characters hiding in the rooms, rushing in and out of doors, and so on. However, in marked contrast to the methods of most Victorian farceurs, Gilbert chooses to develop his plot in a purely verbal way. That is, the comedy of the play rests entirely on the development through dialogue of the nonsensical twists and turns of the plot. This chastening of standard farcical technique extends in fact to all levels of the play: none of the characterisations approach the broad physicality of, say, Williams' creations.

How is one to interpret the lack of low comedy in the play? It may be explained by the theatre for which the piece was originally written, the Prince of Wales', where during the 1860's the Bancrofts were attempting to tame the worst extravagances of Victorian comedy through the plays of T.W. Robertson.⁵⁸ In fact, Allow Me to Explain was played as a curtain-raiser to one of Robertson's comedies.⁵⁹ This theory seems sound until one notices that there are many scenes of unabashed low comedy in Robertson's plays. When looked at in comparison to the comic scenes of Caste,⁶⁰ Allow Me to Explain seems tame indeed.

The answer to this problem is perhaps to be found in Gilbert's own attitude to stage comedy. In an article entitled Actors, Authors, and Audiences published by Gilbert in 1869, the author of an unsuccessful play is brought before a jury of its audience. Among the figures who give evidence before the jury is the "low comedian," who says:

I did my best with the part. I bought a remarkably clever mechanical wig -- (laughter) -- for it -- (laughter) -- but it was useless. (Roars of laughter) In my zeal in behalf of the Prisoner I introduced much practical "business" into the part that was not set down for me. (Laughter) I did not charge extra for introducing practical business; I introduced it solely in the Prisoner's interest. No doubt the Prisoner remonstrated, but I knew what an audience likes much more than he does. (Laughter) The part was soundly hissed -- even the introduced scene with the guinea-pig and the hair-oil. (Roars of laughter).⁶¹

This satirical portrait of the low comedian is reinforced by what we know of Gilbert's methods as a director later at the Savoy. He scowled upon the introduction of low comedy by any member of his company. George Grossmith, the creator of many of the great comic rôles in the Gilbert and Sullivan operas, recollected the following confrontation with Gilbert:

"I am told, Mr. Grossmith, that in last night's performance when you and Miss Bond were kneeling before the Mikado she gave you a push and you rolled completely over on the floor."
 "Yes. You see, I -- in my interpretation of Ko-Ko --."
 "Whatever your interpretation, please omit that in future."
 "Certainly if you wish it, but I got a big laugh by it."
 "So would you if you sat on a pork pie."⁶²

Gilbert, then, showed a definite dislike of low comedy all through his career, and its absence from Allow Me to Explain may be seen as one manifestation of this dislike. However, this does not make Allow Me to Explain a superior farce: on the contrary, it is only a mediocre work precisely because it lacks the robustness and vitality given farce by low comedy. Its strongest element is its dialogue, which possesses a witty nonsensicality that offers a foretaste of Tom Cobb and Engaged, but on the whole it makes little advance on the spirited romps of Morton and Williams, who were not afraid of the pork pie.

Gilbert's next farce, Highly Improbable, produced at the New Royalty Theatre on December 5, 1867,⁶³ demonstrates the same aversion to low comedy. The play concerns Mr. Peter Bowindo, M.P., who has recently moved from London to his constituency of Little Snugborough (population: 12) so that he may better "devote himself occasionally to the interests of his constituents." His six daughters are bored in Little Snugborough, however -- until their father tells them he is expecting a guest, Mr. Tom Fergusson, for a fortnight's stay. Mr. Fergusson is a candidate who is to run with Bowindo in the next general election, and is assisting Bowindo with his "M.P.'s Matrimonial Qualification Bill," which requires that all M.P.'s must be married. Presuming that Fergusson is a country bumpkin, the six daughters decide to play a joke on him by dressing up as female members of various professions:

Polly as a lawyer, Jenny as a sailor, and Tilly as a doctor. Fergusson arrives, and upon encountering the girls and suspecting something is amiss, formulates a problem by which he can test their legal, nautical, and medical knowledge:

Ladies, this is a most distressing case. My unfortunate servant was crossing the Irish Channel with me the other day - a collision with a Cunard vessel took place at the mouth of the Mersey, and this miserable young man was knocked down the companion, and every bone in his body broken. I am anxious to commence an action on his behalf against the owners of the vessel, but I am wholly ignorant of the laws of the case, quite unacquainted with his chance of recovery from the effect of the accident, and utterly unaware of the rules that prevail when two ships meet stern on at sea. (p. 13)

Each of the girls is asked for her professional advice on this problem, and each of course fails miserably. Their trick is unmasked, and the play ends as Fergusson asks for Polly's hand, so that he can qualify under Bowindo's bill.

As in Allow Me to Explain, the play contains little physical business, except for the costuming of the girls as professionals. Once again, Morton's influence is evident in the dialogue, particularly in this burlesque of melodramatic oath-takings:

Polly. We will nail our colours to the mast, and fight our ship to the water's edge. Swear it on your croquet mallet.
Polly, Jenny, and Tilly. (holding up croquet mallets) On our croquet mallets we swear it!
The Others. (operatically) On their croquet mallets they swear it! (p. 7)

However, whereas Allow Me to Explain is only a very

mediocre work, Highly Improbable is enlivened by a variety of amusing and original elements. Through Bowindo's six daughters, the play takes a satiric look at the clash of town and country. The girls are bored in Little Snugborough and express their contempt for the countryside in the following way:

Bowindo. I've a surprise for you - guess
 what it is?
Polly. Perhaps the thrilling excitement
 of district visiting?
Jenny. Or a reckless course of Sunday School
 teaching!
Tilly. Or the wild revelry of a Parish tea-
 fight!
Lotty. The gay delirium of a needle-work
 class!
Patty. The intoxicating delight of a potato-
 show!
Milly. Or to go to tea with the curate!
Bowindo. No - no - no, it's none of these.
 A young gentleman is coming to stop with
 us for a fortnight. (p. 3)

The girls' contemptuous attitude is given a dressing-down in the central comic scene of the play, in which they fail to bluff their way through Fergusson's examination of their skills. Their attempts to answer him in a correct professional way result in some neat parodying of legal, nautical, and medical jargon. For example, in attempting her medical examination of Fergusson's servant, Tilly says:

Ha. Very bad indeed. We have ossified our
 left shoulder-blade, we have splintered our
 parietal artery, and we are suffering from a
 compound fracture of the lower lumbage. (p. 16)

Asked for her legal advice, Jenny says:

Well, having got your conviction and issued your writ you prove an alibi - take out a declaration (fee five shillings), traverse, challenge the jury, petition for alimony, demur. (p. 14)

Amusing use is made of nautical jargon in the following scene:

Tom. (to Jenny). Now as to the rules which govern vessels meeting "stern on".
Jenny. What's that?
Tom. Why, look here - you're a devilish nice little trim taut Yankee clipper.
Jenny. Sir!
Tom. And I'm a big lumbering heavy-sided bluff-bowed Channel steamer. Very good. Now advance towards me in a direct line. Now we're advancing "stern on" and if neither vessel alters her course a collision must necessarily ensue - thus. (he kisses her). (p. 15)

The most original element in the play is the introduction of political satire, centred in the figures of Bowindo and Fergusson. Both are to represent Little Snugborough, which, with its population of 12, is clearly a "rotten borough". There are foreshadowings of Sir Joseph Porter in the means by which Fergusson has attained his position: "You came into a fortune and here you are. Member-elect for Snugborough" (p. 8). All this seems pretty mild stuff until one recalls the political situation in England in 1867. In August of that year Disraeli had pushed through his "leap in the dark" Reform Bill which almost doubled the electorate in its enfranchisement of the artisan masses. The political turmoil created by this bill did not die away until the election of 1868, which Gladstone won.⁶⁴ Gilbert's play, performed in

December of 1867, clearly reflects the new reforms. For example, Tom refers to the way in which he and Bowindo will represent the obviously working-class constituents of Snugborough:

Mr. Bowindo will attend to the butcher, the baker, the curate and the three farm labourers - I am to have the postman, the farrier, the half-pay lieutenant on the hill, the pig-sticker, the national school-mistress and the sweet stuff woman. (p. 7)

All in all, given the sensitivity of the Lord Chamberlain's office in this period, one can consider it an act of no small daring on Gilbert's part to write and have produced during a time of political crisis a play which pokes fun at M.P.'s.

In its topicality and its elements of satire and parody, Highly Improbable marks a refreshing departure from the conventionalities of Allow Me to Explain. Considered together, the two plays might indicate that Gilbert is attempting to raise farce from the level of low comedy to a higher, altogether more witty, level. Unfortunately, this trend seems to be reversed in his next two farces, A Medical Man and A Colossal Idea.

A Medical Man was written in 1869 but not performed until 1872, when it was produced on October 24th at St. George's Hall.⁶⁵ Alphonso de Pickleton, a penniless dramatist, desires to get married. He explains to the audience that because of his shyness he has placed a matrimonial advertisement in the Halfpenny Teaser, and has received 2,327 replies, of which only

one, that of a girl named Belinda, seems suitable. His shyness has prevented him from keeping any of the appointments he has made to see her. Suddenly, a crash is heard from outside Alphonso's apartment. He runs out, and returns with a lovely young lady insensible in his arms. When he leaves to discover the cause of the accident, she awakens and tells the audience that she is Belinda and, fed up with waiting, has pretended to fall downstairs to gain entry to Alphonso's apartment. He returns, and she pretends to be unconscious once more. Finding a fainted woman "more agreeable than the waking article," he kisses her. She awakens, and in order to explain his proximity to her, he pretends to be a doctor. A theatrical manager, Mr. Jones, arrives, and Alphonso, wishing to keep up the pretence of being a doctor, treats the mystified Jones like a patient. After Jones leaves, Belinda reveals to Alphonso who she is, and as she consents to be his bride, Jones returns with a fifty pound advance on Alphonso's new play.

In its conventionalities of plot and characterization, the play seems to be a reversal of the trends observed in Gilbert's first two farces. Alphonso, the hero, is the lovable eccentric characteristic of so much mid-Victorian farce:

I can't write a letter without going into a profuse perspiration: and the absolutely necessary operation of dressing in the morning so completely prostrates me, that I only recover from the effect in time to un-

dress and go to bed at night.⁶⁶

The character of Belinda, however, brings a breath of fresh air into the play: in her frankness and duplicity she anticipates the outspoken heroines of Engaged. The best comic scene of the play is that in which the encounter between Alphonso pretending to be a doctor and Jones, the theatrical manager, produces some amusing confusion of medical and theatrical terminology. Jones has come to see Alphonso about his play, the Blue Pill:

Jones. I've called about this "Blue Pill" of yours. Do you know, I'm afraid I can't take it.

Alphonso. Can't take it? Nonsense! Why not?

Jones. Why, in the first place, there's a great deal too much of it.

Alphonso. Too much of it? Why, what do you mean?

Jones. Why, I mean that I don't think it will go down. I'm sure it won't be long in the bill ... Miss de Montmorency isn't at all pleased with what you've given her, and she is determined to throw it up.

Belinda. O, the nasty creature!⁶⁷

Once again, Gilbert's tendency to verbal rather than physical humour is evident here. But while the play is lively and amusing, it never approaches the sophistication of Highly Improbable.

A Colossal Idea, written in 1873 and (perhaps mercifully) never produced, is even more trite.⁶⁸ The central character, Mr. Wellington Yellowboys, explains his late hours to his wife by telling her that he is writing the one hundred and

third edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica. In fact, he spends his evenings cavorting at the Tivoli Gardens. Problems are created when Jack Battersby, Mrs. Yellowboys' cousin, arrives and recognizes Yellowboys as a gentleman he met at the Tivoli Gardens. The plot becomes complicated beyond all reason, and in the end Yellowboys is forced to give up his "colossal idea." The deception of a wife by her husband is a hackneyed farce device. The only characteristically Gilbertian element in this piece is the lack of low comedy; but in this play, with its tired conventionalities, one almost wishes for some enlivening stage action.

A Medical Man and A Colossal Idea appear to cancel the claim put forward earlier that Gilbert is attempting to raise farce to a more sophisticated level. However, in his next farce, The Realm of Joy, produced at the Royalty Theatre on October 18, 1873,⁶⁹ one sees a culmination of the trends observed in Allow Me to Explain and Highly Improbable in a full and successful replacement of low comedy by intellectual wit. The play is undoubtedly Gilbert's finest contribution to the farce form and one of his most biting satirical works. It is basically a satire on the hypocrisy of Victorian theatre audiences, and by implication, a satire on hypocrisy in general.

To appreciate the play, it is important to note the circumstances which surrounded its writing and first production. On March 3rd, 1873, a burlesque of Gilbert's fairy comedy The Wicked World appeared at the Court Theatre. The bur-

lesque was entitled The Happy Land and was credited as the work of Gilbert à Beckett and F. Latour Tomline (Gilbert's pseudonym). In The Happy Land, à Beckett and Gilbert used the framework of The Wicked World to satirize the Gladstone government, and the actors playing the three central characters were made up to look like Gladstone and two of his Cabinet colleagues. Because of its obvious political satire, the play was banned after a few performances by the Lord Chamberlain's Office.⁷⁰

The Realm of Joy is Gilbert's comment on the society that would privately rush to see and enjoy The Happy Land and publicly denounce it as offensive and seditious. The play takes place in the lobby behind the boxes in a London theatre, where a play entitled The Realm of Joy is being performed. The play is universally condemned for its immorality, offensiveness, and utter disgracefulness, and yet night after night the boxes, gallery and stalls are crammed with people. Commenting on the play, the Box-keeper says:

A more disgraceful attack on high minded and estimable public characters was never perpetrated. The authority of the most generally esteemed and unmistakeably indispensable of all our CourtFunctionaries, I allude to the Lord High Disinfectant -- is publicly set at naught and his office is declared night after night to be nothing better than a senseless mockery. Society is furious. Society loves its Lord High Disinfectant. It regards him as a discreet and loving father who shall determine what it is fit for them to hear, and they have no words of contempt strong enough for the irreverent hacks who have dared

to defy his authority. (p. 11)⁷¹

Yet, the Cloakwoman observes, "Society comes and brings its cloaks and umbrellas too." Most of the spectators who come to the play excuse their attendance on the highest moral grounds, and Gilbert attacks this hypocrisy in the figures of two "swells", Quisby and Jopp:

Jopp. Hello Quisby!

Quisby. Hello Jopp!

Jopp. Well, here we are again.

Quisby. Yes, here we are again.

Jopp. Let's see, how many times have you witnessed this infamous attack on beloved public servants?

Quisby. Sixty-seven times.

Jopp. Only sixty-seven? I've seen it eighty-four.

Quisby. Disgraceful, ain't it?

Jopp. Atrocious, abominable.

Quisby. I shan't come any more, it makes me miserable. (Weeps) demme.

Jopp. It affects me in a similar way. (Weeps)

Quisby. Then why do we come?

Jopp. We don't come to see the piece, we come to see the spectators, we come to moralize over the depravity of human nature, we come to moralize over this sort of thing. (p. 12)

The play divides itself into two separate but thematically related plots. After we have been introduced to Quisby and Jopp, Mr. and Mrs. Jellybag arrive with their two daughters, "two demure little girls in white frocks and sashes". Mr. Jellybag has heard that the piece is full of the "most outrageous political allusions," and has come to see "if it's really true" (pp. 13-14). The Cloakwoman appeals to Jellybag to have mercy on his children:

Cloakwoman. Take them away before it is too late. Oh sir, listen to the voice of a mother, have mercy on them and suffer them not to witness this horrible and demoralizing spectacle.

Jellybag. I can't send them away, we are stopping at a boarding-house in the Strand and two young ladies alone in a boarding-house, it would never do.

Cloakwoman. What, what is to be done?
(Wringing hands)

Jellybag. This, when Mrs. Jellybag and I find that the dialogue is becoming politically disgraceful and when the allusions to persons in power threaten to become particularly audacious, we shall turn them out of the box.

Cloakwoman. I see.

Jellybag. I propose at such awful moments to place them under your motherly care, that they may come to no harm while they are waiting in the Box Lobby. (pp. 14-15)

Each time the piece becomes too disgraceful, Jellybag sends them out into the lobby. Eventually, they are spotted by Quisby and Jopp, who flirt with them and take them away. This is a nice touch of irony: the theatre lobby is seen as more dangerous than the theatre itself.

While this is going on, Mr. Wilkinson enters with Mrs. Scruby. Mrs. Scruby, whose husband refuses to take her to the piece, has taken advantage of his temporary absence in Manchester to prevail upon Mr. Wilkinson to escort her. They disappear into a box. A few minutes later, Mr. Scruby appears escorting Mrs. Wilkinson. Mrs. Wilkinson has prevailed upon Mr. Scruby to escort her because her husband refuses to take her, and he is away on business in Birmingham. What transpires is predictable farce material: the two couples meet,

but they are quickly reconciled through mutual declarations of the purity of their motives:

Mrs. Scruby. My dear Mr. Scruby you can't possibly punish Mr. Wilkinson for bringing your wife to the theatre when you yourself brought his.

Scruby. But I brought Mr. Wilkinson's wife under circumstances that would not have disgraced an Archbishop.

Wilkinson. And I brought Mr. Scruby's wife under circumstances that would have done credit to a Lord Chamberlain.

Scruby. You did?

Wilkinson. I did.

Scruby. Say no more. The force of purity can no further go. And now suppose we testify to our reconciliation by sitting out the rest of the piece all together in Box 4. (p. 24)

In The Realm of Joy, there is an implied comparison between events on the stage and in the lobby. The supposed immorality of the play is contrasted with the immorality of the audience, which is seen as far more reprehensible than anything perpetuated on the stage. All the characters are hypocrites whose professed reasons for attending the play are very different from their real, baser motives. Furthermore, the desire of the male characters to protect their wives and daughters from the sinfulness of the piece results ironically in sins of a real kind: the female characters become involved in lechery and adultery. Gilbert's conclusion is that a stage play is inoffensive compared to the vices of the real world. It is the vilest hypocrisy of all to attempt to suppress a work of art when the world itself is in a dis-

graceful state. As will become evident in the following chapters, hypocrisy is a theme that pervades and informs much of Gilbert's early comedy.

The play is described on the cover of the first-night programme as "a very free and easy version of the highly successful Palais Royal Farce, Le Roi Candaule."⁷² Gilbert did indeed use Meilhac and Halevy's work about an immoral play that proves an excuse for adultery as a basis for The Realm of Joy. Both his subsequent farces are adaptations of French originals. Committed for Trial was presented at the Globe Theatre on January 24, 1874,⁷³ and concerns Alfred Trimble, who is thrown into jail accidentally when he is mistaken for Alfred Wagstaffe. Gilbert used the same material again in On Bail (1877).⁷⁴ The most interesting aspect of Committed for Trial is Gilbert's satire of the law at all levels, in a corrupt judge, Tommy Cobb, a barrister, Mr. Portiboy, and a policeman, Sergeant Stubbs. Gilbert's last farce, The Blue-Legged Lady, presented at the Court Theatre on 4th March, 1874,⁷⁵ is a direct translation of Labiche and Marc-Michel's La Dame aux Jambes d'Azur, and hence does not warrant discussion here.

Gilbert, then, wrote no more largely original farces after The Realm of Joy in 1873. This may be partly accounted for by the rise in popularity during the 1870's of the lengthier and more sophisticated French cousin of the English farce.⁷⁶ In his work for Marie Litton at the Court Theatre,⁷⁷ Gilbert

himself had much to do with the introduction of the new form. Michael Booth notes "The Wedding March (1873), Gilbert's version of Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie (1851), by Eugene Labiche and Marc Michel, really began the vogue of adaptation from ...French farce."⁷⁸ Although elements of the one-act farce lived on - its structure in the polite comedietta and its low comedy in the music halls, by the 1880's the most popular farces were French or imitations of French methods and formulas.

It is extremely unlikely, however, that if the one-act farce had lived on as a popular form Gilbert would have been one of its chief exponents. The preceding survey of his work in farce has revealed an unevenness of quality which suggests Gilbert was not comfortable working within the traditional farce form as handed down to him by Buckstone, Morton, or Williams. One explanation for this has been suggested in his dislike of low comedy, of the broad, physical style of Victorian farce. However, in depriving his farces of low comedy, he impoverishes them of that vitality characteristic of the best Victorian farce.

Gilbert's best work in farce does not come when he uses a conventional approach. He is most successful when he introduces elements of wit; that is, when his comedy is verbal and intellectual rather than physical. From the non-sequiturs of Allow Me to Explain and the professional jargon

of Highly Improbable and A Medical Man to the satire of The Realm of Joy, the tendency to wit is discernible in all his farces. Robert Bernard Martin describes the movement of comedy in the nineteenth century as one from sentimental humour to intellectual wit, and says that this change took place around 1870.⁷⁹ Gilbert's farces would seem to offer some substance to this theory in their uneasy tension between conventional farcical elements based on sentimental humour, and original wit. Certainly in his incorporation of wit into farce as early as 1867, Gilbert is in the vanguard of the return of intellect to English stage comedy.

However, this is not to suggest that Gilbert's farces are neglected masterworks, for their original elements are counterbalanced by much banality and mediocrity. It is important to note that for the most part they were written in haste and for the sole end of gaining their author a few extra pounds, and that they are only a small part of Gilbert's dramatic output. What they and the comedietta Uncle Baby demonstrate above all is Gilbert's apprenticeship in the conventional forms and methods of the Victorian theatre. However uneasy that apprenticeship was, it is important to note that Gilbert did not set out purposefully to revolutionize English comedy. As Harley Granville-Barker says:

There are two ways of developing ability in an art. The one, and doubtless the nobler, is to go out into the desert and await inspiration, and when it has worked

its will on you -- well, you have written what you have written. But this, for some reason, seldom proves to be the right approach to the vulgar art of the theatre. The other plan is to serve your apprenticeship as you would to carpentering or house-painting, carrying out your orders with quickness and despatch and making the momentary best of them, such as they are. Then, when you are master of your trade, produce masterpieces - if you can. This was Shakespeare's plan, and (comparisons apart) it was Gilbert's too.⁸⁰

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

1. W.S. Gilbert, "An Autobiography," W.S. Gilbert: A Century of Scholarship and Commentary, John Bush Jones, ed. (New York University Press, 1970), p. 54.
2. Even the latest biography of Gilbert and Sullivan, Caryl Brahms, Gilbert and Sullivan: Lost Chords and Discords (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975), describes Dulcamara as Gilbert's "first play."
3. Kate Field, "W.S. Gilbert," Scribner's Monthly, XVIII (May-October, 1879), pp. 751-755.
4. Harry How, "Illustrated Interviews: No. IV - Mr. W.S. Gilbert," Strand Magazine, II (October, 1891), p. 338.
5. W.S. Gilbert, Uncle Baby, Terence Rees, ed. (London: privately printed, 1968).
6. Terence Rees, "W.S. Gilbert and the London Pantomime Season of 1866," Gilbert and Sullivan: Papers Presented at the International Conference held at the University of Kansas in May 1970, James Helyar, ed. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Libraries), 1971.
7. For example, Sidney Dark and Rowland Grey, W.S. Gilbert: His Life and Letters (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), discuss Gilbert's early career almost solely in terms of his burlesques.
8. With the exception of Uncle Baby, all dates of original productions of Gilbert's early works are taken from Reginald Allen, W.S. Gilbert: An Anniversary Survey and Exhibition Checklist (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1963), pp. 10-11.
9. Elizabeth Inchbald, ed., A Collection of Farces and Other Afterpieces, which are acted at the Theatres Royal (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1809).
10. Reproduced in Diana Howard, London Theatres and Music Halls 1850-1950 (London: The Library Association, 1970), p. 187.
11. Ashley Thorndike, English Comedy (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965), p. 416.

12. J.S. Coyne, "How to Settle Accounts with Your Laundress," English Plays of the Nineteenth Century: IV, Farces, Michael Booth, ed. (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1973).
N.B. All dates of plays given in text are dates of first productions.
13. William Brough and Andrew Halliday, "The Area Belle," ibid.
14. See also "Introduction," ibid., pp. 1-4.
15. William Brough, Trying It On (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). Garrick Club Collection, University of Calgary Library.
16. Ibid., p. 5.
17. J.B. Buckstone, Shocking Events (London: John Dicks, n.d.). No. 808 in Dicks' Standard Plays. G.C.C.
18. T.J. Williams, The Trials of Tompkins (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
19. T.J. Williams, A Cure for the Fidgets (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
20. Ibid., p. 24.
21. T.J. Williams, Found In A Four Wheeler (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
22. Charles Matthews, "Patter versus Clatter," English Plays, Booth, ed.
23. J.M. Morton, "Box and Cox," ibid.
24. Michael Booth has shown that many farcical situations - duels, mock-deaths, threatened suicides, etc. - are often parodies of melodrama. Michael Booth, "Early Victorian Farce: Dionysus Domesticated," Nineteenth Century British Theatre, Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson, eds. (London: Methuen, 1971).
25. For example, Charles Selby, The Boots at The Swan (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
26. Ernest Bradlee Watson, Sheridan to Robertson (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1963), p. 316.

27. Brough, Trying It On, pp. 10-11.
28. "Introduction", English Plays, p. 22.
29. J.B. Buckstone, A Dead Shot (London: John Dicks, n.d.).
No. 808 in Dicks' Standard Plays. G.C.C.
30. Another example is William Murray, "Diamond Cut Diamond,"
English Plays, Booth, ed.
31. J.B. Buckstone, A Kiss In The Dark (London: Samuel French,
n.d.). G.C.C.
32. J.B. Buckstone, A Rough Diamond (London: Samuel French,
n.d.). G.C.C.
33. J.B. Buckstone, An Alarming Sacrifice (London: John Dicks,
n.d.). No. 1012 in Dicks' Standard Plays. G.C.C.
34. Michael Booth, "Early Victorian Farce," p. 99.
35. J.M. Morton, "Box and Cox," English Plays, Booth, ed.,
p. 218.
36. Ibid., p. 232.
37. J.M. Morton, A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion (London:
Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
38. J.M. Morton, Sent to the Tower (London: Thomas Hailes
Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
39. J.M. Morton, A Capital Match! (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy,
n.d.). G.C.C.
40. J.M. Morton, Poor Pillicoddy (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy,
n.d.). G.C.C.
41. T.J. Williams, The Better Half (London: Samuel French, n.d.),
p. 4. G.C.C.
42. T.J. Williams, Found in A Four Wheeler.
43. T.J. Williams, Ici On Parle Français (London: Samuel French,
n.d.). G.C.C.
44. T.J. Williams, Pipkin's Rustic Retreat (London: Samuel
French, n.d.). G.C.C.
45. Ibid., p. 19.

46. Michael Booth, "Early Victorian Farce," p. 103.
47. Robert Bernard Martin, The Triumph of Wit: A Study of Victorian Comic Theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), Chapter III.
48. Ernest Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama (1830-1870) (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1965), p. 55.
49. W.S. Gilbert, Uncle Baby, Terence Rees, ed. (London: privately printed, 1968). Uncle Baby was first performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre on October 31st, 1863, under the management of Charles Fechter. Fechter managed the Lyceum from 1863 to 1867 and specialized in the production of romantic drama; Uncle Baby was produced as a curtain-raiser to John Brougham's Bel Demonio, A Love Story in Twelve Tableaux. Raymond and Joe Mitchenson, The Theatres of London (London: Rupert Hart-Davies, 1963), pp. 273-276.
50. Winton Tolles, Tom Taylor and the Victorian Drama (New York: AMS Press, 1966), p. 127.
51. One notes here a similarity between Uncle Baby and the relationship between Esther Eccles and her father in T.W. Robertson's Caste (1867). T.W. Robertson, Caste, Nineteenth Century Plays, George Rowell, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).
52. Gilbert, Uncle Baby, pp. 21-22.
53. Ibid., p. 25.
54. Rees, "Introduction," ibid., p. 3.
55. W.S. Gilbert, Allow Me to Explain (London: The British Library, type-script from MS, n.d.). Marie Wilton and Henry James Byron had taken over the Price of Wales' Theatre in 1865. In 1867 Byron left the partnership and Marie Wilton married Squire Bancroft. The Bancroft regime is chiefly memorable for the first productions of T.W. Robertson's comedies. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, Chapters XVII and XVIII; Frances Donaldson, The Actor-Managers (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1970), Chapter I.
56. For example, both occur in Morton's Box and Cox.
57. Gilbert, Allow Me to Explain, p. 11. For similar burlesquing of melodramatic dialogue, see discussion of Highly Improbable below, p. 45 and Engaged, Chapter V, p. 171.

58. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, Chapters XVII and XVIII.
59. Allow Me to Explain was performed on the same bill as Robertson's Caste from November 4 to December 4, 1867. W. Craven Mackie, "The Bancrofts' Repertory, 1865 to 1885," Educational Theatre Journal, XXVII (March, 1975), p. 106.
60. For example, the business with the hat in Act One. Robertson, Caste, Nineteenth Century Plays, p. 358.
61. Reprinted in Dark and Grey, W.S. Gilbert, p. 61.
62. Quoted in Leslie Baily, Gilbert and Sullivan and their World (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 88.
63. W.S. Gilbert, Highly Improbable (London: The British Library, typescript from MS, n.d.). All page references given in the text are to this edition. During the 1860's, the New Royalty Theatre was under the management of Martha Oliver, who raised its fortunes to a high point with the production of burlesques such as F.C. Burnand's Black-Eyed Susan. She produced Gilbert's burlesque The Merry Zingara in 1868. Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson, The Lost Theatres of London (New York: Taplinger, 1968); Erroll Sherson, London's Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969).
64. "English History," Encyclopedia Britannica (1971), VIII, p. 531.
65. W. S. Gilbert, "A Medical Man," Drawing-Room Plays and Parlour Pantomimes, Clement Scott, ed. (London: Stanley Rivers, 1870). St. George's Hall was opened as a Concert Hall in 1867, in which year Sullivan's Contrabandista was presented there. From 1874 to 1895 it was the regular home of the German Reed Entertainments. Mander and Mitchenson, The Lost Theatres of London.
66. Gilbert, A Medical Man, p. 16.
67. Ibid., p. 27. Cf. the parody of professional jargon in Highly Improbable.
68. W.S. Gilbert, A Colossal Idea, Towney Searle, ed.. (London: Putnam's, 1932).

69. W.S. Gilbert, The Realm of Joy, Terence Rees, ed. (London: privately printed, 1969). All page references in the text are to this edition. The Royalty (formerly the New Royalty - see note 63) was under the management of Henrietta Hodson from 1873 to 1875. Gilbert and Sullivan's Trial by Jury was produced there on 25th March, 1875. Mander and Mitchenson, The Lost Theatres of London.
70. Terence Rees, "Introduction," The Realm of Joy.
71. This speech is a direct satirical attack on the theatrical censorship of the mid-Victorian era: for "Lord High Disinfectant," read "Lord Chamberlain." See Chapter II, pp. 18-19.
72. Ibid., front cover. It is possible that some of the earlier farces are derived from French originals; however, in the absence of evidence to the contrary at the present time, I am treating them as original Gilbert works. For an interesting comparison of Le Roi Candaule and The Realm of Joy, see George McElroy, "Meilhac and Halevy--and Gilbert: Comic Converses," Gilbert and Sullivan Papers, Helyar, ed., pp. 98-99.
73. W.S. Gilbert, Committed for Trial (London: The British Library, typescript from MS, n.d.). In this period the Globe Theatre was producing opera bouffe under the management of Harry Montague. Sherson, London's Lost Theatres.
74. W.S. Gilbert, On Bail (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
75. W.S. Gilbert, "The Blue-Legged Lady," Jane Stedman, ed., Nineteenth Century Theatre Research, III (Spring, 1975).
76. Booth, "Introduction" English Plays, pp. 31-37.
77. Marie Litton opened the Court Theatre in 1871 with a production of Gilbert's Randall's Thumb. For her he also wrote On Guard (1871), The Happy Land (1873), The Wedding March (1873), and The Blue-Legged Lady (1874).
78. Booth, "Introduction", English Plays, p. 31.
79. Martin, The Triumph of Wit, Chapter III.
80. Harley Granville-Barker, "Exit Planché - Enter Gilbert", The Eighteen-Sixties, John Drinkwater, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1932), p. 140.

CHAPTER IV

EXCURSIONS INTO FAIRYLAND, 1870-1875

It is relatively easy to make an assessment of Gilbert's farces because the one-act farce was a popular and standardized Victorian theatrical form which provides many hundreds of examples against which we may judge his work. With Gilbert's blank-verse comedies, however, the problem is much different. These four works -- The Palace of Truth (1870), Pygmalion and Galatea (1871), The Wicked World (1873), and Broken Hearts (1875) -- have no direct antecedent in Victorian drama, or for that matter in any drama at all. They must rank among the oddest stage works ever composed. Written in blank verse, they combine fairy-tale (or, in the case of Pygmalion and Galatea, mythological) characters and situations with a satiric, often cynical, view of the world.

The poetic style of these works is not altogether unprecedented on the Victorian stage: there had been many

attempts to revive poetic drama as a popular form during the nineteenth century. These attempts fell generally into three categories: neo-Elizabethan plays, which sought to emulate the work of Shakespeare and his contemporaries, such as Richard Horne's The Death of Marlowe (1837) and Westland Marston's Marie de Meranie (1856); neo-classic plays, imitative of the Greek masters, such as Thomas Noon Talfourd's Ion: A Tragedy (1836); and historical dramas, such as Bulwer-Lytton's Richelieu (1839) and Talfourd's Glencoe (1840).¹ Most of these works suffered from a deadening pedantry of style which resulted from "copying the letter rather than the spirit of the ancients."² Often, they were merely "domestic dramas [i.e., melodramas] dressed in verse and historical trappings."³ However, it is not to the Victorian imitators of Shakespeare and Sophocles that one must look in seeking a form which may have provided inspiration for Gilbert's blank-verse comedies. Rather, their closest relatives would appear to be found on the Victorian comic stage in the form of the classical burlesque and fairy extravaganza. To fully appreciate Gilbert's work in his poetic dramas, it is necessary to sketch the main features and development of these forms.

As noted in the Introduction, during the first forty-three years of the nineteenth century, the minor theatres of London were restricted to presenting illegitimate drama:

that is, drama involving only pantomime, music, and dancing.⁴ The one form of entertainment which above all was "held not to infringe the patent theatres' exclusive right to present legitimate drama" was the burletta.⁵ Fortunately for London theatrical managements, the term burletta was never satisfactorily explained or defined by the Lord Chamberlain's office. The difficulties of definition are well illustrated by George Colman's unsatisfactory attempt:

I think that you may fairly say that it is easy sometimes to say what is not a Burletta, tho' it may be difficult to define what a Burletta is, according to the legal acceptance of the Term, Burletta, Five or Six songs in a Piece of One Act for example, where the songs make a natural part of the piece (and not forced into an acting piece, to qualify it as a Burletta) may perhaps be considered so far a Burletta, as not to be refused by the Chamberlain, tho' there always remains the question, whether the Burletta must not be in verse, and the whole sung, not said; which makes the question dangerous.⁶

What made a clear definition difficult was the constant transmutation of the form. In the last decade of the eighteenth century, a burletta had been a "light musical piece, generally of a burlesque nature, without a word of spoken dialogue." Such presentations often included cloth scrolls on which the audience could read bits of dialogue and description. By 1800, the form consisted not only of pantomime and music but also "brief passages of dialogue ... meant to be chanted as recitative to musical accompaniment." The encroachment of dialogue into the form continued, until

the burletta was regarded as an entertainment written in rhyming doggerel and played to the accompaniment of a piano. By the 1820's, the Chamberlain was permitting almost any play to be performed as a burletta as long as it was restricted to three acts, had a continuous musical accompaniment, and had at least five songs to an act.⁷ By the 1840's, "an occasional chord on the piano seems to have been all that was required."⁸

Despite the flexibility of the burletta form, many playwrights and managers felt themselves limited by its restrictions. There was one manageress, however, who sought to make the best of existing theatrical conditions by elevating and refining the burletta to the level of respectable and tasteful entertainment. This was Madame Vestris, who in 1831 took over the Olympic Theatre. As one writer says, "prevented from staging the legitimate, she determined to raise the "illegitimate" forms ... to a plane of artistic excellence unsurpassed in the memories of her older patrons."⁹ As part of her scheme to raise the level of London's minor theatre fare, she engaged James Robinson Planché as a writer.

Today Planché (1796-1880) is remembered, if at all, for his research which resulted in his History of British Costumes of 1834. As both a historian and a dramatist, however, his influence on Victorian theatre was pervasive and lasting. His work for Madame Vestris at the Olympic during

the 1830's, and later at Covent Garden, the Haymarket, and Lyceum during the '40's and '50's, set a style and formula for Victorian musical entertainment which lasted until the Savoy Operas.¹⁰ The first works which Planché wrote for Madame Vestris were Olympic Revels, or Prometheus and Pandora (January, 1831), Olympic Devils, or Orpheus and Eurydice (December, 1831), and The Paphian Bower, or Venus and Adonis (December, 1832).¹¹ These were the first of Planché's classical burlesques, in which, as Augustin Filon says, "the whole point of the piece consists in putting modern sentiments and expressions into the mouths of characters taken from antiquity."¹² Through irreverent use of anachronism, Planché burlesqued the stories and heroes of classical mythology. These entertainments were written in rhyming couplets, interspersed with songs sung to popular tunes of the day, and produced with a discipline and taste then rare on the English stage.¹³ Particularly, extravagances of acting were forbidden, for "it was Planché's belief that the highest effect could be produced in these burlesques by having the acting perfectly natural and familiar, so that the contrast between the absurdity of the thing said and the propriety of the everyday behaviour of the speakers should greatly heighten the comic effect."¹⁴

A good example of Planché's mature work in classical burlesque is The Golden Fleece, or, Jason in Colchis and

Medea in Corinth, produced at the Haymarket in 1845 under the management of Benjamin Webster, and featuring Madame Vestris as Medea.¹⁵ The basic plot of the second half follows the Medea closely, and at times reads like a translation. However, the facetious tone of Planché's rendering of Euripides is indicated in the *Dramatis Personae*, where it is announced:

N.B. The public is respectfully informed, that in order to produce this Grand Classical Work in a style which may defy competition in any other establishment, the lessee has, regardless of expense, engaged

Mr. Charles Mathews

To represent the whole body of the chorus, rendering at least fifty-nine male voices entirely unnecessary.¹⁶

Medea's opening monologue on her fate is transformed into a song entitled "A Fine Young Grecian Gentleman," sung to the tune of "A Fine Old English Gentleman." At the point in the play where Medea is supposed to be killing her children, screams are indeed heard from within the palace. A moment later Medea appears with the children in her chariot, and reveals the cause of the uproar:

I bear them to the land of Erectheus
By a special invitation of Egeus
To a Greek grammar-school he means to send them,
And pay a private tutor to attend them.¹⁷

A similar deflation of classical legend is found in Theseus and Ariadne, or, The Marriage of Bacchus, produced by Vestris at the Lyceum in 1848.¹⁸

Planché's greatest popularity, however, arose not from his classical burlesques but from his fairy extravaganzas. For the Christmas season of 1836 at the Olympic, he produced Riquet with the Tuft, which marked a turning-point in his career: "an abandonment of the world of the gods in favour of the fairy-tale world of Perrault and the Countess d'Aulnoy."¹⁹ Although Planché continued to write classical burlesques, his main efforts after the success of Riquet went towards his fairy extravaganzas. The main differences between burlesque and extravaganza lay not so much in form as in subject and attitude. Planché himself defined burlesque as a "broad caricature" of a "serious subject," whereas extravaganza was the "whimsical treatment of a poetical subject."²⁰ Rather than debunk a legend or myth, the extravaganza sought to retell a fairy-tale or nursery story in as delightful a manner as possible. Through such works as Puss In Boots (1837), The Sleeping Beauty (1840), and Beauty and the Beast (1841), Planché became the chief purveyor of the charm and magic of fairyland on the Victorian stage.²¹

The White Cat, produced by Madame Vestris at Covent Garden in 1842, is typical of Planché's fairy extravaganzas.²² King Wunsaponatyme, King of Neverminditsnamia, cannot decide which of his three sons, Prince Paragon, Prince Placid, or Prince Precious, to make his heir. He devises a contest:

whoever brings him a dog small enough to pass through his ring will inherit his throne. As he begins his quest, Prince Paragon is mysteriously transported to a Fairy Palace. There he is fed and entertained by Invisible Attendants and a Cat Orchestra. The White Cat appears and gives Paragon an acorn with a tiny spaniel in it. Paragon and his companion Jingo return to Neverminditsnamia, and, having found the smallest dog, win the contest; but the King declares that Paragon cannot become King until he finds himself a bride. The Prince and Jingo return to the Fairy Palace, where the White Cat implores the Prince to cut her head off. He does so, and the Cat is transformed into the Princess Catarina, whom Paragon claims as his bride.

The White Cat is, like most of Planché's extravaganzas, written throughout in rhyming couplets. The main feature of the dialogue is an abundance of puns, to which Planché was addicted. For example, after Paragon and Jingo are transported to the Fairy Palace, the following interchange takes place:

Paragon. Methought but now we in the
palace stood,
But now the ground we stand on's in
a wood!
Some treason this!
Jingo. Why sir, it stands to reason
It couldn't be a wood without some
trees on.²³

On hearing the Cat Orchestra, the Prince remarks, "I own such mew-sic does not me a-mews."²⁴ The piece is filled

with songs and incidental dances, and includes many spectacular scenic effects, such as the finale to Act One:

The scene opens or changes, and discovers the Wooden Horse, magnificently trapped and harnessed to a Fairy Car; the magic hands are holding flambeaux; Prince Paragon and Jingo enter the car, which ascends as the Act Drop descends.²⁵

Planché's formula is also well illustrated by The Invisible Prince, or, The Island of Tranquil Delights (1843; revived, 1859).²⁶ Prince Leander is given fairy powers by the Fairy Gentilla. He arrives on the Island of Tranquil Delights, upon which lives the beautiful Princess Xquisite-littlepet with other maidens. Using his fairy powers, which include invisibility, Leander helps the Princess defeat her enemy, Furibond, and thus gains her love. The piece contains many songs, spectacular scenes, and the usual round of puns, such as the following:

Fairy. You've heard, no doubt, of fairies,
now you see one.

Leander. I had a slight suspicion you might
be one.

Fairy. My name's Gentilla.

Leander. None could be genteeler.²⁷

Spectacle was a key element of the Planché extravaganza. Most of the published editions of these pieces include an elaborate "Order of Scenery, etc." such as this from The Fair One With The Golden Locks:

PALACE OF KING LACHRYMOSO
 The Meadows
 COURT OF QUEEN LUCIDORA
 A RUM-ANTIC GLEN!
 The King's Palace
 CORRIDOR IN THE KING'S PALACE
 with
 A CHANGE (it is hoped) FOR THE BETTER!!!²⁸

In fact, Planché's work became increasingly dominated by spectacle. In his last period of collaboration with Madame Vestris, at the Lyceum Theatre from 1847 to 1855, his work became little more than an excuse for the elaborate scenic designs of William Beverley.²⁹

Planché felt that he was destined for greater things than his burlesques and extravaganzas. He wished "to lay the foundations of an Aristophanic drama," and produced his own adaptation of The Birds at the Haymarket in 1843.³⁰ His chief contribution to nineteenth-century drama, however, lay in his transformation of the burletta into a disciplined and tasteful form of entertainment, so much so that even after the lifting of the monopoly restrictions in 1843, it lived on as a popular form. The greatest testimonial to Planché's achievements is that his methods were so closely imitated by the writers who followed him.

His followers included F.C. Burnand, who was at his best in classical burlesques such as Venus and Adonis, or, The Two Rivals and the Small Boar, Being a Full, True, and Particular Account, Adapted to the Requirements of the Present Age, of An Ancient Mythological Scandal.³¹ The piece contains the usual

puns, songs, and sending up of mythology: at the rise of the curtain the Olympian deities are discovered asleep. Something of Burnand's method is indicated in the short Preface to the work, where he states that, although based on sound authorities, his version of the myth resulted after "shaking my authorities well together in a waste-paper basket."³² Typical also is Pirithous, the Son of Ixion, produced at the Royalty in 1865, in which Hercules is described as "Professor of the Art of Self-Defence, and Lecturer on Muscular Paganism."³³

The most extreme examples of classical burlesque on the Victorian stage are to be found in the work of Francis Talfourd. His Alcestis, The Original Strong-Minded Woman, first seen at the Strand Theatre in 1850, is aptly described as a Most Shameless Misinterpretation of the Greek Drama of Euripides.³⁴ Although the piece follows closely Euripides' original about Alcestis' death and her rescue from the grave by Hercules, it is far from a reverent adaptation. The play is set before the house of Admetus, upon whose door is a brass plate bearing the following inscription: *Mr Αδμητος - please to ring the bell.* ³⁵ Such anachronistic yoking of classical setting and Victoriana is a common feature of classical burlesque. It is well illustrated later in the play in the figure of Polax, who is in love with Phodre, Admetus' cook. He is "habited in classic dress, with the exception of his hat, cape, and staff, which are those of a

modern policeman."³⁶ In places, Alcestis approaches a true parody of Euripides' style, as in Alcestis' monologue on her fate:

Oh! Sun, and moon, and stars! Oh, day
and night!
Oh, everything above an inch in height!
Oh Day! As black as black of Day and
Martin,
To what infernal realms must I be starting!
Oh Bed! - beg pardon - nuptial couch, I
mean,
'Twere green, though, to regret now Gretna
Green.³⁷

This brings up an interesting point about the classical burlesque: rarely does it ascend to the level of burlesque in the sense of intelligent parody of a classical author's style. Rather, the use of classical material is often only an excuse for songs, puns, anachronism, and dances.

In the Prologue to Alcestis, Talfourd disparages the spectacular nature of the mid-Victorian burlesque and extravaganza:

In such fine feathers managers now show them,
The authors of their being wouldn't know them!
Burlesquewrights shake their waggish heads,
and vow,
That e'en the best of fairy-pieces now
Must have red fire the dresses well to show off
As fowling pieces without smoke can't go off.³⁸

He says Alcestis will run counter to this trend:

No great effects or new imported dance,
The drooping eye will waken and entrance;
No fairy land burst widely on the view,
To dissipate your mem'ry of who's who;
But an old story from a classic clime,³⁹
Done for the period into modern rhyme.

By 1857, however, Talfourd's own work had succumbed to the taste for spectacle: his Atalanta: or the Three Golden Apples, produced at the Haymarket in that year, contains elaborate scenic effects and ballets.⁴⁰

Of mid-Victorian fairy extravaganza, William Brough's Prince Amabel, or The Fairy Roses (1862), is typical.⁴¹ King Buonocore's son, Prince Amabel, is in love with a girl whom he sees in his dreams. A Fairy gives him magic roses that will lead him to his love and give him the fairy power of invisibility. The roses lead Amabel to the kingdom of the cruel tyrant Turko, whose daughter Violet he at once recognizes as the girl of his dreams. After further adventure, Amabel wins the hand of Violet. The piece concludes with a tableau: "Vision of The Flowery Future."

The work is interspersed with many songs set to popular airs such as "The Whole Hog or None," "It is a Charming Girl I Love," "My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose," and tunes from Norma and Il Trovatore. Some of the lyrics are Gilbertian, such as Turko's opening song, set to that ubiquitous extravaganza tune, "A Fine Old English Gentleman:"

I'll sing a good old song of the monarch
truly great,
The fine old-fashioned tyrant of the
school legitimate,
Who scorns the namby-pamby rule of
kings effeminate,
And much above his subjects' love, prefers
his people's hate.⁴²

Prince Amabel is absolutely riddled with puns, such as the

following, occurring after the Fairy appears to Amabel:

Fairy. I am a fairy;
 Prince. So I should have
 guessed
 By the amount of gauze in which you're
 dressed.
 Fairy. (conceitedly) Is it effective?
 Prince. Yes, by Nature's laws,
 There's no effect without sufficient
 gauze.⁴³

H.J. Byron's Cinderella, or, The Lover, The Lackey,
and the Little Glass Slipper of 1860 is another good ex-
 ample of mid-Victorian fairy extravaganza: it greatly
 expands on the basic story of Cinderella to include fairy
 scenes in a Forest Dell.⁴⁴

Although Planché's chief influence was on his suc-
 cessors in burlesque and extravaganza, he altered the course
 of another dramatic form, the pantomime. The original form
 of the pantomime was that of a short opening, based usually
 on a fairy-tale, followed by a Transformation Scene in which
 the characters were transformed into the figures of Harlequin,
 Pantaloon, Columbine, Clown, and Lover who romped through a
 lengthy Harlequinade.⁴⁵ In his Harlequin In His Element,
 David Mayer partially attributes the decline of this trad-
 itional form after 1836 to the rise in popularity of the
 Planché-style fairy extravaganza.⁴⁶ The pantomime opening
 was lengthened until it, not the Harlequinade, was the chief
 element (as it is today).⁴⁷ Thus, by the 1860's pantomime
 and extravaganza were virtually indistinguishable forms.

This is well illustrated by the Christmas pantomimes written by Henry F. Saville for the Theatre Royal at Nottingham. Both his Harlequin Prince Thalaba, or Queen Khawla, the Enchantress, and the Fairy Bells of Paradise of 1863⁴⁸ and his King Atlas and the Seven Princesses of the Stars, or, The Fays of the Fountain of Jewels of 1864⁴⁹ owe more to Planché than to the traditional harlequinade-oriented pantomime.

The preceding survey of the Victorian burlesque and extravaganza will have suggested that these forms rarely rose above the level of pure entertainment. Usually presented at the festive seasons of Christmas and Easter, they provided a diverting and charming mixture of music, dancing, puns, and spectacle. However, as anyone who has read a number of these works will attest, they quickly become tiresome, for their formula is always the same, and their wit never rises above the pun, anachronism, or the occasional topicality. Whatever their momentary charm, they hardly make a major contribution to the development of English drama. It remained for Gilbert, in his blank-verse comedies, to transform the extravaganza and burlesque into vehicles for more serious and lasting content than they had previously possessed.

The first of these works, The Palace of Truth, produced at the Haymarket Theatre on November 19, 1870,⁵⁰ has obvious similarities to fairy extravaganza. Act One introduces the

traditional fairy-tale characters and setting of a King, Queen, Prince and Princess who live in an imaginary kingdom unfixed in place or time. The opening situation of the play might have been drawn from Planché: Prince Philamir, the "bravest and the most accomplished Prince in Christendom," is betrothed to Princess Zeolide, daughter of King Phanor and Queen Altemire, Zeolide, however, receives Philamir's passionate love coldly. In order to discover whether Zeolide really loves Philamir, Phanor resolves that his entire court shall journey to the Palace of Truth, a magical place described in this way:

That palace is enchanted. Every one
Who enters there is bound to speak the
truth -
The simple, unadulterated truth.
To every question that is put to him
He must return the unaffected truth.
And strange to say, while publishing
the truth
He's no idea that he is doing so;
And while he lets innumerable cats
Out of unnumbered bags, he quite believes
That all the while he's tightening the
strings
That keep them from a too censorious
world. (p. 266)

The first act also serves to introduce various personages of Phanor's court: Chrysal, a toady, Zoram, a pedant, and Aristaeus, who in his outspokenness is regarded as the court's Diogenes. Of the female courtiers, Mirza, Zeolide's companion, is described as "the best, the noblest woman in the world." Having introduced this assortment of characters,

Gilbert packs them off at the end of the act to the Palace of Truth. Except for its blank-verse style and lack of songs, up to this point the play has the distinct flavour of fairy extravaganza.⁵¹

However, in the second act, which takes place within the Palace of Truth, the play shifts key from the merely fantastic to the ironic. For upon succumbing to the influence of truth, nearly all the characters are revealed to be their exact opposites in personality. Zeolide reveals that she does in fact love Philamir, and explains her reticence to him in the following way:

You ask me, then,
To limit my illimitable love,
And circle, with a boundary of words,
A wealth of love that knows no bounds at all!
... Why, Philamir, I might as well attempt
To set a price upon the universe -
Or measure space - or time eternity,
As tell my love in words! (p. 280)

Unfortunately, Philamir, who in the world outside appears to love Zeolide passionately, reveals under the influence of truth that his love is feigned and is only a means of seeking attention to gratify his vanity:

Phil. Why, Zeolide,
At last you speak! Why this, indeed, is
love!
Zeo. (aside) What have I said? (Aloud and coldly)
Indeed, I'm glad to think
My words have pleased you!
Phil. (with enthusiasm) Pleased me? They've
done more -
They've gratified my vanity, and made
Me feel that I am irresistible!
Zeo. Indeed!

Phil. Indeed, dear Zeolide, they have.

Why how you frown!

Zeo. (coldly) If such a love as mine
Serves but to feed your sense of vanity,
I think it is misplaced.

Phil. My vanity
Must needs be fed, and with such a love
as yours. (pp. 280-281)

Finding Zeolide disappointed with him, Philamir's attentions shift to Mirza.

All the other characters undergo similar transformations. Asked for their opinion on Zeolide's singing, Chrysal betrays that his flattery is insincere and Zoram that he is a charlatan:

Altemire. I think I've often heard you
say

No voice could rival Princess Zeolide's?

Chrysal. (enthusiastically) I've often said
so -

I have praised her voice,
Because I am a courtier - paid to praise.
I never meant one word of what I said;
I have the worst opinion of her voice,
And so has Zoram.

Zoram. I? Oh, dear me, no!
I can form no opinion on the point,
I am no judge of music.

Chrysal. Eh?

Zoram. Not I!
I hardly know the treble from the bass,
And as to harmony - I know the word,
But hang me if I guess at what it means!
(p. 277)

Most ironic of all, Aristaeus, who in the outside world prides himself on his truthfulness, is exposed as an amiable fellow:

No child's more easily amused than I.
But, here at Court, where every one is pleased
With everything, my amiability
Would go for naught; so I have coined myself
A disposition foreign to my own,

In hopes my clumsy boorish insolence
Might please you by its very novelty.
(p. 278)

The most amusing unveiling is that of the coquette Azema,
who, as she flirts, reveals all her ploys:

Philamir. I beg your pardon, but the
furniture
Has caught your dress.
Azema. (re-arranging her dress hastily)
Oh, I arranged it so,
That you might see how truly beautiful
My foot and ancle [sic] are.
Philamir. I saw them well,
They're very neat.
Azema. I now remove my glove,
That you may note the whiteness of my
hand.
I place it there in order that you may
Be tempted to enclose it in your own.
(p. 287-288)

Even the king cannot escape the force of truthfulness.
Thinking that he is under the protection of a talisman -- a
crystal box -- which wards off the Palace's effects, Phanor
submits to questioning by his wife. The authentic talisman
has been stolen, and unwittingly armed with a powerless for-
gery, Phanor openly tells his wife of all his marital in-
discretions. The only characters who are not transformed by
the palace's influence are Altemire, Gelanor, the steward of
the Palace, Palmis, a woman of the court, and, at first, Mirza.
The unmasking of Mirza is reserved for the final act of the
play, where she, apparently the noblest of all the characters,
is shown to be the worst of them all. She stole the talisman,
and under its protection masqueraded as good to gain Philamir's

love and steal him from Zeolide.

Thus with the exception of the Queen and two minor characters, all the figures in the play are revealed to have true natures far different from the masks they wear in the real world. The comedy of the play depends not only on these ironic unmaskings but also on the characters' unawareness that they are revealing their true feelings. For example, after Zeolide's song in Act Two, Chrysal's words betray his flattering actions:

Chrysal. (coming forward with all the action
of a man who is expressing extreme approval.)
Oh, I protest, my ears have never heard
A goodly song more miserably sung.
(Clapping hands.) Oh, very poor indeed -
oh, very weak,
No voice - no execution - out of tune -
Pretentious too - oh, very, very poor!
(Applauding as if in ecstasies.)
(p. 276-277)

It would be a difficult acting exercise to make this discrepancy between voice and body effective, and it is a credit to the cast of the original production that they made it one of the funniest elements of the play.⁵²

Underneath the comedy, however, lies an almost cynical satire of human nature. The object of Gilbert's satire is plain enough: it is that favorite target for satirical attack, human hypocrisy.⁵³ However, whereas other satirists are content to expose the hypocrisy of one or two individuals, Gilbert sees the entire world outside the Palace of Truth as a world of masks, falsehood, and appearances.

Love, flattery, faithfulness and purity are seen as masquerades for vanity, insincerity, infidelity, and evil. In this application of hypocrisy to the entire world, Gilbert is implicitly suggesting the illusory nature of our everyday experience. We live in a world of illusion created by the innate human faculty of falsehood and deception.

A further irony is added by the corollary that the world of illusion is man's most secure refuge. Man is fundamentally incapable of living in a world of truth, of spiritual nakedness. This is demonstrated in The Palace of Truth through the unhappiness that revelations of truth bring to all the characters in the play. Gilbert shows that if the principle of truth were to be applied to human affairs, the result would be discord and confusion. This is foreshadowed in Act One in Gelanor's description of the palace:

I have seen married couples, by the score,
Who, when they passed within our crystal walls,
Have boldly advertised themselves prepared
To stake their souls upon each other's faith -
But who, before they've spent an hour at most
Under the castle's mystic influence,
Have separated ne'er to meet again! (p. 271)

Truth does indeed bring discord to all the male-female relationships in the play. Not only does Zeolide break off her engagement with Philamir, but Altemire discovers her husband's infidelities and Palmis that Chrysal does not love her. Zoram and Chrysal fight a duel because each has insulted the other. In short, Gilbert turns the concept of truth upside down and demonstrates that far from being the idealistic good it is

held to be, truth equals chaos.

Thus there is general relief at the end of Act Three when the spell of the palace is broken and the influence of truth vanishes. As the court prepares to leave the Palace, Phanor declares that "we shall get on much better" without truth's influence. The only lesson the characters appear to have learnt from their excursion into truth is one of mistrust of their fellow humans:

Phanor. We've learnt how matrimonial
constancy
By causeless jealousy is sometimes
tried -
(Looking reproachfully at Altemire)
Altemire. How jealousy is sometimes
justified -
(Looking reproachfully at Phanor)
Chrysal. How Zoram - music's vaunted
pioneer -
Don't even know his notes - and has
no ear!
Zoram. That surly misanthropes, with
venom tainted -
Aristaeus. Are often not as black as
they are painted! (pp. 323-324)

Gilbert, however, does not allow any of his characters any self-knowledge or change as a result of their experiences with truth. Rather, one senses that they breathe a collective sigh of relief as they depart for the secure world of make-believe. Only one character appears to have learnt anything from his experience in the Palace, and that is Philamir, who has come to realize Zeolide's true worth after seeing Mirza's duplicity. Gilbert thus gives at least one pair of characters a fairy-tale happy ending; but this seems a little

contrived after the play's cynicism.

The play's weakest attribute is its self-conscious poetry. Gilbert's blank verse is indeed blank; his true metrical genius is revealed in the comic opera libretti. Most of the metaphors which adorn the verse are trite and forced. The characters lack any real psychological depth: they are one-dimensional puppets fashioned and controlled to fit the theme of the play. All in all, the play's most appealing aspect is its intellectual framework: its topsyturvy view of truth and its vision of the illusory nature of experience. Within nineteenth-century English drama, these themes are thoroughly revolutionary: certainly, Gilbert is the first nineteenth-century playwright to challenge conventional notions of truth and reality.

At least one early critic was impressed enough with The Palace of Truth to write:

Certes, it is no small matter for a dramatist to keep an audience interested and attentive by a story which is void of incident or "sensation" of every kind, and which, moreover, is told in blank verse ... The literary value of the piece is not small. It is hoped that future audiences will prove as intelligent as the audience by which 'The Palace of Truth' was first received, since works of this class will go far to redeem our modern comedy from the charge of vulgarity and want of subtlety it has incurred.⁵⁴

Just as The Palace of Truth grows out of the fairy extravaganza form, so Gilbert's next blank-verse comedy, Pygmalion and Galatea of 1871,⁵⁵ has many similarities to

classical burlesque. It is a retelling of the legend of the sculptor Pygmalion, who fell in love with one of his creations. Venus answered his prayers and brought the statue to life.⁵⁶ Such scant material as the original legend supplies is considerably added to by Gilbert in his play: he gives Pygmalion a wife, Cynisca, who becomes jealous of the statue Galatea's affection for her husband. Using special powers granted to her by the goddess Artemis, Cynisca blinds Pygmalion. Galatea, however, effects a reconciliation between husband and wife and leaves the world to become a statue once more. Early reviewers were quick to point out the anachronistic nature of these additions, which applied Victorian ideas about marriage to a Greek setting.⁵⁷ However, unlike the anachronisms of, say, Talfourd's Alcestis: The Original Strong-Minded Woman, Gilbert's additions to the Pygmalion legend are not of a burlesque nature. His intent is not so much to send up his material as to give it new interest and meaning.

The play is set in classical Athens. Pygmalion is sketched as a successful artist, but one who is dissatisfied and frustrated. He chafes under the bondage of his creativity to wealthy patrons such as Chrysos:

He is a fashion, and he knows it well
 In buying sculpture; he appraises it
 As he'd appraise a master-mason's work -
 So much for marble, and so much for time,
 So much for working tools - but still
 he buys
 And so he is a patron of the Arts!

Cynisca. To think that heaven-born Art
should be the slave of such as he!

Pygmalion. Well,
wealth is heaven-born too. I work
for wealth.

Cyn. Thou workest, love, for
fame.

Pyg. And fame brings wealth. The thought's
contemptible,
But I can do no more than work for
wealth. (p. 76)

Furthermore, although his work is successful, he feels the frustration of creating only the "senseless mockery of life." As a creative artist, he aspires beyond mere imitation of life:

Pyg. It all but breathes - therefore
it talks aloud!
It all but moves - therefore it walks
and runs!
It all but lives - and therefore it is
life!
No, no, my love, the thing is cold, dull
stone,
The lifeless, senseless mockery of life.
The gods make life: I can make only
death! (pp. 76-77)

His finest work is a statue of a woman modelled on Cynisca. The action of the play begins as Cynisca leaves on a journey into Athens, leaving Pygmalion alone in his studio to brood on his frustration. As he does so, by some mysterious answering of his wishes, the statue is brought to life:

Pyg. I am no bungler - all the men I make
Are straight-limbed fellows, each mag-
nificent
In the perfection of his manly grace:
I make no crook-backs - all my men are
gods,
My women goddesses - in outward form.
But there's my tether! I can go so far,
And go no further! At that point I stop,

To curse the bonds that hold me sternly
back:

To curse the arrogance of those proud
gods,

Who say, "Thou shalt be greatest among
men,

"And yet infinitesimally small!"

Galatea. Pygmalion!

Pyg. Who called?

Gal. Pygmalion!

Pyg. tears away curtain and discovers

Galatea alive,

Pyg. Ye gods! It lives!

Gal. Pygmalion!

Pyg. It speaks!

I have my prayer! My Galatea breathes!

(pp. 78-79)

In the ensuing encounter between the statue and her creator,
much comedy is provided by Galatea's ingenuous questioning:

Gal. Where am I, then?

Pyg. Why, born into the world by miracle!

Gal. Is this the world?

Pyg. It is.

Gal. This room?

Pyg. This room is portion of a house;

The house stands in a grove; the grove
itself

Is one of many, many hundred groves

In Athens.

Gal. Is Athens then the world?

Pyg. To an Athenian - Yes. (pp. 79-80)

Difficulties arise, however, when the statue declares her
love for her master. Restrained by his marriage vows,
Pygmalion finds some embarrassment in responding to her:

Pyg. Such love as thine

A man may not receive, except indeed

From one who is, or is to be, his wife.

Gal. Then I will be thy wife!

Pyg. That may not be;

I have a wife - the gods allow but one.

Gal. Why did the gods then send me here to thee?

Pyg. I cannot say - unless to punish me

For unreflecting and presumptuous prayer!

I prayed that thou shouldst live - I
have my prayer,
And now I see the fearful consequence
That must attend it! (p. 83)

Fearing reprisal from his wife, Pygmalion sends Galatea to stay with his sister Myrine.

Presently, Cynisca returns from her journey and discovers the affection between Pygmalion and Galatea. Filled with jealousy, she blinds Pygmalion. In the third and final act, Galatea, after hearing that Cynisca plans to leave Pygmalion, decides to reconcile them. In the presence of Cynisca, she draws from Pygmalion the confession that he never loved her. Cynisca forgives her husband and restores his eyesight, and as the play ends Galatea returns once more to statuehood.

In making marital jealousy the central issue of the plot, Pygmalion and Galatea proves to be a very Victorian retelling of the original legend.⁵⁸ Marital infidelity is at the centre of a comic sub-plot which mirrors the main action outlined above. In the second act, the art patron Chrysos and his wife Daphne visit Pygmalion's studio. Daphne discovers her husband flirting with Galatea, and he invents the excuse that the girl is only a living statue. Much to his amazement, this lie is corroborated by all the other characters. Daphne is so incensed, however, that she throws Chrysos out of their home. But the couple are quickly reconciled when they meet at the studio in Act Three.

A second sub-plot is concerned with Myrine, Pygmalion's sister, and Leucippe, a soldier, who are engaged. Once again, Galatea is the cause of misunderstanding. Upon being told of Leucippe's profession, she calls him a "paid assassin," and accuses him of murder when he shows her a fawn he has shot. Hearing from Galatea that her fiance is a murderer, Myrine is horrified and breaks off their engagement. However, as with the two other couples in the play, the misunderstanding is cleared up in the final act.

The overviews of the three plots given above make the play sound simpler than it is. Pygmalion and Galatea is not without its Gilbertian ironies, which are centered in the figure of Galatea. At first glance, Galatea is the cause of all the misunderstanding and confusion in the play. At least, this is what the other characters say:

Myrine. Oh, we were all so happy yesterday,
 And now, within twelve miserable hours,
 A blight has fallen upon all of us.
 Pygmalion is blind as death itself,
 Cynisca leaves his home this very day,
 And my Leucippe hath deserted me!
 I shall go mad with all this weight of
 grief!

Daphne. All this is Galatea's work?

Myr. Yes, all.

(p. 112)

Pygmalion himself describes her as "the curse of all who fell / Within the compass of thy waywardness" (p. 123). Yet Galatea's supposed wrongdoings do not arise from any evil designs on her part, but rather from her simple naivety about the ways of the world. Primarily, she is a figure of truth. Having

just been born into the world, she views it with an open, uninhibited truth which the other characters lack and cannot tolerate. What the world calls a soldier she sees as a murderer, a destroyer of life; what the world calls a sin she sees as natural love. It is from this truthfulness, this "audacity of innocence," that arise all the misunderstandings between the other characters; but the fault lies not so much with Galatea as with the other characters' inability to deal with truth. Thematically, then, the play is similar to The Palace of Truth. It is as if Galatea carries around with her an umbrella of truth from under which she regards and comments on the world. As in The Palace, the intrusion of truth into the human world causes only unhappiness, and its influence must inevitably be destroyed. Pygmalion curses her and says "She is not fit upon this world." The irony is that it is the world that is not fit for the truth and simplicity of Galatea.

Galatea's naivety is a means by which the dramatist forces us to look afresh at the world and realize its follies and pretensions. This satire is accompanied by a bitterness born of Galatea's gradual disillusionment with the world. For Galatea does not return to statuehood simply because she wishes to make things easier for the mortals whose lives she has upset. Her retreat is motivated by a general disenchantment with the world, and her progressive disillusionment

is the play's strongest feature.

The character of Galatea gave early critics many headaches. William Archer, for one, was concerned with what he saw as inconsistencies in her character:

As we have no scientific record of a statue coming to life, the probable moral and intellectual condition of a being so created is left to the widest conjecture. The playwright may assume for it any stage of development he pleases, and his audience will readily grant his assumption. But if his work is to have any claim to artistic value he must not assume all sorts of different stages of development at every second word his creation utters. He must not make her a child in one speech, a woman of the world in the next, and an idiot in the next again.⁵⁹

Archer could not understand why, after her birth in Act One, Galatea possessed such a mixture of childish naivety and mature intelligence. Clearly, however, Gilbert is not asking us to respond to Galatea realistically; the whole play is, after all, a fantasy. He merely asks us to accept the convention that Galatea, while naive in her knowledge of the world, can talk and think intelligently. However intelligent some of her later remarks in the play may appear, at her first appearance in Gilbert characterizes her as an innocent, as a tabula rasa.⁶⁰ Her first instinct is to luxuriate and take delight in the sense of life:

I felt my frame pervaded by a glow
That seemed to thaw my marble into flesh;
Its cold hard substance throbbed with
active life,

My limbs grew supple, and I moved - I lived!
 Lived in the ecstasy of new-born life!
 Lived in the love of him that fashioned me!
 (p. 81)

Then, she childishly questions Pygmalion about the world. From these initial moments of joy and innocence to her death at the end of the play, however, her life is that of progressive disillusionment.

The first stage in her awakening from innocence comes when Pygmalion tells her that her love is a sin:

Pyg. It's a grievous sin
 To sit so lovingly as we sit now.
Gal. Is sin so pleasant? If to sit and
 talk
 As we are sitting, be indeed a sin,
 Why I could sin all day! (p. 85)

As the first act closes, her initial delight with life is clouded with confusion:

Gal. It's a strange world!
 A woman loves her husband very much,
 And cannot brook that I should love him
 too;
 She fears he will be lonely till she comes,
 And will not let me cheer his loneliness;
 She bids him breathe his love to sense-
 less stone,
 And when that stone is brought to life -
 be dumb!
 It's a strange world - I cannot fathom it!
 (p. 87)

In the second act, she tells Pygmalion and Myrine of the strange experiences of watching her first sunset and falling asleep. She is horrified to learn that sleep is a daily occurrence. Up to this point, her naivety is chiefly a source

of laughter, but comedy shifts key to pathos when she first learns of death:

Myrine. Once every day this death occurs
 to us,
 Till thou and I and all who dwell on earth
 Shall sleep to wake no more!

Gal. To wake no more?

Pyg. That time must come - may be not yet
 awhile -
 Still it must come, and we shall all
 return
 To the cold earth from which we quarried
 thee. (p. 92)

The sudden awareness of death brings Galatea's disillusionment to full value:

See how the promises of new-born life
 Fade from the bright hope-picture, one
 by one!
 Love for Pygmalion, a blighting sin;
 His love a shame that he must hide away;
 Sleep, stone-like senseless sleep, our
 natural state;
 And life a passing vision born thereof!
 How the bright promises fade one by one!
 (p. 92)

Worse is yet to come, for having been made aware of the transience of life, Galatea is confronted by Leucippe, whom she can only see as an instrument of death:

 Why, my Pygmalion,
 How many dreadful things thou teachest me!
 Thou tellest me of death - that hideous doom
 That all must fill; and having told me this -
 Here is a man, whose business is to kill:
 To filch from other men the priceless boon
 That thou hast given me - the boon of life.
 (p. 94)

Finally, she confronts death itself in the form of the fawn Leucippe has killed. Filled herself with an awareness of the wonder of life, she is amazed at the callousness of humanity

towards death as Pygmalion shows her the dead fawn:

Gal. (in extreme of horror) His victim!

Take it hence!

I cannot look at it!

Myr. Why, what is this?

Gal. The being he destroyed in wantonness;
He robbed it of the life the gods had
given.

Oh! take it hence, I dare not look on
death!

Myr. Why, was this all he killed?

Gal. (astonished) All!!! (sic) And
enough! (p. 100)

Galatea's final disillusionment is reserved for the last act, where she learns that Pygmalion, her creator and source of love, has come to hate her. Having discovered that "life is bitterer to me than death," she resolves to leave the world. With the curses of Pygmalion ringing in her ears, she ascends to her pedestal once more. As she disappears, Cynisca reveals to Pygmalion that it was Galatea who effected their reconciliation. Pygmalion is stricken by remorse, but it is too late:

Gal. Farewell, Pygmalion! Farewell!

Farewell!

(Pygmalion rushes to the veil and tears
it away, discovering Galatea as a statue
on the pedestal, as in Act 1.) (p. 123)

Early reviewers of the play found Pygmalion's treatment of Galatea "cruel" and "offensive".⁶¹ However, his attitude to her is a necessary link in the growth of Galatea's disenchantment with the world and her final, suicidal rejection of it. In Gilbert's ironic view of the world, it is only fitting that the creator should kill his creation. This

anti-romantic view of a Pygmalion who, in the end, is distasteful may have influenced that other modern retelling of the same story, Shaw's Pygmalion.

The blank verse of the play is on the whole less artificial and more natural than that of The Palace of Truth. It reaches its most effective moments in the speeches of Galatea quoted earlier. Overall, the play has a special blend of charm and irony that makes it unique among Gilbert's work. It combines a light comedy born of Galatea's naivety with an underlying bitterness and sadness expressed through her disillusionment with and rejection of life. It is a bitter-sweet creation which deserves more critical attention than it has received in the past. One can only agree with Allardyce Nicoll when he says it reveals "a tremulous poetic expression which shows Gilbert capable of greater and more serious things than one might, judging from his other work, have imagined."⁶²

Gilbert's next blank-verse play was The Wicked World, an "Original Fairy Comedy" produced at the Haymarket Theatre in 1873.⁶³ The play marks a return to the world of fairy extravaganza, for the curtain rises to disclose:

Fairy Land. A beautiful, but fanciful landscape, which is supposed to lie on the upper side of a cloud. The cloud is suspended over the earth, a portion of which (representing "a bird's-eye view" of a medieval city), is seen, far below, through a rent or gap in the cloud. (p. 5)

We are introduced to various inhabitants of fairyland, such as Zayda and Darine, who love to sit and contemplate the wicked world of mortals which rolls by beneath their cloud. Selene, the queen of the fairies, tells her companions that every fairy has a mortal counterpart:

Yes, on that world - that very wicked world -
 Thou - I - and all who dwell in fairy land,
 May find a parallel identity:
 A perfect counterpart in outward form;
 So perfect that, if it were possible
 To place us by these earthly counterparts,
 No man on earth, no fairy in the clouds,
 Could tell which was the fairy - which the
 man. (p. 7)

Furthermore, a law of fairyland permits fairies and mortals to exchange places:

When a fairy quits his fairy home
 To visit earth, those whom he leaves behind
 May summon from the wicked world below
 That absent fairy's mortal counterpart;
 And that mortal counterpart may stay
 In fairy land and fill the fairy's place
 Till he return. (p. 13)

This is the whimsical device upon which the action of the play depends. Since two of their society, Ethais and Phyllon, are to visit earth, the fairies persuade Selene to summon their mortal counterparts to fairyland. Shocked by the ever-increasing wickedness of the world, the fairies wish to show the mortals the unalloyed happiness of fairyland so that they will learn how to better conduct life on earth. Accordingly, Selene summons Sir Ethais and Sir Phyllon to fairyland.⁶⁴

It is only after the mortals are brought to fairyland that the main action of the play begins. The theme of the work is stated succinctly in the Prologue:

The Author begs you'll kind attention pay
While I explain the object of his play.
You have been taught, no doubt, by those
 professing
To understand the thing, that Love's a
 blessing:
Well, he intends to teach you the reverse -
That Love is not a blessing, but a curse!
 (p. 3)

Gilbert illustrates this thesis through the confrontation and interaction of fairies and mortals. Having brought Ethais and Phyllon to fairyland to teach them goodness, the innocent fairies find themselves inexplicably attracted to them. Even as Selene's words of welcome demonstrate an interest in Ethais' moral nature, so her actions reveal an interest of another kind:

We know that you are very frail,
Poor, blind, weak, wayward mortals - willing
 reeds,
Swayed right and left by every tempting wind;
And we are pure, and very, very brave,
Having no taste for trivial solaces
 (taking Ethais' hand)
Scorning such idle joys as we have heard
Appeal most strongly to such men as you;
And we have cherished earnest hope that we,
By the example of our sacred lives,
May teach you to abjure such empty joys,
May send you back to earth, pure, childlike
 men,
To teach your mothers, sisters, and your wives,
And those perchance (sighing) who are to be
 your wives!
That there are fairy maidens in the clouds,
Whose gentle mode of thought and mode of life
They would do well to imitate. We would

That every maid on earth were such as we!
 (Placing her arms round his neck.) (pp. 20-21)

By the end of the first act, all the fairies have fallen in love with the mortal visitors.

In the second act, we learn that Darine has also fallen in love with Ethais. Filled with jealousy, she plots to win him from Selene. From Ethais' servant Lutin (who has arrived in fairyland to replace his fairy counterpart), she obtains a potion which he says will cure Ethais of wounds received in a duel with Phyllon. With this potion, she bribes Ethais into pledging his love to her. At the end of the act, Selene discovers Ethais' faithlessness and Darine's duplicity:

May Heaven rain down her fury on thy soul!
 May every fibre in that perjured heart
 Quiver with love for one who loves thee not!
 May thine untrammelled soul at last be caught,
 And fixed and chained and riveted to one
 Who, with the love of heaven upon her lips,
 Carries the hate of hell within her heart!
 Thou phantom of the truth - thou mimic god -
 Thou traitor to thine own unhappy soul -
 Thou base apostate to the lovely faith,
 That thou hast preached with such false
 eloquence,
 I am thine enemy! (To her sisters.) Look
 on your work,
 My gentle sisters. (They look in horror.)
 Are ye not content?
 Behold! I am a devil, like yourselves!
 (pp. 50-51)

Through the introduction of love, fairyland is transformed from heaven to hell. It is only returned to its former tranquil, happy state when, because of the imminent

return of their fairy counterparts, Ethais, Phyllon, and Lutin return to earth. As the play concludes, the fairies agree that their experiment has been a disaster. They chastise themselves for the self-righteousness which led them to bring the mortals into their society in the first place:

Oh, let us lay this lesson to our hearts;
 Let us achieve our work with humbled souls,
 Free from the folly of self-righteousness.
 Behold, is there so wide a gulf between
 The humbled wretch who, being tempted, falls,
 And that good man who rears an honoured head
 Because temptation hath not come to him?
 Shall we, from our enforced security
 Deal mercilessly with poor mortal man,
 Who struggles, single handed, to defend
 The demon-leagured fortress of his soul?
 (p. 61-62)

Thus experience has chastened the self-righteousness which made the fairies treat mankind with scorn and contempt. However, although their experience has given the fairies more charitable understanding towards mankind, it only serves to widen the distance between fairyland and the wicked world:

Let us glide through our immortality
 Upon the placid lake of sister-love,
 Nor tempt the angry billows of a sea,
 Which, though it carry us to unknown lands,
 Is so beset with rocks and hidden shoals,
 That we may perish ere our vessel reach
 The unsafe haven of its distant shore.
 (p. 62-63)

The play thus applies the same ironic treatment to love that Gilbert applies to truth in The Palace of Truth.

Love, like truth, is a synonym for unhappiness. At every level in the play Gilbert seeks to destroy the romantic notion that "Love's a blessing." He does this not only through the depiction of the effects of love on an innocent fairyland, but also through the glimpses various characters give of love's operation on earth. Love is seen as the root of all earthly evils:

Why Love's the germ
Of every sin that stalks upon the earth:
The brawler fights for love - the drunkard
drinks
To toast the girl who loves him, or to drown
Remembrance of the girl who loves him not!
The miser hoards his gold to purchase love.
The liar lies to gain, or wealth, or love;
And if for wealth, it is to purchase love.
The very footpad nerves his coward arm
To stealthy deeds of shame by pondering on
The tipsy kisses of some tavern wench!
Be not deceived - this love is but the seed;
The branching tree that springs from it is
Hate! (p. 24)

Men and women are seen at eternal war with one another.
Questioned about his marriage, the servant Lutin replies:

Lutin. Humph - we do fall out -
We did to-day.
Neodie. And how came that about? (All anxious to know.)
Lutin. Why thus - to tell the truth - between ourselves -
There was a lady in the case.
Zayda. (apart, much shocked) Hush, hush -
Confine thyself to matters that relate
To thine own sex. Thy master, Ethais -
He fought with Phyllon - what was that about?
(Crossing to Lutin)
Lutin. Oh, it's the old, old story!
Locrine. Tell it.
Lutin. Well,
There was a lady in the case!

Zayda. Then, stop -

Go on to something else - Where wast
thou born?

Lutin. Why, in Bulgaria - some years ago -
(whispering) There was a lady in that
case!

Zayda. (severely) It seems
There is a lady, sir, in every case.

Lutin. In all those cases they do inter-
fere! (pp. 41-42)

Gilbert blasts romantic conceptions of love not only by equating it with discord and unhappiness but also by hinting that love is only sex in disguise. Early in the play, Selene says "Of earthly things / This love of theirs ranks as the earthiest" (p. 12). This statement is reinforced in the play in passages which suggest the purely physical basis of love, as in Selene's attempt to explain why she loves Ethais:

Selene. I am a woman, and thou art a man;

Well, thou art comely - so, in truth,
am I;

We meet and love each other - that's to
say,

I am prepared to give up all I have,
My home, my very fairyhood for thee;
Thou to surrender riches, honour, life,
To please the fleeting fancies of my
will.

And why?

Because I see in thee, or thou in me,
Astounding virtue, brilliant intellect,
Great self-denial, venerable years,
Rare scholarship, or godly talent? No!
Because, forsooth, we're comely
specimens -

Not of our own, but Nature's industry!
(pp. 30-31)

Ethais is characterized as a cad who cannot sustain a relationship beyond the attraction of a pretty face. In the

Prologue, Gilbert makes perfectly clear that the type of love he is describing is based on sexual attraction:

It's easy to affect this cynic tone,
 But, let me ask you, had the world ne'er
 known
 Such love as you, and I, and he, must
 mean -
 Pray where would you, or I, or he, have
 been? (p. 3)

Since sex is the cause of human unhappiness, Gilbert's ideal society would seem to be one in which sex is non-existent. Such is fairyland before the coming of the mortals, where the only kind of love is a spiritual "tranquil brotherhood," confirmed by the action of the play to be far superior to mortal love. This vision of a sexless society as the happiest is a recurring theme in Gilbert's work, and one that deserves more study. At least one rather unsatisfactory attempt has been made to explain it in terms of modern psychology.⁶⁵

However, fairyland is not altogether spotless. Through the fairies, Gilbert satirizes the self-righteousness of those who condemn the sinful without ever having known or experienced the temptation to sin themselves. All the fairies' pontifical utterances about the sinfulness of the world and the perfection of their own state are undercut by the quickness and easiness with which they succumb to temptation. Their experience humbles them and makes them more understanding towards mankind's plight -- but also isolates them still further from the world.

The Wicked World is a devastating attack on Victorian ideals about love. Not only does Gilbert upset the romantic conception of love as ennobling and purifying,⁶⁶ and show it to be debasing and destructive, but he suggests that it is really nothing more than an animal passion. These ideas shocked the play's original audience. Gilbert became involved in a lawsuit with The Pall Mall Gazette which had labelled the play vulgar, coarse, and indecent.⁶⁷ He won his case, but in 1873 public opinion was not yet on his side. Peyton Wrey, writing in London Society, said of Gilbert:

If he has any more mythological comedies forthcoming it will be advisable for him to submit them to the revision of some person who has a perception of what, without straining the text, may be very easily taken for impurity of thought and expression. The 'Pall Mall Gazette,' by its outspoken candour, did a distinct service to the cause of the drama.⁶⁸

However, the daring Mr. Gilbert continued his assault on the proprieties of Victorian audiences: later in 1873, his burlesque of The Wicked World, The Happy Land, was banned by the Lord Chamberlain's office. This goaded Gilbert into writing the satirical farce The Realm of Joy, discussed earlier.⁶⁹ 1873 indeed marked the high point of Gilbert's career as the angry young man of Victorian theatre.

However, Gilbert may well have taken Peyton Wrey's advice to heart, for his last "Fairy Play," Broken Hearts,

shows a considerable falling off from its predecessors. It was produced at the Court Theatre on December 9th, 1875.⁷⁰ The play concerns the sisters Hilda and Vavir, who with two other maidens, Amanthis and Melusine, have cloistered themselves on a tropical island far from the human world. They have sought this seclusion because

We maidens all (save one) have dearly loved,
And those we loved have died. We, broken
 hearts,
Knit by the sympathy of kindred woe,
Have sought this island far from the ken of
 man;
And having loved, and having lost our loves,
Stand pledged to love no living thing again.
(p. 5)

Their one male companion is Mousta, a deformed dwarf. Having been broken-hearted through love in the outside world, on the island the maidens have directed their affections towards inanimate objects: Hilda towards a fountain, and Vavir towards a sun-dial.

To this island comes Prince Florian of Spain, who possesses a magic veil which gives him powers of invisibility. He observes Vavir's affection for the sun-dial and decides to play a trick on her. Invisible, he pretends to be the voice of the sun-dial:

Florian. (aloud) Vavir, I love thee
 with my whole, whole heart!
Vavir. (recoiling, horrified) Who spoke?
Florian. 'Twas I -
 thy dial!
Vavir. Oh, terrible!
 What shall I do?
Florian. Fair lady - have no fear.
Vavir. "Fair lady" - It's a man! My

sisters, help!

I am betrayed!

Florian. Have patience for a while -

Vavir. Who and what art thou? - speak!

Florian. (aside) What shall I say?

(aloud) I am a poor, long-suffering,
mortal man,

Whom in the stony substance of thy dial,

A cruel magician holds incarcerated!

Vavir. Oh, marvellous!

Florian. And very pitiful!

Vavir. Aye, pitiful indeed, poor prisoned
soul!

(advancing)

Florian. "There shalt thou be," said he,

"till some pure maid

Shall have been constant to thine unseen
self

A twelvemonth and a day!" That maid art
thou! (pp. 11-12)

Vavir takes Florian perfectly seriously and falls more deeply in love with her sun-dial. Florian himself falls in love with Hilda, whom he observes talking to her fountain. He overhears her tell it that her love in the world was one Prince Florian, and that her heart had been broken when she thought him drowned in a shipwreck. Disguised as the voice of the fountain, Florian speaks to Hilda, and she pledges her love to this spirit.

In the second act, we discover that Moustas has stolen the magic veil from Florian to assist him in his own wooing of Hilda. Florian, now disarmed and visible, appears before Vavir, who is overjoyed to discover the spirit of the sun-dial incarnate. Florian is forced into pledging his love to Vavir:

Vavir. Thou wilt not leave me?

Florian. Only for a while;

I will return to thee.

Vavir. So, hand in hand,
We shall grow old, and die, still hand
in hand?

Florian. Yes, ever hand in hand.

Vavir. Oh, gentle Heaven,
I have more happiness than I can ever
bear!

(Exit Vavir)

Florian. Poor soul, what shall I say? To
tell her now
Would be to kill her! (p. 20)

Disguised with the veil, Moustas wooed Hilda as the spirit
of the fountain, and obtains her pledge of love. When he
reveals himself, Hilda is horrified and takes away the
veil. Invisible, she overhears Florian disappoint Vavir's
hopes by telling her he does not love her:

Florian. There was a knight
Who, as he journeyed, met a gentle
maid,
With whom he, light of heart and
light of tongue,
Conversed in playful strain. The
maid was fair,
And he, in jest, spoke loving words
to her,
Believing that she knew them to be
feigned.

(At this point it begins to dawn upon Vavir
that Florian is referring to her.)

She, pure as Faith - having no
thought of guile
Tender and trusting in her innocence -
Believed the madcap knight's unworthy
words,
And mused them in his heart. He, smitten
with shame,
For he was plighted to her sister whom
(Vavir, finding her fears confirmed, rises,
shrinking from Florian, expressing extreme
pain. He rises after her).

He loved with an exceeding love, es-
sayd,
With clumsy hint and far-fetched
parable,

To break the truth to her. At length -
 at length,
 By very slow degrees - light came to her!
 Shall I go on?
Vavir. (faintly) No need - I know the rest!
The maiden died - she pardoned him, and
died! (p. 28)

In the final act Hilda, out of love for her sister, renounces Florian, and persuades him to accept Vavir's love once more. The sacrifice is in vain, however, for Vavir dies of a broken heart.

Like The Palace of Truth and The Wicked World, the play has close similarities to fairy extravaganza. The story of a hero possessing powers of invisibility (a ubiquitous extravaganza device) who intrudes onto an island inhabited by beautiful women is told in Planché's The Invisible Prince, or, The Island of Tranquil Delights.⁷¹ However, whereas Planché's version is merely a charming entertainment, Gilbert's is an attempt to imbue the story with seriousness. The underlying pattern of the play is similar to The Wicked World: just as Ethais and Phyllon destroy the happiness of fairyland, so the intrusion of Florian onto the island destroys its tranquility. However, whereas in The Wicked World the confrontation between mortals and fairies brings about a condemnation of mortal love and of the wicked world, the events of Broken Hearts carry no such import. The vision of a wicked world beyond, which is so conspicuous in The Wicked World, is lacking in Broken Hearts. The sole repre-

sentative of the outside world, Florian, is seen as essentially noble, both in his sympathy for Vavir and his final renunciation of Hilda. The differences between the two plays can best be appreciated by comparing Gilbert's handling of the same situation in each. In both The Wicked World and Broken Hearts, the central conflict arises when two women love the same man. Gilbert was fond of this situation: it provided the basis for the comedietta Uncle Baby.⁷² In The Wicked World the rivalry between Selene and Darine for Ethais leads to jealousy, spitefulness, and hatred. In Broken Hearts, when Hilda learns that Vavir also loves Florian, she renounces him out of love for her sister. Whereas The Wicked World looks at human nature with a hardness and cynicism, then, Broken Hearts sees the world through sentimental eyes. This sentimentality extends, as has been suggested above, to the character of Florian, and also to Vavir, whose self-pity becomes a little tiresome:

I am a poor weak girl, whose fluttering
heart
Quakes at the rustle of a leaf, and yet
I did not fear to die - I prayed to die!
(p. 20)

Viewed in the context of the earlier blank-verse comedies, Broken Hearts seems decidedly un-Gilbertian.

The most interesting character in the play is the grotesque yet pathetic figure of Moustas.⁷³ At the opening of the play, he is discovered reading a book of magic so that he may transform his ugliness:

See what I am - dwarfed, twisted, and
 deformed!
 I have a fancy to be tall and straight -
This volume teaches me to have my will.
My only eyeball flashes from its pit
 Like a red snake trapped in a sunken
 snare -
 I do not like my eye. As I've but me,
 I'd have it large and bright. This
 teaches me
To make it so. (p. 4)

Mousta sees himself as a scar on the beauty of the island:

I am the one foul blot upon its face:
 I am the one misshapen twisted thing
 In this assemblage of rare loveliness:
 I am the one accursed discord in
 This choir of universal harmony! (p. 5)

The maidens have chosen Mousta for their servant because they think his ugliness makes him harmless, yet Mousta says that despite his outward unattractiveness he still has "A man's desire to love - and be loved." His actions in the play chronicle his pathetic attempts to be loved. When Florian arrives on the island, his veil of invisibility seems to Mousta to be a heaven-sent blessing. He can now woo Hilda without the discomfiture of her repulsion by his appearance. Disguised as the spirit of the fountain, he obtains her pledge of love, but when he reveals himself, she is horrified. Her love is shattered by the reality of his appearance. In this scene, Gilbert suggests a theme already expressed in The Wicked World: love's dependence on physical beauty. Even the noble, charitable, good Hilda cannot bring herself to love ugliness. She loves Florian, who is Mousta's antithesis:

Mousta. Look at yourself, sir knight, then
 look at me!
 You, comely, straight-limbed, fair of
 face and form,
 ... I, a dwarf,
 Crooked, humpbacked, and one-eyed -
 so foul a thing
 That I am fain to quote my love for women
 To prove that I have kinship with mankind. (p. 34)

Ironically, it is Florian who shows Mousta the only kindness
 in the play:

Florian. My wrath has faded - when I look upon
 The seal that Heaven hath set upon thy brow,
 Why, I could find it in my heart to ask
 Thy pardon for the fury of my words!
 Go, take thy life, make fairer use of it.
Mousta. (much moved) I thank you, in - not
 for my blighted life,
 But for the pitying words in which you
 grant it.
 (with emotion) You've moved me very deeply.
 (Places the ring that Hilda gave him on
 Florian's finger - then kisses his hand).
 Curse the tears.
 I am not used to weep, my lord, - but then
 I am not used to gentleness from men.
 (pp. 34-35)

The figure of Mousta, then, brings in one touch of irony
 to the play: love's hopeless bondage to beauty.

Overall, the play lacks the satiric bite of The Palace
 of Truth and The Wicked World. As suggested above, this
 is due to the sentimentality with which Gilbert paints the
 figures of Vavir, Hilda, and Florian. It does, however,
 possess the mood of disillusionment and world-weariness
 which colours the final appearance of Galatea in Pygmalion
 and Galatea. In fact, the play's most effective aspect is
 its evocation of a dream-like world of escape and forget-

fulness from the sadnesses and despairs of the human world.

This is perhaps best expressed in Hilda's song:

Far from sin - far from sorrow
Let me stay - let me stay!
From the fear of to-morrow
Far away - far away!
I am weary and shaken
Let me stay - let me stay!
Till in death I awaken
Far away - far away! (p. 14)

It is not an exaggeration to say that the four works discussed in this chapter are revolutionary within the context of nineteenth-century comedy. Just as Planché in the 1830's had transformed the burletta into a respectable entertainment, so Gilbert in the 1870's metamorphosizes the extravaganza and burlesque into vehicles for serious comment on the world. Retaining the settings and magical devices of burlesque and extravaganza, he discards their rhymed couplets, puns, songs, and spectacle and replaces them with a blank verse through which he expresses his own vision of the world. That vision, as has been demonstrated above, is basically satiric and ironic. It assaults Victorian complacencies with the world by exposing it as a world of sham, wickedness, and unhappiness.

One naturally wonders why Gilbert chose the extravaganza and burlesque forms as the basis for his satire. The answer is perhaps found by considering that his satire is always based on a single magical device: a palace of truth, a living statue, a flight to fairyland. Northrop

Frye identifies one of the satirist's methods as a shift of perspective:

He so often gives to ordinary life a logical and self-consistent shift of perspective. He will show us society suddenly in a telescope as posturing and dignified pygmies, or in a microscope as hideous and reeking giants, or he will change his hero into an ass, and show us how humanity looks from an ass's point of view. This type of fantasy breaks down customary associations, reduces sense experience to one of many possible categories, and brings out the tentative, als ob basis of all our thinking.⁷⁴

It can be seen that Gilbert's use of magical devices enables him to distort and change the normal perspective from which we view life. The magical events of Gilbert's blankverse comedies allow us to see man in entirely new, fresh, and revealing ways. The Palace of Truth is a means of revealing man's innate hypocrisy and thereby the sham of the everyday world. The figure of Galatea enables us to see the world through the eyes of an innocent. From the lofty perspective of fairyland, man seems like an insignificant and corrupt beast. Gilbert's use of magic, then, far from being a whimsical ornament to his fantasies, is crucial to his satire: it provides that change in perspective so necessary to the satirist's vision. Gilbert's fantasy is thus not far removed from the methods of Swift in Gulliver's Travels.

In reading these plays, one has the feeling that Gilbert, like Swift, sees man as "the most pernicious race

of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth."⁷⁵ This suggests another aspect of Gilbert's use of fantasy. Fairyland, for Gilbert, is not merely the enchanted playground of nursery-tales. Rather, it is an idealized world of perfection and happiness which by contrast makes the human world seem thoroughly corrupt and evil. This is seen most obviously in The Wicked World, but it is also present in Pygmalion and Galatea, where Galatea is seen as too good for the world, and The Palace of Truth, where man is seen as incompatible with an idealized world of truth. By contrast with fairyland, the human world is viewed as hopelessly fallen and irredeemable.

The blend of magic and satire seen in these works is uniquely Gilbert's, and provides the informing principle of several of his later comic opera libretti. It undoubtedly exerted a strong influence on the Shaw of such works as Back to Methuselah. Before Shaw arrived on the scene, at least one critic felt that in his choice of themes and attitudes Gilbert was the one English playwright who resembled Ibsen:

Over the satire of the Swedish poet and the English humourist hangs the same crepuscular atmosphere in which the writings of Heine, De Musset, Mr. Tennyson, Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Morris, and Mr. Victor Hugo are bathed.⁷⁶

Indeed, in their tone of disillusionment and cynicism there

is much in these four works which reflects the intellectual atmosphere of late nineteenth-century England.⁷⁷ Gilbert has always been regarded as an intellectual reactionary, but further study will undoubtedly prove his work has close connections with the intellectual movements of the later nineteenth-century.

The Swiftian pessimism which underlies the blank-verse comedies seems at first glance a far cry from the merriment of the Savoy Operas. Yet of the thousands of people who must have read or performed in a Gilbert and Sullivan opera, few have been led to remark on the underlying bitterness and melancholy which surfaces every now and again in these works. The blank-verse comedies teach us that Gilbert's laughter was born of pessimism and sadness, that he was at his most sincere when he wrote:

The world is but a broken toy,
Its pleasure hollow - false its joy,
Unreal its loveliest hue,⁷⁸
Its pains alone are true.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

1. Reynolds, Early Victorian Drama, Chapter Four.
2. Ibid., p. 118.
3. Tolles, Tom Taylor, p. 222.
4. See Chapter Two, p.15.
5. George Rowell, The Victorian Theatre (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 10.
6. Ibid.
7. The history of the burletta is traced in Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, pp. 32-39.
8. Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, p. 10.
9. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, p. 196.
10. The history of the collaboration between Planché and Vestris is to be found in W.W. Appleton, Madame Vestris and the London Stage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).
11. James R. Planché, The Extravaganzas of J.R. Planché, T.F. Dillon Croker and Stephen Tucker, eds. (London: Samuel French, 1879), Vol. I
12. Augustin Filon, The English Stage: Being an Account of the Victorian Drama (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), p. 94.
13. Planché, Extravaganzas, I, 40-41.
14. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, p. 339.
The style of acting suggested here foreshadows the style recommended by Gilbert for the playing of Engaged. See Chapter Five, p. 181.
15. J.R. Planché, The Golden Fleece (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
N.B. All dates given in text are dates of first production.

16. Ibid., p. 2.
17. Ibid., p. 33.
18. J.R. Planché, Theseus and Ariadne (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
19. Appleton, Madame Vestris, pp. 102-103.
20. Planché, Extravaganzas, Vol. II, pp. 66-67.
21. Ibid., Vols. I and II.
22. J.R. Planché, The White Cat (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
23. Ibid., p. 9.
24. Ibid. p. 12.
25. Ibid., p. 16.
26. J.R. Planché, The Invisible Prince (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
27. Ibid., p. 13.
28. J.R. Planché, The Fair One With The Golden Locks (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.), pp. 2-4.
29. Appleton, Madame Vestris, pp. 173-174.
30. Planché, Extravaganzas, Vol. III, pp. 81-84. Here, in the Preface to The Birds, Planché states that it was an attempt to adapt Aristophanes to "modern and local circumstances," and to "ascertain how far the theatrical public would be willing to receive a higher class of entertainment than the modern extravaganza." Clearly, he sees Gilbert as his heir and successor when he says, "The recent successes of 'The Palace of Truth' and still more of 'Pygmalion' upon these boards (i.e. the Haymarket) have proved that there is a public who can enjoy good writing and good acting unassisted by magnificent scenery and undergraded by 'break-downs'."
31. F.C. Burnand, Venus and Adonis (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C. The piece was first performed in 1864.
32. Ibid., p. 2

33. F.C. Burnand, Pirithous, the Son of Ixion (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
34. F. Talfourd, Alcestis: The Original Strong-Minded Woman (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
35. Ibid., p. 5.
36. Ibid., p. 12.
37. Ibid., p. 16.
38. Ibid., p. 3.
39. Ibid., p. 4.
40. F. Talfourd, Atalanta (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
41. W. Brough, Prince Amabel (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
42. Ibid., p. 12.
43. Ibid., p. 9.
44. H.J. Byron, Cinderella (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.). G.C.C.
45. David Mayer, Harlequin in his Element: The English Pantomime 1806 - 1836 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 23-31.
46. Ibid., Chapter 9.
47. A.E. Wilson, Pantomime Pageant (London: Stanley Paul, 1946), pp. 47-48.
48. Henry F. Saville, Harlequin Prince Thalaba (Nottingham: Stafford and Co., Printers by Steam Power, n.d.). G.C.C.
49. Henry F. Saville, King Atlas (Nottingham: Stafford and Co., Printers by Steam Power, n.d.). G.C.C.
50. W.S. Gilbert, "The Palace of Truth," Original Plays (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876).
All page references given in text are to this edition. John Baldwin Buckstone was the manager of the Haymarket from 1853 to 1878. The original production of the Palace featured Buckstone as Phanor, W.H. Kendal as Philamir, and Madge Robertson (sister to Tom and later Dame Madge Kendal) as Zeolide. W. Macqueen-Pope, Haymarket: Theatre of Perfection (London: W.H. Allen, 1948), Chapter 24.

51. The blank verse is not unprecedented within the extravaganza form. Planché's High, Low, Jack and the Game of 1833 was written in blank verse. Planché, Extravaganzas, Vol. I, p. 117-118.
52. Joseph Knight (?), review of The Palace of Truth, The Athenaeum, No. 2248, November 26, 1870, p. 697. Although this and other reviews of Gilbert's plays in the Athenaeum are unsigned, they are almost certainly the work of Joseph Knight, who was the journal's drama critic from 1868 to 1907. By 1900, he was one of the most widely respected and influential critics in London. Leslie E. Marchand, The Athenaeum: A Mirror of Victorian Culture (New York: Octagon, 1971), p. 226; George Rowell, ed., Victorian Dramatic Criticism (London: Methuen, 1971), p. xxiii.
53. Arthur Pollard, Satire (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 12.
54. Knight (?), review of The Palace, p. 697.
55. W.S. Gilbert, "Pygmalion and Galatea," Original Plays. All page references in the text are to this edition. Pygmalion was, like the Palace, first produced at the Haymarket, with Buckstone as Chrysos, Kendal as Pygmalion, and Madge Robertson as Galatea. The play proved to be the most popular of the four blank-verse comedies, and was revived many times during the nineteenth century. It earned Gilbert £40,000. Baily, Gilbert and Sullivan and their World.
56. Ovid, The Metamorphoses, trans. Horace Gregory (New York: Mentor, 1958), p. 281-282. The most notable Victorian retelling of the legend was in William Morris' The Earthly Paradise of 1868, which may have influenced Gilbert's version. William Morris, The Earthly Paradise (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1905).
57. Joseph Knight (?), review of Pygmalion and Galatea, The Athenaeum, No. 2303, December 16, 1871, pp. 802-803.
58. "After marriage ... the Victorian ethic made fidelity the supreme virtue and sexual irregularity the blackest of sins." Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 356.
59. William Archer, "Mr. W.S. Gilbert," W.S. Gilbert: Scholarship and Commentary, Jones, ed., p. 33.

60. Filon, The English Stage, p. 149.
61. Knight (?), review of Pygmalion, pp. 802-803.
62. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Late Nineteenth-Century Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1949), p. 136.
63. W.S. Gilbert, "The Wicked World," Original Plays. All page references given in the text are to this edition. In the original production Buckstone played Lutin; Kendal, Ethais; and Madge Robertson, Selene.
64. The spell by which the fairies bring the mortals to fairyland involves the casting of roses to earth. Magic roses are a common device in extravaganza: both Planché's Invisible Prince and Brough's Prince Amabel make use of them.
65. Arthur Brenner, "The Fantasies of W.S. Gilbert," Psychoanalytic Quarterly, XXI, pp. 373-401.
66. Walter E. Houghton, "Love," The Victorian Frame of Mind, pp. 375-381.
67. David W. Cole, "The Policy of Contentiousness," Gilbert and Sullivan Papers, Helyar, ed., p. 28.
68. H.A. Hargreaves, "Sir William Schwenk Gilbert and the Lure of the Fallen Fairies," ibid., p. 66.
69. See Chapter III, pp. 51-52.
70. W.S. Gilbert, "Broken Hearts," Original Plays: Second Series (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922). All page references given in text are to this edition. In 1875 the Court was under the management of John Hare. Kendal played Florian; Madge Robertson, Hilda.
71. See above, p. 74.
72. See Chapter III, p. 38.

73. Moustafa may have been inspired by the deformed hero of Riquet with the Tuft, Planche's extravaganza of 1836. There are also echoes of Caliban. Although Gilbert professed to loathe Shakespeare, the poetic comedies contain much that is Shakespearian: the magical realm of The Palace recalls the enchanted forest of Midsummer Night's Dream, and the Island of Broken Hearts finds an obvious analogue in Prospero's island, to name but two examples.
74. Northrop Frye, The Anatomy of Criticism (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 234-235.
75. Jonathan Swift, "Gulliver's Travels," The Writings of Jonathan Swift, Robert A. Greenberg and William B. Piper, eds. (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 108.
Cf. Zayda's remark in The Wicked World:
Man is everything detestable --
Base in his nature, base in thought and deed,
Loathsome beyond all things that creep and crawl!
(p. 14)
Gilbert's satire has often been compared to that of Aristophanes: see Edith Hamilton, "W.S. Gilbert: A Mid-Victorian Aristophanes" and Walter Sichel, "The English Aristophanes," both in W.S. Gilbert: Scholarship and Commentary, Jones, ed.
76. Joseph Knight (?), review of The Wicked World, The Athenaeum, No. 2359, January 11, 1873, pp. 57-58.
77. Lorraine McMullen, An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement in English Literature (Ottawa: Bytown Press, 1971).
78. W.S. Gilbert, "Princess Ida," The Savoy Operas (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 318.

CHAPTER V

SENTIMENT AND SATIRE, 1869-1877

Next to the Savoy Operas, the blank-verse comedies are Gilbert's most original contribution to nineteenth-century drama. However, his work in comedy was not restricted to satiric fantasy, for from 1869 to 1877 he wrote six original prose comedies: An Old Score (1869), Randall's Thumb (1871), On Guard (1871), Sweethearts (1874), Tom Cobb (1875), and Engaged (1877). Just as it is difficult to discuss the poetic comedies without referring to the Victorian extravaganza, so one cannot discuss these works without saying something about Victorian comedy in general.

Of the three Victorian dramatic forms discussed in this study, comedy has been most frequently disparaged by critics. Ashley Thorndike notes the paradox that "in an age of great humourists, comedy remained commonplace and thin."¹ Ernest Watson sees the development of English comedy arrested at mid-nineteenth century by the rise in popularity of the

melodrama and extravaganza.² George Rowell blames theatrical conditions -- particularly, the large size of most theatres and the illiteracy of audiences -- for the poor quality of most Victorian comedies.³ Within the scope of this study, it would be impossible to test the truth of these opinions by surveying all the stage works purporting to be comedies written before Gilbert began his career in the 1860's. Therefore in the following pages the main features of Victorian comedy will be indicated through a brief consideration of some of the most popular comic playwrights active in the decade prior to the production of Gilbert's first comedy.

In 1853, J.B. Buckstone took over the management of the Haymarket Theatre and determined that it should become the leading comedy theatre of London.⁴ The quality of English playwriting around 1860 can best be appreciated through the plays written by Tom Taylor for the array of comic talent which Buckstone assembled at the Haymarket. Victims of 1857 demonstrates a concern with marital problems raised by incompatibilities of temperament between husband and wife. Mr. Merryweather, a prosaic but good-natured stock-broker, is married to a woman who fancies herself to be a romantic and intellectual. She prefers the society of the affected Herbert Fitzherbert, a poet, and finds her marriage frustrating:

Ill-assorted marriage! Yes! I should have
been a poet's wife - to have shared in his
aspirations, partaken his hopes, exulted

his fame! Oh, Fitzherbert - Fitzherbert,
 why did we not meet 'ere I had become⁵ the
 wife of one who cannot understand me?

However, she is forced to realize her husband's true worth when Fitzherbert's cruel treatment of his own wife is revealed. This essentially serious story is enlivened by the introduction of a number of comic characters, chief among which is Mr. Butterby, who is wooing Miss Spinn. Butterby arranges to send Miss Spinn a dress as a gift, but a servant confuses the gift with a package from the tailor's, and Miss Spinn is the recipient of a pair of trousers. Victims epitomizes the mid-Victorian comic formula: a serious story with comic relief in the form of humorous characters and farcical incidents.

The formula is also well illustrated by Taylor's The Overland Route of 1860, which takes place on a ship en route from India to England. The journey provides the excuse to bring together a number of eccentric characters, such as Sir Solomon Fraser, who loses his false teeth, and Mr. Lovibond, who is mistakenly arrested as a criminal.⁶ The best example of mid-Victorian comedy, however, is Taylor's Our American Cousin produced at the Haymarket in 1861. The basic plot concerns the attempts of Asa Trenchard to foil the villain Coyle's scheme to gain control of Sir Edward Trenchard's fortune and marry his daughter Florence. This entirely forgettable story provides the framework for the introduction

of several comic characters, chief of whom is Lord Dundreary. Although he is totally incidental to the play's main action, Dundreary dominates one's impression of the play, chiefly through scenes such as this:

Florence. He writes from Brattleboro', Vermont.

"Quite well, just come in from a shooting excursion, with a party of Crows, splendid fellows, six feet high."

Dundreary. Birds six feet high, what tremendous animals they must be.

Florence. Oh, I see what my brother means; a tribe of Indians called Crows, not birds.

Dundreary. Oh, I thought you meant those creatures with wings on them.

Florence. Wings!

Dundreary. I mean those things that move, breathe and walk, they look like animals with those things. (Moving his arms like wings).

Florence. Wings.

Dundreary. Birds with wings, that's the idea.⁷

Dundreary was as much the creation of Edward Sothorn, who first played the part, as Tom Taylor,⁸ and this points to the actor-oriented nature of most mid-Victorian comedy. However deficient the era may have been in the writing of comedy, it was an age of great comic actors.⁹ Many Victorian comedies are written in an almost indecipherable theatrical shorthand: "Business with letter," "This to be worked up," "Repeat business." This dependence on performance considerably weakens the literary value of most Victorian comedies, and has probably helped to generate the general critical disparagement noted before.

The Haymarket's reign as the home of comedy came to an

end in 1865, when Marie Wilton and H.J. Byron opened the Prince of Wales' Theatre. In 1867 Wilton married Sidney Bancroft, one of her actors.¹⁰ The Bancroft regime at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, which lasted until 1880, brought many innovations to English theatrical management, such as the introduction of matinees and the reduction of the play-bill to a single item.¹¹ Their most important contribution to English drama, however, lay in their production of a series of comedies by T.W. Robertson: Society (1865), Ours (1866), Caste (1867), Play (1868), School (1869), and M.P. (1870).

Robertson's innovations were summed up by the Bancrofts in their autobiography:

Looking back ... it is still easy to understand the great success of this comedy (Society). In those days there had been little attempt to follow Nature, either in the plays or in the manner of producing them. With every justice was it argued that it had become a subject of reasonable complaint with reflective playgoers, that the pieces they were invited to see rarely afforded a glimpse of the world in which they lived ... I do but echo unbiased opinions in adding that many other so-called pictures of life presented on the stage were as false as they were conventional ... The Robertson comedies appeared upon the scene just when they were needed to revive and renew intelligent interest in the drama. Nature was Robertson's goddess ... The return to Nature was the great need of the stage, and happily he came to help supply it at the right moment.¹²

As one writer has said, Robertson's comedies were "clearly a reaction against melodramatic excess, an attempt to domesticate the overprotected emotional displays of the first half

of the century."¹³ The movement towards naturalism in Robertson's plays is shown by his choice of stories and themes. While still coloured by melodrama and sentiment, his plots are generally simpler and more plausible than those of most Victorian dramatists, and his characters are ones with which his audiences could readily identify. In his choice of thematic material, Robertson tried to reflect the social problems of his own day. This is well illustrated by Caste of 1867, which is an illustration of the social strata of nineteenth-century England.¹⁴ Each of the characters represents a different class: from top to bottom, the aristocratic Marchioness and her son George; the upper-middle-class Hawtree; the lower-middle-class Esther and Polly; the tradesman Sam Gerridge; and the down-and-out Eccles. The play presents a variety of conflicts created by the characters' class situation. The most obvious is that of the Marchioness' objections to George and Esther's marriage. This is mirrored comically in Sam Gerridge's wooing of Polly, who finds him objectionable because he is of the labouring class. It is paralleled in the offstage rejection of Hawtree by the aristocratic Florence Carberry. Yet as many writers have pointed out, Robertson's own attitude to caste is neither here nor there, for by the final act he brings us to a conclusion that is reassuring but unoriginal:

Oh, Caste's all right. Caste is a good thing if it's not carried too far. It shuts the door on the pretentious and the vulgar;

but it should open the door very wide for exceptional merit. Let brains break through its barriers, and what brains can break through love can leap over.¹⁵

Despite its thematic feebleness, Caste is clearly an attempt to give its audience "a glimpse of the world in which they live."

Robertson's realistic approach extends beyond theme to include a naturalism of tone and atmosphere created largely through natural dialogue. His characters speak in easy conversational rhythms rather than in the artificial rhetoric characteristic of most Victorian drama. Naturalism in dialogue creates an aura of emotional restraint in Robertson's plays which contrasts with the unreal frenzied emotion of most Victorian plays. These qualities are best appreciated by comparing his love scenes with those of earlier dramatists. Here is the scene between Alfred and Clara in Bulwer-Lytton's Money of 1840:

Evelyn. Oh, Clara, you know not the tortures that I suffer hourly! When others approach you - young - fair - rich - the sleek darlings of the world - I accuse you of your very beauty - I writhe beneath every smile that you bestow. No - speak not! My heart has broken its silence, and you shall hear the rest. For you and I have endured the weary bondage of this house - the fool's gibe - the hireling's sneer - the bread purchased by toils that should have lead me to loftier ends: yes, to see you - hear you - breathe the same air - be ever at hand - that if others slighted, from one at least you might

receive the luxury of respect. For this - for this I have lingered, suffered, and forborne. Oh, Clara! We are orphans both - friendless both; you are all in the world to me. Turn not away my very soul speaks in these words - I love you! (Kneels).

Clara. No - Evelyn - Alfred - no! Say it not; think it not! It were madness.¹⁶

Compare this with Sidney Daryl's wooing of Maud Hetherington in Society:

Sidney. Maud?

Maud. Yes.

Sidney. If I were rich - if you were rich - if we were rich?

Maud. Sidney!

Sidney. As it is, I almost feel it's a crime to love you.

Maud. Oh, Sidney!

Sidney. You who might make such a splendid marriage.

Maud. If you had -- money -- I couldn't care for you any more than I do now.

Sidney. My darling! I know you wouldn't. Sometimes I feel mad about you - and when I know you are out and smiling upon others - and - and waltzing.

Maud. I can't help waltzing when I'm asked

Sidney. No, dear, no; but when I fancy you are spinning around with another's arm about your waist. Oh! - I feel -

Maud. Why, Sidney. You are jealous?

Sidney. Yes, I am.

Maud. Can't you trust me?

Sidney. Implicitly. But I like to be with you all the time.

Maud. So do I with you.

Sidney. My love!¹⁷

Often, Robertson discards words, and his characters play out inarticulate scenes.¹⁸

Robertson's plays are often described as "cup-and-saucer" comedy because of the domestic realism which colours his settings and situations. In Act Three of Caste, for

example, the characters prepare and drink tea onstage.¹⁹ This is not as innovative as first appears, however, for many mid-Victorian farces deal with the preparation and consumption of food. In fact, Robertson's much-praised scenic realism probably owes much to the meticulousness of the Bancroft management in such matters: in Ours, for example, they ensured that autumn leaves dropped continually through the wood scene of the first act.²⁰ Certainly, the style of ensemble acting which became associated with Robertson's comedies resulted directly from the Bancrofts' insistence on "natural acting".²¹

Whatever contributions the Robertson-Bancroft collaboration made to the development of English drama as a whole, their methods did not effect much improvement on the nature of English stage comedy. If one analyzes Robertson's plays from the point of view of the nature of the comedy, it soon becomes apparent that they mark little advance on the plays of Taylor. There are flashes of wit and a genuine attempt to reflect the manners of an age, and comic eccentricity of character is toned down. Yet Robertson's funniest scenes are generally of the low comedy variety: that is, largely dependent on humorous characterization and physical business. In Society, the chief comic character is Lord Ptarmigan, who drops off to sleep at every moment. Caste contains comic business more suited to a farce:

Polly. Going, corporal?

Hawtree. Yaas! (Business; taking up hat and stick from bureau he sees Sam's cap. He picks it out carefully, and coming down stage R., examines it as a curiosity, drops it on the floor and pushes it away with his stick, at the same time moving backwards, causing him to bump against Sam, who turns around savagely.) I beg your pardon!²²

The comedy of Caste is centered in the depiction of humorous character - snobbish Hawtree, mischievous Polly, choleric Sam, and drunken Eccles. In the hands of Robertson, comedy does not transcend the level of character to become comedy of wit or manners. He is firmly in the tradition of the sentimental comic vision of the early nineteenth-century.

Despite the fact that Robertson's plays made little contribution to the development of comedy per se, his methods and style exerted a considerable influence on all the dramatists writing in the 'sixties. His pervasive influence is well illustrated by comparing Tom Taylor's pre-Robertson comedies with New Men and Old Acres of 1869.²³ It demonstrates that Robertson's desire to reflect his own age had awakened a social consciousness in his fellow playwrights, for like Society and Caste it deals with class conflict and social ambition. In Taylor's play, Samuel Brown, a Liverpool merchant, manages to prevent the sale of Cleve Abbey, ancestral home of the Vavasours, to the nouveau-riche Bunters, who wish to turn the estate into an iron mine. Not only does the play possess a naturalism in dialogue and atmosphere, but the clearly-

demarked ideological difference between the aristocratic Vavasours, the nouveau-riche Bunters, and the gentleman businessman Brown result in some proto-Shavian debates among the characters on the meaning of class and social position. One hardly believes it to be the work of Taylor of Our American Cousin.

Robertson's influence can also be detected in the work of H.J. Byron, one of the most popular comic dramatists of the late 'sixties and early 'seventies. Again, it is interesting to compare his pre - with his post - Robertson work. Byron's War to the Knife was one of the first comedies presented at the Prince of Wales' after its opening in 1865.²⁴ It depicts the attempts of Captain Thistleton to be revenged on Mrs. Harcourt, who had jilted him some years before. With the help of her friend Mrs. Delacour, Mrs. Harcourt foils the villain's attempts to blackmail her. Despite the fact that the play is labelled an "Original Comedy", it is obviously a domestic melodrama with clearly painted heroine and villain. The only overt comedy of the play resides in the incidental character of Mr. Nubbly, a comic tradesman.

Robertson's influence on Byron's style may be appreciated by comparing the melodramatic rhetoric of War to the Knife with the natural dialogue of Our Boys of ten years later, which contains passages which might have been drawn from a twentieth-century play:

Talbot. Why, you're all alone.

Mary. Yes, I like to be alone.

Talbot. That means I'm to -

Mary. Oh, no, you're -

Talbot. Nobody. Don't count. Thanks.

Mary. I didn't say that.

Talbot. No, but you meant it.

Mary. Why?

Talbot. Because you didn't say it.

(pause)

Mary. What do you mean?

Talbot. What I say.

Mary. What's that?

Talbot. Nothing.

Mary. Then you mean nothing.

Talbot. On the contrary, I mean a lot.
but I can't say it.²⁵

Cyril's Success of 1868 shows the influence of Robertson throughout. It is also an interesting play in its own right, chiefly because it anticipates Ibsen's A Doll House of some years later. Cyril Cuthbert is a successful writer whose wife has become jealous, lonely, and frustrated because of his success. Miss Grannett, Kate Cuthbert's former school-mistress, who is separated from her own husband, urges Kate to leave Cyril. Up to this point, the play is strongly evocative of Ibsen's work, especially when Kate declares:

No, no, Cyril, you have hitherto looked
on your wife as a weak doll of a woman,
to be wrapped up in tissue paper and
kept upon a shelf; but you will dis-
cover your mistake.²⁶

Unlike Norah, however, Kate does not leave her husband for long. As a result of their separation, Cyril takes to drink and his reputation begins to dwindle. Kate takes pity on her husband, returns to him, and begs his forgiveness. This

reconciliation is paralleled in the return of Miss Grannett to her former husband. Obviously, in 1868 dramatists still felt compelled to exalt, rather than criticize, marriage, and particularly the dutiful submission of a wife to her husband. The drama thus solidly upholds the mores of an age when marriage was regarded as the cornerstone of society.²⁷

Cyril's Success exposes the fundamental intellectual weaknesses of most mid-Victorian comedy. In the plays of Robertson, Taylor, and Byron, the stage is a pulpit; but it is not one in the Shavian sense of a place from which society is castigated. Rather, it is a pulpit from which Victorian ideals about life are upheld and glorified. Whatever the social problems and issues raised in the first act of a Victorian comedy, by the final act those problems are being solved through an application of sound Victorian principles and ideals about human psychology. The chief principle is the change of heart, through which a previously disagreeable character suddenly sees the error of his or her ways and is transformed from bad to good. Kate Cuthbert undergoes such a transformation, as do Robertson's Marchioness in Caste and Lady Ptarmigan in Society. Moreover, such transformations always fit in with the right ordering of Victorian society: after her separation, Kate Cuthbert becomes a submissive, dutiful wife. The endings of Victorian comedies never shock; rather they leave the audience with the complacent feeling that their ideals about society are

right and unassailable.²⁸

While this makes Victorian drama an accurate image of a sentimental age, it hardly encouraged originality and growth in drama. Rather, it limited the dramatist to expression of those ideas which upheld the morality of the age. Victorian dramatists were unaware of this problem: undoubtedly the majority of them felt drama had a moral duty to uphold and illustrate the ideals of Victorian life. Yet this inhibition leads one to the inescapable view that comedy in the nineteenth century had sunk far below the level of unrestrained wit and satire attained in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

To sum up, although by 1869 the Robertson-Bancroft partnership had initiated a new interest in theme and realism, comedy remained the mixture of melodrama, sentiment, and humour it had been for most of the nineteenth century.

Gilbert's first three comedies show no sign that he was willing or eager to depart from this formula. The first, An Old Score, was presented at the Gaiety Theatre on July 26, 1869.²⁹ The plot is reminiscent of a Dickens novel. Thirty years before the play begins, Colonel Calthorpe in an act of charity had placed the beggar boy James Casby with the firm of Bounderby Brothers. In the ensuing years, Casby has worked his way to the top of the firm and become a rich man, while Calthorpe has fallen into dire financial straits. To

aid his pecuniary difficulties, Calthorpe has urged a match between his niece, Ethel Barrington, and Casby. In apparent ingratitude to his benefactor, however, Casby refuses to lend him any money. Unexpectedly, the Colonel inherits a peerage and a large fortune. He now berates Casby for his ingratitude, but in the final scene Casby confronts Calthorpe and reveals the reason for his apparent thanklessness: he knows Calthorpe to be a worthless scoundrel whose philanthropy is motivated by selfishness and who is moreover a criminal. He possesses some legal documents which Calthorpe forged. Although he is aware of Calthorpe's worthlessness, Casby nonetheless feels an obligation to his benefactor, and he settles his old score with Calthorpe by destroying this evidence of his criminality. Through this act, he wins Ethel's heart and hand.

A sub-plot concerns Harold Calthorpe, the Colonel's son, who is also in financial difficulties and is refused help by Casby. When he announces his engagement to Mary Waters, a servant, Calthorpe dismisses him from his house. Harold becomes the editor of The Weekly Tormentor, a "journal of critical satire", and is eventually reconciled to his father.

From this synopsis, it will be evident that the play is more melodrama than comedy. The suppression and revelation of a dark secret (Calthorpe's criminality) and the

fortuitous accident which transforms Calthorpe into Lord Ovington are obvious melodramatic devices. The careers of all the major characters are shaped by changes of fortune: Casby's life is classic rags-to-riches; the impecunious Colonel becomes wealthy Lord Ovington; Harold moves from poverty to the editorship of a magazine. Yet despite all these changes of rank, which like Caste reflect nearly all the social strata of nineteenth-century England, the play does not deal with questions and problems of class conflict and social ambition. There is an inherent conflict in Harold's wooing of Mary, a servant, but this is left undeveloped. There are possibilities for satire in Calthorpe's transformation into an aristocrat. Yet An Old Score seems to miss the opportunity seized by so many Victorian dramatists to comment on the social structures and breakdowns of their day. Set alongside Taylor's New Men and Old Acres, also written in 1869, An Old Score seems weak indeed.

This is not to say that the play is totally devoid of thematic interest. The central issue of the play is moral rather than social, and is focussed in the relationship of Casby to his benefactor Calthorpe. Casby's dilemma is similar to that faced by Pip in Chapter 39 of Great Expectations, where he learns that his benefactor is none other than the convict Abel Magwitch. Casby is faced with a similar conflict between his sense of obligation to his

benefactor and his knowledge that Calthorpe is a scoundrel and hypocrite. In the end, he repays his obligation through a kind of reverse blackmail, and his refusal to publish the evidence of Calthorpe the criminal becomes a means of destroying his debt to Calthorpe the benefactor. Casby's backhanded treatment of his benefactor shocked the play's early critics, who felt that he was indebted to Calthorpe whatever the latter's villainy.³⁰ His moral duty should have outweighed his knowledge of Calthorpe's criminality. Gilbert's handling of the relationship between the two men is, however, original and unsentimental. Our initial sympathy for Calthorpe as the victim of Casby's ingratitude is quickly eroded as Calthorpe's character is revealed. At the beginning of the play, he is sketched as a kindly philanthropist whose greatest achievement was the rescue of Casby from the streets and setting him on the road to fortune. Little by little, this picture changes, until in the final scene of the play Calthorpe's philanthropy is revealed as a mask for selfishness. His charity to Casby is revealed as a self-seeking act: he wished to reinstate his reputation in the world after having been court-martialled for "several brutal acts of tyranny over the men in his company". He exploited the act of charity towards Casby to gain the affection and fortune of a wealthy woman: as Casby says, "If you had not taken James Casby out of the streets, you would not have married 20,000 pounds."³¹ This exposure of the selfishness

underlying philanthropy is thoroughly Gilbertian, and prepares the way for that fuller exposé of human selfishness, Engaged.

Yet the Casby-Calthorpe plot is set within a play that is elsewhere unsuccessful. The Harold-Mary sub-plot, in which one can see Gilbert straining to emulate the Robertson-Bancroft school, is awkwardly welded to the main plot. Most important, the play is conspicuously lacking in comedy, which is confined to the introduction of a few minor comic characters: Manasseh, a Jewish moneylender, and the comic servants Flathers and Mrs. Pike. Apart from these unoriginal creations, the rest of the play is devoid of comedy except for the occasional feeble joke:

Casby. I'll go and smoke a cheroot on
the lawn.

Colonel. But you won't have time - Ethel
will be down directly.

Casby. Oh, no; she has gone to put her
bonnet on!³²

Not surprisingly, An Old Score did not fare well with its original audiences, and was withdrawn a few weeks following its opening.³³ The critic of the Athenaeum found the play strained, shapeless, and slovenly in construction.³⁴ Perhaps the most interesting comments came from the drama critic of Fun, who likewise disparaged the play's construction. That reviewer was none other than W.S. Gilbert.³⁵

Gilbert was also called upon by Fun to review his next comedy, Randall's Thumb, which was produced at the opening of

the Court Theatre on January 25, 1871.³⁶ Again he castigated his own work. In reading Randall's Thumb, it is easy to see why, for it has the same weaknesses as An Old Score. Again there is an improbable melodramatic plot, which takes place at the Beachington Hotel at a seaside resort. The Randall of the title is a villain who is attempting to gain control of Edith Temple's fortune. He urges his accomplice Buckthorpe to woo Edith, and Buckthorpe complies, knowing that Randall possesses information about a supposed murder he committed. It turns out that Buckthorpe and Edith are former lovers, and swayed by his affection for her, Buckthorpe tells Edith of Randall's evil plans and his hold on him through blackmail. Randall threatens to expose Buckthorpe, but his plot is foiled when it is discovered that Buckthorpe's supposed crime was no crime at all, for the man he was supposed to have killed is discovered to be alive and staying at the same hotel. Superintendent Clench arrives and arrests Randall.

With its clearly painted villain (Randall), hero (Buckthorpe), and heroine (Edith), the play is even more melodramatic than An Old Score. Unlike An Old Score, the play is enlivened by a variety of incidental characters, guests at the Beachington Hotel. Chief among these are two married couples, the Flamboys and the Scantleburys. Mr. and Mrs. Flamboys are on their honeymoon, but to avoid

disturbance they pretend to be a bickering couple who have been married for years. The opposite is true of the Scantleburys: they masquerade as newlyweds while in fact they have been married for thirty-five years. The misunderstandings arising from these deceptions come to a head when Mr. Scantlebury begins to flirt with Mrs. Flamboys and Mrs. Scantlebury with Mr. Flamboys. Before any real harm is done, the misunderstandings are cleared up. One sees in this farcical sub-plot a favorite Gilbertian device, the topsyturvy transformation of roles: newlyweds posing as a bickering couple, and vice versa.³⁷ A further comic sub-plot is concerned with the wooing of Joe Bangles, the man Buckthorpe supposedly killed, by the aging spinster Miss Spinn, who foreshadows the predatory middle-aged females of the Savoy Operas. Randall's Thumb can thus best be described as a melodrama with farcical interludes, but it hardly marks much of an improvement on An Old Score, since like the earlier play its construction is awkward and weak. The comic sub-plots, while amusing, are completely irrelevant to the main action. The play is utterly devoid of thematic interest, and is therefore chiefly interesting because it shows the degree to which Gilbert was willing to cater to the Victorian taste for melodrama and sentiment.

The third of Gilbert's comedies, On Guard, was presented at the Court Theatre on October 28, 1871.³⁸ It is similar to both An Old Score and Randall's Thumb in the preponderance of

melodrama over comedy. The basic plot is concerned with the rivalry of two friends, Denis Grant and Guy Warrington, for the hand of the same woman, Jessie Blake. Although Denis also loves her, Jessie accepts Guy, who leaves for military service in Gibraltar. For reasons that are left unclear, all the other characters arrive in Gibraltar too, where Guy accuses Denis of dallying with Jessie. All is forgiven when Jessie declares her undying love for Guy. This sentimental story is given some substance by a melodramatic sub-plot which concerns the attempts of Corny Kavanagh and a lawyer named Grouse to disinherit Jessie. Kavanagh, however, turns against Grouse, and foils his plans.

As with the two earlier comedies, comedy is completely incidental to the main story, and is here centred in the characters of Mrs. Fitzosborne, a widow, and Captain Baby Boodle, a foppish numbskull. Kavanagh is also the source of some comedy: as one early reviewer pointed out, he is an interesting variation on the conventional stage villain, for while possessing the traditional villainous attribute of avarice, he is also a charming, sophisticated gentleman.³⁹ The play reaches its comic heights in the scenes in which he verbally fences with Mrs. Fitzosborne:

Kavanagh. In yachting, one's enjoyment
depends so much less on oneself than
on one's companions.

Mrs. F. You are quite right not to depend
too much upon yourself.

Kavanagh. Yes. I may be hypercritical,
but I am tired of myself.

Mrs. F. You see you have had too much of yourself.

Kavanagh. No doubt.

Mrs. F. But there, I won't be rude anymore, I'll say a pretty thing to you. I'll admit that if your epigram and repartees amused you as much as they amuse others, you would never tire of your own society.

Kavanagh. (with an elaborate bow) Thank you, Mrs. Fitzosborne

Mrs. F. But they don't, do they?

Kavanagh. No, indeed.

Mrs. F. You see you've heard them so often before! This man does give one such chances!

Kavanagh. At all events I may conclude from your admission that they amuse you, that you have not heard them before.

Mrs. F. No, indeed! The society in which I move is so horribly well-bred. I can forgive almost any rudeness if it's clever.⁴⁰

Kavanagh and Mrs. Fitzosborne find a common subject of scorn in Baby Boodle, who is no match for their repartee: "Whenever a person thays an impertinent thing, I conthole myself with the reflection that there's always a thundering good answer to it - if one only knew what it was!"⁴¹ All in all, the badinage between Kavanagh, Fitzosborne, and Boodle has the flavour of true wit, and it is a pity that the rest of the play does not match it.

On Guard was severely lashed by early critics, who found it wanting in action and deficient in dialogue and construction. Gilbert's answer to criticism of the play provides an interesting glimpse into the inadequate production methods of the Victorian stage which he was to reform at the

Savoy:

The piece was rehearsed in conjunction with two other pieces, in ten days, and during much of that time half the stage was occupied by carpenters, while the rehearsal, such as it was, took place on the other half. I had no opportunity whatever of judging the effect of my piece, as a whole, until the night of performance; in point of fact, I was in the position of an artist, who, having to paint a large picture, is permitted to see only six square inches of his canvas at a time.⁴²

An Old Score, Randall's Thumb, and On Guard are all constructed from the same dramatic blueprint: a melodramatic story with incidental comic characters. Not only is this formula entirely unoriginal, but overall the plays do not attain the level of Taylor or Byron. Although they contain flashes of wit and the occasional Gilbertianism, they are a disappointing beginning to his career in comedy. It is significant to note that Gilbert chose only one, Randall's Thumb, for subsequent publication in collections of his plays. An Old Score and On Guard he relegated to the dramatic graveyard. Like the early farces, these three plays are only useful in so far as they reveal Gilbert's apprenticeship in the conventional modes of the Victorian theatre. Their awkward construction, weak characterization, and unoriginal comic techniques demonstrate that the apprenticeship was not a happy one.

One must presume that Gilbert felt dissatisfied with his early attempts at comedy, for after On Guard there is

a hiatus in his writing of original comedy until Sweethearts of 1874. In 1872 and 1873, his work in comedy was restricted to his highly successful translation of Un Chapeau de Paille d'Italie.⁴³ This exercise probably taught him something of the art of dramatic construction, in which the French were so proficient and in which his early comedies had been so awkward.

When we pick up the thread of Gilbert's career in comedy with Sweethearts, produced on November 7, 1874 at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, a new maturity and skill is evident.⁴⁴ Although not labelled a comedy, Sweethearts, "An Original Dramatic Contrast in Two Acts", is essentially comic in spirit. It proved to be one of Gilbert's most successful plays. It centres on the relationship between Harry Spreadbrow and Jenny Northcott. The first act, which occurs on the eve of Harry's departure for military service in India, depicts his unsuccessful attempt to court Jenny. Although she secretly loves him, she plays fast and loose with him, and he leaves unhappily. The second act takes place thirty years later. The middle-aged Harry visits Jenny, and when he discovers that she did in fact love him, the affection between them is reawakened. As the play ends they join hands and look forward to future happiness together.

This simple love story is played out against the background of the changing face of nineteenth-century England. The first act is set in 1844 and the curtain rises to

disclose:

The Garden of a pretty Country Villa.
The house is new, and the garden shows
signs of having been recently laid out;
the shrubs are small, and the few trees
about are moderate in size; small creepers
are trained against the house; an open
country in the distance; a little bridge
over a stream forms the entrance to the
garden. (p. 89)

The second act is set in the year of the writing of
 the play, 1874:

Scene - The same as in Act I, with such
additions and changes as may be supposed
to have taken place in thirty years. The
house, which was bare in Act I, is now en-
tirely covered with Virginia and other
creepers; the garden is much more fully
planted than in Act I, and trees that were
small in Act I are tall and bushy now ...
the landscape has also undergone a met-
amorphosis, inasmuch as that which was
open country in Act I is now covered with
picturesque semi-detached villas, and
there are indications of a large town in
the distance. (p. 100)

The background of change is alluded to by Harry when
 he first meets Jenny after thirty years:

I hardly know where I am, for all my old
 landmarks are swept away; I assure you
 I am within the mark, when I say that this
 house is the only place I can identify...
 I left a village, I find a town - I left a
 beadle, I find a mayor and corporation -
 I left a pump, I find a statue to a
 borough member. The inn is a "Palace
 Hotel Company" - the almshouse a county
 jail - the pound is a police station, and
 the common a colony of semi-detached
 bungalows! Everything changed, including
 myself - everything new, except myself.
 (p. 102).

In the transformation of country village into suburban town, one can detect a Gilbertian delight in topsy-turvy metamorphosis. The transformation of setting is reflected in the characters. Gilbert humorously points out the changes wreaked by age in the following scene:

Jenny. I have lived here thirty-two years!

Spreadbrow. Thirty-two years! is it possible? Then surely I ought to know you? (He feels for his glasses.) My name is Spreadbrow - Sir Henry Spreadbrow!

Jenny. Spreadbrow! (Putting on spectacles.) Is it possible? Why, my very dear old friend (offering both her hands), don't you recollect me?

Spreadbrow. (He puts on his double eye-glass, takes both her hands). God bless me! - is it possible? - and this is really you! - you don't say so! (pp. 102-103)

The transformation extends beyond that of age. In Act One the young Jenny is painted as a cold-hearted coquette who feigns indifference to Harry's attentions. When he comes to say goodbye to her, her chief interest seems to lie in the difficulties of planting the tree he has sent her as a gift:

Jenny. I'm going to plant it just in front of the drawing-room window, so that I can see it whenever I look out. Will you help me? (He prepares to do so; she puts it into the hole.) Is that quite straight? Hold it up, please, while I fill in the earth. (He holds it while she fills in the earth; gradually his hand slips down till it touches hers.) It's no use, Mr. Spreadbrow, our both holding it in the same place! (He runs his hand up the stem quickly.) (p. 95)

After he has left, however, Jenny's actions betray that her indifference is a mask for her true feelings:

Jenny watches him out - sits down, leaving the gate open - hums an air gaily - looks round to see if he is coming back - goes on humming - takes up the flower he has given her - plays with it - gradually falters, and at last bursts into tears, laying her head on the table over the flower he has given her, and sobbing violently. (p. 99)

The Jenny of the second act is much different from that of the first. She has become a sentimental middle-aged spinster who has realized the mistake of her youth. This transformation is mirrored ironically in Harry. In Act One, he is the sentimental one: he is pictured as a nervous romantic youth:

Spreadbrow. I was going to ask you to do me a great favour ... I was going to ask you if you would give me a flower - any flower, I don't care what it is.

Jenny. (affecting surprise) A flower? Of course I will. But why?

Spreadbrow. (earnestly) That I may have a token of you and of our parting wherever I go; that I may possess an emblem of you that I shall never - never part with, that I can carry about with me night and day wherever I go, throughout my whole life.

Jenny. (apparently much affected, crosses slowly, stoops and takes up large geranium in pot.) Will this be too big? (p. 97)

He is bitterly hurt by Jenny's playfulness. In the second act, Harry has become Sir Henry Spreadbrow, and it is he who adopts the mask of indifference to love worn by Jenny in Act

One. Much to Jenny's displeasure, he can now laugh at his youthful extravagances:

Spread. I remember that I had the impertinence to be very fond of you. I forgot that I had the impertinence to tell you so. I remember it now. I made a fool of myself. I remember it by that. I told you that I adored you, didn't I? - that you were as essential to me as the air I breathed - that it was impossible to support existence without you - that your name should be the most hallowed of earthly words, and so forth. Ha! Ha! my dear Jane, before I'd been a week on board I was saying the same thing to a middle-aged governess whose name has entirely escaped me. (She has exhibited signs of pleasure during the earlier part of this speech, and disappointment at the last two lines.) What fools we make of ourselves! (p. 105)

In these changes of personality - Jenny from cold-hearted girl to sentimental matron and Harry from romantic youth to cynical man of the world - there is an exchange of rôles which is characteristically Gilbertian.⁴⁵ In Act One, Jenny counters Harry's truthful emotion with a false indifference; in Act Two, it is Harry who adopts the mask while Jenny is sincere. In Sweethearts, then, Gilbert is playing with the same ideas of truth and deception which inform The Palace of Truth. The difference between the two plays is that while in The Palace the transformations are brought about through magic, in Sweethearts they are wrought through the realistic workings of age and experience. More-

over, Sweethearts ends happily, for love is seen as an agent that transcends the masks that human beings may wear:

Spreadbrow. It all comes back with a distinctness which is absolutely photographic. I begged you to give me a flower - you gave me one - a sprig of geranium.

Jen. Mignonette.

Spread. Was it mignonette? I think you're right - it was mignonette. I seized it - pressed it to my trembling lips - placed it next my fluttering heart, and swore that come what might I would never, never part with it! - I wonder what I did with that flower! - And then I took one from my button hole - begged you to take it - you took it, and - ha, ha, ha! - you threw it down carelessly on the table, and thought no more about it, you heartless creature - ha, ha, ha! Oh, I was very angry! I remember it perfectly; it was a camellia.

Jen. (half crying aside). Not a camellia, I think.

Spread. Yes, a camellia, a large white camellia.

Jen. I don't think it was a camellia; I rather think it was a rose.

Spread. Nonsense, Jane - come, come, you hardly looked at it, miserable little flirt that you were; and you pretend, after thirty years, to stake your recollection of the circumstance against mine? No, no, Jane, take my word for it, it was a camellia.

Jen. I'm sure it was a rose!

Spread. No, I'm sure it was a camellia.

Jen. (in tears). Indeed - indeed, it was a rose. (Produces a withered rose from a pocket-book - he is very much impressed - looks at it and at her, and seems much affected.)

Spread. Why, Jane, my dear Jane, you don't mean to say that this is the very flower?

Jen. That is the very flower! (Rising.)

Spread. Strange! You seemed to attach

no value to it when I gave it to you, you threw it away as something utterly insignificant; and when I leave, you pick it up, and keep it for thirty years! (Rising.) My dear Jane, how like a woman!

Jen. And you seized the flower I gave you - pressed it to your lips, and swore that wherever your good or ill fortune might carry you, you would never part with it; and - and you quite forgot what became of it! My dear Harry, how like a man!

Spread. I was deceived, my dear Jane - deceived! I had no idea that you attached so much value to my flower.

Jen. We were both deceived, Henry Spreadbrow.

Spread. Then is it possible that in treating me as you did, Jane, you were acting a part?

Jen. We were both acting parts - but the play is over, and there's an end of it. (With assumed cheerfulness.) Let us talk of something else.

Spread. No, no, Janet, the play is not nearly over. (Music in orchestra, "John Anderson my Jo.") My dear Jane - (rising and taking her hand), my very dear Jane - believe me, for I speak from my hardened old heart, so far from the play being over, the serious interest is only just beginning. (He kisses her hand - they walk towards the house.) (pp. 107-108).

These final speeches strongly reinforce the Gilbertian view of life as theatre.

Despite the changes in their personalities and the change in the outside world, the two lovers are brought together by a realization of their mutual affection. The play's message is thus a sentimental one of love's ability to conquer time and the shifting sands of human personality. Unlike Gilbert's earlier comedies, Sweethearts is carefully

designed around this central theme. The tree which Harry and Jenny plant in Act One becomes a symbol of the steadfastness of their love in a world of change. Wilcox, Jenny's gardener, is an amusing eccentric who sees life in horticultural terms:

Wilcox. I don't want no young gentleman hanging about here, miss. I know what they comes arter; - they comes arter the flowers.

Jenny. The flowers? What nonsense!

Wilcox. No, it ain't nonsense. The world's a haphazard garden where common vegetables like me, and hardy annuals like my boys, and sour crabs like my old 'ooman, and pretty delicate flowers like you and your sisters grow side by side. It's the flowers they come arter. (p. 91)

Overall, the play has a charm and lightness which make it special among Gilbert's work.

Sweethearts is the one work of Gilbert's in which the influence of the Robertson-Bancroft school is apparent throughout. Although it has its Gilbertian ironies, the play is strongly influenced by Robertson, especially in the atmosphere of emotional restraint which colours the first act. Harry and Jenny's parting is almost Chekhovian:

Spreadbrow. Well, I've got to say good-bye; there's no reason why it shouldn't be said at once -
(Holding out his hand). Good-bye.
Jenny!

Jenny. (cheerfully) Good-bye! (He stands for a moment with her hand in his - she crosses to porch.)

Spreadbrow. Haven't you anything to say to me?

Jenny. (after thinking it over). No, I
 don't think there's anything else. No -
 nothing. (p. 98)

In its stage history, Sweethearts was closely connected to Robertson and the Bancrofts. It was first presented on the same bill with Society in its revival from November 7, 1874 to April 13, 1875. Its success is measured by the fact that it was revived for 54 performances in 1877, and it was given 18 performances during the Bancrofts' farewell season at the Haymarket in 1885.⁴⁶ The popularity of the piece was due largely to the acting of Marie Bancroft as Jenny Northcott, one of her most famous rôles.⁴⁷

We now arrive at discussion of Gilbert's two finest comedies, Tom Cobb and Engaged. Tom Cobb was first performed at the St. James' Theatre on April 24, 1875.⁴⁸ It concerns the adventures of a penniless young surgeon, Tom Cobb, who at the opening of the play is engaged to Matilda O'Fipp, daughter of Colonel O'Fipp, an Irish adventurer. The death of an aged patient of Tom's fellow-surgeon Whipple provides Tom with a means of extricating himself from his financial difficulties: since the deceased's name is also Tom Cobb, Tom can pretend to the world that he has died and thus nullify his financial obligations. He plans to disappear for a few months and then reappear under an assumed name. To this end, he prepares a will, leaving his worldly possessions to Matilda, and bids farewell to the world. At the end of the first act Whipple brings

the astonishing news that the deceased Tom Cobb was in fact a wealthy man. Since Matilda possesses Tom Cobb's will, she inherits this large fortune.

In the second act, which takes place some months later, Tom reappears in the O'Fipp household. Knowing that their wealth depends on maintaining the illusion of his death, the O'Fipps and Whipple refuse to recognize him. By this time, Tom is wanted by the police for robbery and forgery and he decides to adopt the name of Major-General Arthur Fitzpatrick, a name he picks at random from the newspaper. Through a bizarre coincidence, this name turns out to be that of the fiance of Caroline Effingham, a romantic friend of Matilda's. Unfortunately for Tom, Caroline has never seen her fiance in the flesh, for she loved "his soul", and as the second act closes Caroline claims Tom as her husband.

The final act discovers Tom residing with the eccentric Effingham family, who are by turns philosophers, poets, and thinkers. At length, Tom decides to publish his true identity whatever the consequences to himself. He is saved from prison by the revelation of a hitherto - suppressed secret: he is in fact the grandson of the deceased Tom Cobb! This news enables Tom to claim rightfully the fortune, and, spurning Matilda, he accepts Caroline as his bride.

Improbable and contrived as this plot might appear, it provides the framework for one of Gilbert's funniest comedies. The story is clearly melodramatic, but unlike the melodrama

of Gilbert's early comedies, is obviously not meant to be taken seriously. Rather, the play burlesques several conventions of melodrama. Tom Cobb is subtitled Fortune's Toy and the play thus associates itself with the long tradition of melodramas which deal with drastic changes of fortune. For example, in J.T. Allingham's Fortune's Frolic, a will makes Robin Roughead, a farm labourer, into the master of his estate.⁴⁹ Such situations are parodied in Tom Cobb through the absurdity of the coincidences, reversals, and discoveries which affect the characters' lives. Tom himself seems aware of the ludicrousness of his position when he says:

Well, well - there is a grim justice
in the fact that my punishment will be
brought about through the employers of
the son of the husband of the mother of
the young woman to whom I was to have
been married. (p. 295).

Each of the acts reaches a crisis with the revelation of some all-important piece of news, and these revelations grow in comic absurdity. First, there is the discovery at the end of Act One that the deceased Tom Cobb was rich; secondly, the recognition of Tom as Major-General Fitzpatrick by Caroline Effingham; and finally, Bulstrode Effingham's revelation of a hitherto-suppressed secret:

Tom. Take me to my dungeon!
Bulstrode. No dungeon yawns for you,
oh happy sir. Wealth - wealth awaits
you open-armed!
All. What!
Bulstrode. You had a father once -
that father yet another of his own,
the aged man so strangely like your-

self. That aged person had a son -
 that son another son - that son your
 father, and that other son yourself!
Tom. Then - I am the old man's grandson!
Bulstrode. That is the same idea in vulgar
 phrase. (p. 297)

Gilbert is here parodying the same kind of plot machinery which he had taken seriously and in which he had become entangled in An Old Score, Randall's Thumb, and On Guard.

At the heart of Tom Cobb is a contrast between two groups of characters, who may be divided into the O'Fipp and Effingham households. Colonel O'Fipp is a descendant of the long lineage of comic Irishmen in English drama.⁵⁰ He is an entirely unsentimental portrait of a rogue whose every action is motivated by an almost inhumane selfishness. In impecunious circumstances, he arranges engagements for Matilda that will be financially advantageous to himself:

Tom. Who is the scoundrel who has dared
 to aspire to your hand?

Matilda. 'Deed, and I don't know, but
 it'll be someone who's lending money
 to papa. I generally go with the
 bills.

Tom. What!

Matilda. When a body falls in love with
 me, papa generally borrows money of
 him, and he gives bills, and I go with
 'em. It's a rule of the family. (p. 264).

His manipulation of any circumstances to suit his own bank account is seen at the end of Act One. Before the news of the secret fortune arrives, he throws Tom Cobb's will into the fire. After the news arrives, his behaviour is different:

(O'Fipp, during the last few lines, has
 hurriedly snatched the will out of the

fire, and smoothed it out, unobserved.

He produces it with a dignified air.)

Whipple. What's that?

O'Fipp. This, sorr, is the poor old gentleman's will, in which he leaves everything to my beloved daughter.

Whipple. But that's not old Tom Cobb's will! That's the will young Tom Cobb made in fun just now!

O'Fipp. Sorr, old Tom Cobb's dead, and here's a will signed 'Tom Cobb'. Put that and that together, and what d'ye make of it? (p. 274)

While not as avaricious as her father, Matilda finds the chief attraction of men in their cheque-book: she prefers the wealthy Whipple to the penniless Tom. Whipple can be included in the O'Fipp household because he shares the selfishness of the Colonel and Matilda. While affecting sentiments of charity towards Tom's financial difficulties, his real motive for arranging Tom's "death" is to get him out of the way so he may court Matilda. The selfishness of these three characters is best exposed in the opening of Act Two, where they all refuse to recognize Tom since their well-being depends on his "death":

Tom. My darling Matilda! My beloved Matilda! I'm so, so, so, glad to see you again, dear! Why, it's three months since we met. (Kissing and hugging her). What a fool I've been to cut myself out of this sort of thing for three months! (Kisses her.) How very, very well you're looking!

Matilda. Will ye koindly leave off kissin' me till I've had the pleasure of bein' inthrojuiced to ye? (p. 279)

The O'Fipp household, then, finds its ruling passion in selfishness.

The Effinghams present a complete contrast to the O'Fipps. They appear to have forsaken the world for the loftier realms of philosophy and art. The older Effingham utters their credo when he says:

Read the master thoughts of mighty
minds. Withdraw yourself within
yourself. Soar. Be abstract. Think
long and largely. Study the incom-
prehensible. Revolve. So will you
learn at last to detach yourself from
the sordid world, and float, as we
float, in thoughts of empyrean purity.
(p. 284).

Bulstrode, the son, is a "soaring soul" who finds himself "fettered by stern destiny to the office stool of an obscure attorney" (p. 284). The most exotic member of the family is the daughter Caroline:

Caroline. Will you believe me when I
tell you that - I have loved?

Matilda. Oh, yes!

Caroline. And that I have been loved
in return?

Matilda. Well, ye-es. Oh, yes; it's
possible.

Caroline. He was a poet-soldier,
fighting the Paynim foe in India's
burning clime - a glorious song-
ster, who swept the lute with
one hand while he sabred the foe
with the other!

Matilda. Was he in the band?

Caroline. The band! He was a major-
general!

Matilda. Oh! Handsome?

Caroline. I know not. I never saw
him.

Matilda. Ye never saw him?

Caroline. I never saw his face; but -
I have seen his soul!

Matilda. What's his soul like?

Caroline. Like? Like the frenzied
passion of the antelope! Like the
wild fire of the tiger-lily! Like
the pale earnestness of some love-
sick thunder-cloud that longs to
grasp the fleeting lightning in
his outstretched arms! (p. 270).

In their overblown poetic language and metaphysical yearnings, the Effinghams are clearly a parody of literary and philosophical affectation. It is difficult to say whether they satirize any particular movement of the 1870's. Certainly, satire of romantic posturing is common in Victorian drama: Taylor's Victims has several satiric portraits of literary poseurs, notably Herbert Fitzherbert, a poet who is idolized by his friends just as Tom is by the Effinghams:

(Fitzherbert rises.)

Butterby. Hush - Fitzherbert is going
to say something. (All look at
Fitzherbert - a pause - he sits
again.) Oh, I beg your pardon, I
thought he was.⁵¹

In the same author's New Men and Old Acres, Bunter disparages the "pre-raffe-le-tite attitudes" of his daughter Fanny:

Lillian. The worst thing about your
house, Fanny, is that it is all
too bright - too gay. I haven't
seen a single corner where I
could fancy you reading Tennyson
and having a good cry.

Fanny. Ah, you should see my oratory -
all black draperies, ebony fur-
niture, and the sweetest death's
head in ivory. Do come over some

morning, and let's revel in 'In
Memoriam' together. One long
sigh, interrupted with sobs.⁵²

Many farces contain satirical portraits of romantics and intellectuals. Most of this satire was probably inspired by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, which was later to blossom into the Aesthetic movement caricatured by Gilbert in Patience.⁵³ The Effinghams certainly prepare the way for Bunthorne, but it is best to assume that rather than satirizing a specific movement, they are a parody of romanticism in philosophy and art in general. As such, they are the most ridiculous portraits to appear in Victorian drama. Their best scene is the opening of Act Three, where their idolization of Tom becomes mechanical:

Effingham. Arthur, ennoble us. Raise
us one step towards the Empyrean.
Give us a Great Thought!

Bulstrode. From the vast treasures
of your poet brain, we beg some
spare small change.

Tom. Well, I really don't know; I
haven't anything just now.

Caroline. We are the bees, and you
the flower. We beg some honey
for our little hives.

Tom. (With a desperate effort to
be brilliant.) Talking of bees --
(All take out note-books and
write down what follows.) talking
of bees, have you ever remarked
how the busy little insect avails
herself of the sunshine to gather
her sweet harvest from - from every
opening flower?

Effingham. (Writing.) We have, we
have. How true to fact!

Bulstrode. (Writing.) You said 'her
sweet harvest.' I think?

Tom. Her sweet harvest.

Bulstrode. (Writing.) Her sweet harvest.

(All shake their heads and sigh.)

Tom. Her honey, you know.

Bulstrode. Thank you.

(Sighs. All finish writing and put up their note-books.)

Mrs. Effingham. You are a close student of nature, sir.

Tom. Yes, I do a good deal in that way.

Mrs. Effingham. How simple are his words, and yet what priceless pearls of thought lie encased beneath their outercrust!

Tom. Yes, I always wrap them in an outercrust, to keep them from the cold. (All take out note-books and write this down.) (p. 289).

Throughout most of the play, the Effinghams seem completely different from the prosaic O'Fipps. Yet the last lines of the play explode their apparent asceticism and reveal them to be as greedy as the O'Fipps:

Tom. Caroline, you loved me as a penniless but poetical major-general; can you still love me as a wealthy but unromantic apothecary?

Caroline. I can! I can love you as a wealthy anything!

Mrs. Effingham. We all can!

Bulstrode. All! (p. 298)

This ironic ending has been prepared for by the breach-of-promise suit which the Effinghams have brought against the Major-General and from which they stand to gain five thousand pounds.

The first half of Tom Cobb is dominated by the money-grubbing world of the O'Fipps; the second, by the romantic

Effinghams. The central figure of the play, Tom Cobb, is caught between these two worlds in a kind of comic limbo. Michael Booth regards Tom Cobb as a farce because of the loss of identity which Tom undergoes and which Booth sees as at the centre of farce:

At the end of Act II he says, 'You say I'm engaged to you. I dare say I am. If you said I was engaged to your mother, I'd dare say it too. I've no idea who I am, or where I am, or what I am saying or doing.' Here in desperation speaks the true farce hero, and his predicament is thoroughly characteristic of the genre.⁵⁴

The number of metamorphoses which Tom undergoes makes the play not only farcical but fantastic. Transformation of identity is one of Gilbert's favourite devices, and in Tom Cobb it is readily apparent. Tom begins his career as a surgeon who cannot get any patients. Urged by Whipple, he resolves to "die by deputy", makes his will, and departs from the world. It is only after his "death" in the first act that his several metamorphoses begin as he struggles to be re-admitted to the real world. At his first appearance in Act Two he is described as "very seedy and dirty", his "boots are in holes", and to top off this beggarly appearance, he is a wanted criminal. To gain access to O'Fipp, he tells the footman he is the "Duke of Northumberland." However, he finds himself totally alienated from his former friends, the Colonel, Whipple, and Matilda, all of whom pretend not

to recognize him, even when he produces evidence of his true identity:

There are plenty of people who know me if you don't. Here's my card - 'T. Cobb, 6' in red cotton, (Showing mark on pocket handkerchief.) and I've several other marks of the same character about me, which I shall be happy to show you at a more convenient opportunity. (p. 279)

Tom sums up this nightmarish loss of identity when he says he has "detached himself from the sordid world so completely that he can't get back again!" (p. 284). He manages to get a foothold in the real world by pretending to be Major-General Arthur Fitzpatrick, the "poet-soldier" of Caroline Effingham's fancy. This results in a further transformation of his physical appearance:

Enter Tom from balcony. Caroline goes to meet him, and brings him forward lovingly. His appearance is somewhat altered. He parts his hair in the centre, and allows it to grow long. He wears a very low lie-down collar in order to look Byronic.
(p. 289)

The true Tom Cobb is only restored to life by the revelation that he is old Tom Cobb's grandson. At the end of the play, Tom is transformed from a "penniless but poetical major-general" to a "wealthy but unromantic apothecary" (p. 298).

The comedy of this loss of identity often verges on the nightmarish, especially when in the second act the

O'Fipps and Whipple pretend not to recognize Tom. Like much farce, Tom Cobb has a dream-like quality.⁵⁵ Moreover, it contains many ritual elements in its motifs of death and rebirth and Tom's separation and re-integration into society. Although it would be going too far to describe Tom Cobb as a ritual play, Gilbert is obviously interested in the masks which society imposes on the individual.

On the whole, Tom Cobb is a mixture of conventional and original elements. As has been indicated, the comic Irishman and the satire of romantics are common in Victorian drama. The parody of melodrama is very similar to that of John Madison Morton's farces, particularly Box and Cox.⁵⁶ What is new about Tom Cobb is that the spirit of absurdity hitherto confined to the one-act farce finds its way into lengthy comedy. More important than this, however, is something fresh in the nature of the comedy itself. Over and over again, laughter is generated in Tom Cobb by the ludicrous juxtaposition of the serious and the trivial. Serious moments are always punctured by irreverent elements. For example, emotion is undercut by food:

O'Fipp. Don't cry, my child.
Matilda. No, pa. (Takes an egg.)
 (p. 263)

Love is deflated by the need for a snooze:

Whipple. I declare I haven't
 slept a wink all night from
 anxiety.

Matilda. Would ye like to take a
snooze on the sofa? (p. 265)

Suicide is spoken about in the same breath as socks: "What's the use of socks to a man who's going to blow his brains out?" (p. 267). Women are equated with money: Matilda declares her frustration at being "handed over with stamped paper." (p. 266). The juxtaposition of the serious, the idealistic, the emotional with the ordinary, the physical, and the mundane is the play's informing comic principle. It extends from a single scene, such as Tom's identity depending on his pocket handkerchief, to the framework of the whole play, involving the contrast between the prosaic O'Fipps and the romantic Effinghams.

In its parody of melodrama, its satire of romanticism, its cynical view of human selfishness, and its juxtaposition of the serious and the trivial, Tom Cobb is a tremendous improvement over Gilbert's early comedies. Gilbert finally breaks out of the bounds of melodrama and sentiment, and as if in reaction to his earlier bondage to convention, provides a comedy that revels in unrestrained fun and nonsense.

If Tom Cobb shows Gilbert at his lightest and most whimsical, Engaged shows him at his darkest and most cynical. Engaged was produced at the Haymarket Theatre on October 3, 1877.⁵⁷ The plot concerns the adventures of Cheviot Hill, a young man "cursed with a strange amatory disposition" who has "contracted a habit of proposing marriage, as a matter

of course, to every woman he meets" (p. 336). He is engaged to marry Minnie Symperson. Deposited by a train accident into a garden in Scotland, Cheviot finds Maggie MacFarlane irresistible and proposes to her. No sooner has he done so than he is captivated by the charms of Miss Belinda Treherne, who is fleeing from one Major McGillicuddy to whom she is betrothed. Cheviot rescues Belinda from the Major by pretending to be married to her.

Back in London, Cheviot and Minnie prepare for their wedding-day, which is upset by the arrival of Belinda who claims Cheviot as her husband. The rest of the play hinges on the question of whether or not the garden in which Belinda and Cheviot pretended to be married is in Scotland: if it is, they are married, since their mutual declaration constitutes a Scotch marriage. While the characters are waiting for this news, many complications occur: Maggie arrives to bring a law-suit against Cheviot, Minnie rejects Cheviot when it appears he is bankrupt, and Cheviot's friend Belvawney plots to elope with Belinda. At length, the truth is revealed: the garden is in Scotland, and Cheviot and Belinda are man and wife.

This bizarre story is the basis for what should rightfully be called a Gilbertian extravaganza. As in Tom Cobb, much of the play's comedy arises from parody of melodrama. The most obvious melodramatic catastrophe is the train

accident in Act One, which becomes funny through the utter casualness with which the characters treat it.⁵⁸ Like so many melodramas, the ending depends on the revelation of a single piece of news, the location of the MacFarlane's garden. Engaged goes further than Tom Cobb, however, in that parody of melodrama extends beyond plot to characterization and style of language. As Michael Booth points out, nearly all the characters are reversals of the accepted stage types of the nineteenth century: the hero is a cad, and the heroines are all artful minxes.⁵⁹ Belvawney, with his "dreadful eyes", which exert a "strange mysterious influence" over Cheviot, is a parody of such stage figures as the Mesmerist in Leopold Lewis' The Bells of 1871.⁶⁰ Throughout the play, there is a sustained effort to parody the rhetorical style of melodrama. This is demonstrated by Cheviot's professions of love:

Madam, be not surprised when I tell you
that I cannot resist the conviction that
you are the light of my future life, the
essence of every hope, the tree upon
which the fruit of my heart is growing -
my Past, my Present, my Future, my own
To Come! (p. 346)

It reaches comic heights in the scene in which Belinda explains her predicament to Minnie:

Miss Treherne. It is a lurid tale.
Three months since I fled from
a hated one who was to have married
me. He pursued me. I confided
my distress to a young and wealthy

stranger. Acting on his advice,
I declared myself to be his wife;
he declared himself to be my
husband. We were parted immediately
afterwards, and we have never met
since. But this took place in
Scotland, and by the law of that
remarkable country we are man and wife,
though I didn't know it at the time.

Minnie. What fun!

Miss Treherne. Fun! Say, rather, horror -
distraction - chaos! I am rent with con-
flicting doubts! Perhaps he was al-
ready married; in that case I am a
bigamist. Maybe he is alive; in that
case I am a wife. What am I? Am I
single? Am I married? Am I a widow?
Can I marry? Have I married? May I
marry? Who am I? Where am I? What am
I? What is my name? What is my con-
dition in life? If I am married, to
whom am I married? If I am a widow,
how came I to be a widow, and whose
widow came I to be? Why am I his widow?
What did he die of? Did he leave me any-
thing? If anything, how much, and is it
saddled with conditions? Can I marry
again without forfeiting it? Have I a
mother-in-law? Have I a family of
step-children, and if so, how many, and
what are their ages, sexes, sizes, names
and dispositions? These are questions
that rack me night and day, and until
they are settled, peace and I are not on
terms! (p. 354)

Part of the fun here lies in the characters' own awareness
of the absurdity of the melodramatic conceits they are forced
to utter:

Miss Treherne. Promise me that you will
never, never marry, and we will both
bless you with our latest breath!

Cheviot. There seems to be a special
importance attached to a blessing con-
ferred with one's latest breath that I
entirely fail to grasp. It seems to
me to convey no definite advantage of
any kind whatever.

Engaged, then, is a more complete theatrical burlesque than Tom Cobb. It is far richer, too, in theme. The title of the play points to at least one of Gilbert's thematic concerns, love. Engaged is a satire of romantic love, and this satire is centred in the person of Cheviot Hill. As with most of the play's characters, the comedy of this character arises from the discrepancy between his words and his true feelings, which are betrayed by his actions. At one moment, Cheviot is apostrophizing romantically about the ideality and beauty of his love; at the next, his eyes and hands are distracted by the nearest female form. This is best illustrated in the first act, where his apparently boundless libido places him in a triple engagement. No sooner has he vowed his fidelity to Symperson's daughter than he is making love to Maggie; no sooner has he vowed eternal love to Maggie than he is allured by Belinda:

Cheviot. Poor little Lowland lassie!
 That's my idea of a wife. No
 ridiculous extravagance; no ex-
 pensive tastes. Knows how to
 dress like a lady on £5 a year;
 ah, and does it too! No pre-
 tence there of being blind to
 her own beauties; she knows
 that she is beautiful, and scorns
 to lie about it. In that respect
 she resembles Symperson's dear
 daughter, Minnie. My darling
 Minnie. (Looks at miniature.)
 My own darling Minnie. Minnie is
 fair, Maggie is dark. Maggie loves
 me! That excellent and perfect
 country creature loves me! She is
 to be the light of my life, my own
 To Come! In some respects she is

even prettier than Minnie - my darling Minnie. Symperson's dear daughter, the tree upon which the fruit of my heart is growing; my Past, my Present, and my Future, my own To Come! But this tendency to reverie is growing on me; I must shake it off.

Enter Miss Treherne.

Heaven and earth, what a singularly lovely girl! (p. 345)

Cheviot finds it extremely hard to restrain his sexual impulses: even on his wedding-day, he cannot keep his hands off Parker, Minnie's maid. Through Cheviot, Gilbert satirizes romantic love by demonstrating the hopeless conflict of its idealism with sexual instincts and urges. Although the expression of Cheviot's sexuality is limited to hugs and kisses, it clearly makes ludicrous his romantic protestations.⁶¹

Gilbert's view of romantic love in women is more restrained but equally cynical. Rather than undercutting the ideals of his female characters through exposing their sexuality, which would have been too outrageous for the Victorian stage, Gilbert satirizes their love by showing its mercenary nature. The technique is much the same: protestations of love are juxtaposed with an outspoken candor about financial objectives. This is best demonstrated in Belinda Treherne's opening speeches:

Belvawney, I love you with an imperishable ardour which mocks the power of words. If I were to begin

to tell you now of the force of my indomitable passion for you, the tomb would close over me before I could exhaust the entrancing subject. But, as I said before, business is business, and unless I can see some distinct probability that your income will be permanent, I shall have no alternative but to weep my heart out in all the anguish of maiden solitude - uncared for, unloved, and alone! (p. 336)

The equation of love and money is also seen in Minnie, who in Act Three suddenly jilts Cheviot because it appears he is bankrupt, and in Maggie, who finds Cheviot's wealth more attractive than Angus' poverty.

Indeed, Gilbert's overall conception of women in the play is original and daring. All the female characters in the play explode the Victorian ideals of womanhood. As Martha Vicinus points out in Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, the ideal Victorian lady was trained from childhood in the virtues of innocence, modesty, passivity, and submissiveness to men.⁶² One needs go no further than Gilbert's early comedies to find this ideal expressed in drama: Ethel Barrington and Edith Temple are fine examples. Even when a wife separated from her husband for reasons that were clearly his fault, as in Byron's Cyril's Success, it was the woman who was blamed and had to crawl on her knees to beg forgiveness of her husband. The ideal of weak, innocent, submissive woman was one that permeated all areas of Victorian life and thought.

In Engaged, Gilbert overturns this notion, chiefly through the character of Minnie Symperson. Again, the character's outer mode of expression is at variance with her true feelings and desires. While expressing herself in the childish babble of feminine servility, Minnie reveals her inner plan to make Cheviot servile to her:

Minnie. Dear papa, Cheviot is the very soul of honour; he's a fine noble, manly, spirited fellow, but if he has a fault, it is that he is very, oh very, very stingy. He would rather lose his heart's blood than part with a shilling unnecessarily. He's a noble fellow, but he's like that.

Symperson. Still I can't help feeling that if my robin had worked him judiciously -

Minnie. Papa, dear, Cheviot is an all but perfect character, the very type of knight chivalry; but he has faults and among other things he's one of the worst tempered men I ever met in all my little life. Poor simple little Minnie thought the matter over very carefully in her silly childish way, and she came to the conclusion, in her foolish little noodle, that, on the whole, perhaps she could work it better after marriage, than before.

Symperson. Well, well, perhaps my wren is right.

Minnie. Don't laugh at my silly little thoughts, dear papa, when I say I'm sure she is ... Papa, dear, I have thought the matter over very carefully in my little baby-noodle, and I have come to the conclusion - don't laugh at me, dear papa - that it is my duty - my duty - to fall in with Cheviot's views in everything before marriage, and Cheviot's duty to fall into my view in everything after marriage. I think that is only fair, don't you? (pp. 351-352)

Similarly, Maggie MacFarlane's rustic innocence and virtue is a masquerade for vanity and selfishness. Virtuous Maggie is not quite as artless as she seems, for in the third act she tells Cheviot that she has "placed the matter in her solicitor's hands, and he tells her that an action for breach will just bring damages to the tune of a thousand pound" (pp. 382-383). It is the same with Belinda Treherne, whose mercenary concerns have been noted above. Apparently the most intensely emotional of all the women, the depth of her emotion is overthrown by her fondness for tarts:

At last I'm in my darling's home, the
home of the bright blythe carolling
thing that lit, as with a ray of
heaven's sunlight, the murky gloom of
my miserable school-days. But what do
I see? Tarts? Ginger-wine? There are
rejoicings of some kind afoot. Alas,
I am out of place here. What have I in
common with tarts? Oh, I am ill-attuned
to scenes of revelry! (Takes a tart and
eats it.) (p. 353)

The comic technique of deflating emotion through food has been observed in Tom Cobb.⁶³ The tart-eating sequence of Engaged is, however, symbolic of the whole play's comic structure. In a most direct way it illustrates the conflict of reason and appetite which is the play's informing principle. Rationally, Belinda rejects the tarts as "ill attuned" to her sadness; instinctively, she takes one. Throughout the play, words, ideals and reason are juxtaposed with conflicting actions, instincts, and appetites. Cheviot's instinctive

sexual impulses overturn his idealistic utterances about love and fidelity, and Minnie's thirst for power over her husband overthrows her apparent submissiveness. In Engaged, then, Gilbert sees man as the helpless victim of all kinds of base irrational impulses which society obliges him to suppress but which continually overturn the rationalizations of his brain.⁶⁴ However thick the veneer of civilization, man remains an animal who exists only to satisfy certain selfish desires of food, sex, money, and power. In Engaged, Gilbert strips the veneer of civilization from man, and by showing its discrepancy with his real desires and interests, makes it seem ludicrous.

For Gilbert, none of man's appetites is as great or voracious as his hunger for personal gain, for money. It has already been indicated that Gilbert uses mercenary concerns as a means of undercutting romantic ideals of love and women. In fact, Engaged sees all of human society as a marketplace. This is summed up by Belvawney near the beginning of the play:

I often think that it is deeply to be deplored that these grovelling questions of money should alloy the tenderest and most hallowed sentiments that inspire our imperfect natures. (p. 335)

With total cynicism, Engaged sees all human transactions, whether concerning love, friendship, or else, as motivated by greed and selfishness. This may be seen in the opening of the play, where the rustic characters are revealed to be

astute businessmen: Angus' derailing of trains provides the community with its livelihood. Later on, Angus does not need much urging to sell Maggie to Cheviot for two pounds. Cheviot himself is the incarnation of miserliness: when his wedding is to be called off, all he can think about is the lost expense. Selfishness is perhaps best exploited in the characters of Belvawney and Symperson, who stand to lose or profit by Cheviot's marriage: the one thousand pound annuity which Belvawney draws while Cheviot remains a bachelor will pass to Symperson should Cheviot marry. Each of these characters will stop at nothing, however reckless or inhumane, to gain their ends. Belvawney spreads vicious rumours that Cheviot has been financially ruined. Symperson urges Cheviot to kill himself:

Cheviot. There is another contingency
on which you come into the money. My
death.

Symperson. (Delighted) To be sure! I
never thought of that! And, as you
say, a man can die but once.

Cheviot. I beg your pardon. I didn't
say anything of the kind - you said
it; but it's true, for all that.

Symperson. I'm very sorry, but of course,
if you have made up your mind to it -

Cheviot. Why, when a man's lost every-
thing, what has he to live for?

Symperson. True, true. Nothing whatever.
Still -

Cheviot. His money gone, his credit gone,
the three girls he's engaged to gone.

Symperson. I cannot deny it. It is a
hopeless situation. Hopeless, quite
hopeless. (pp. 375-376)

Absurd as this scene may be, it underlines the heartlessness

which accompanies the human thirst for money.

Gilbert is not the first nineteenth-century dramatist to satirize human selfishness. Several dramatists attack the attitude put in the mouth of Lady Ptarmigan by Robertson in Society: "Money can do everything."⁶⁵ In the same play, John Chodd, Jr. is a satiric portrait of the nouveau-riche:

Chodd, Jr. The present age is as you are aware - a practical age. I come to the point - it's my way. Capital commands the world. The capitalist commands capital, therefore the capitalist commands the world.

Sidney. But you don't quite command the world, do you?

Chodd, Jr. Practically, I do. I wish for the highest honours - I bring out my cheque-book. I want to get into the House of Commons - cheque-book. I want the best legal opinion in the House of Lords - cheque-book. The best house - cheque-book. The best turn out - cheque-book. The best friends, the best wife, the best trained children - cheque-⁶⁶ book, cheque book, and cheque book.

Bulwer-Lytton's Money of 1840 is a biting satire on a world which has made money a god. The penniless Alfred Evelyn is left a huge fortune which raises his social prestige enormously. Evelyn tests the world's sincerity by pretending to lose his fortune, and discovers that his respectability and attractiveness decline accordingly.

The difference between Gilbert's attack and that of other nineteenth-century dramatists is one of degree and intensity. Like most dramatists of his day, Bulwer-Lytton

redeems the world in the final scene of his play, where Evelyn discovers that the "holiness of truth and love" still exists "amidst the humours and the follies, the vanities, deceits, and vices that play their parts in the great Comedy of Life."⁶⁷ Gilbert, on the other hand, permits his characters, and mankind in general, no such redemption. The wicked world is hopelessly fallen and corrupt. Civilization is a sham; base appetites control the world.

Those appetites only become funny when juxtaposed with the high-sounding ideals of love and altruism. This is what makes the melodramatic rhetoric of the play so entirely appropriate, for melodrama is above all the stage language of idealism. It depicts man at his most civilized, attempting to live according to unreal ideals of love and happiness and goodness. By casting his play in the outward mold of melodrama, with his characters speaking an artificial rhetoric of idealism, Gilbert is able to exploit fully the discrepancy between that idealism and the realities of human nature.⁶⁸

Although Engaged is Gilbert's most profoundly pessimistic and cynical work, it has several absurdist elements which do not fit into any logical thematic framework. One such element is the character of Belvawney, whose magic tricks link the play with the supernatural. Indeed, the feeling of magic, of dream, is never far from the surface

of Engaged. Like the characters in The Palace of Truth, the characters seem utterly unconscious or unaware that they are revealing their true feelings.⁶⁹ It is as if some magical force were making them speak the truth. Cheviot's "amatory disposition" is strangely close to the magic powers of heroes in fairy extravaganzas. In short, the world of Engaged guides us back to the threshold of fairyland. The world of Engaged is an unreal world, lingering on the threshold of fantasy.

The conclusions arising from the preceding survey of Gilbert's work in comedy are similar to those generated by an examination of his farces. In comedy, as in farce, Gilbert seems uncomfortable working within conventional Victorian modes. His three earliest comedies, An Old Score, Randall's Thumb, and On Guard, are largely unsuccessful attempts to emulate the standard Victorian comic formula of melodrama, sentiment, and humour represented by the plays of Taylor, Robertson, and Byron. Sweethearts is somewhat of an aberration among Gilbert's work in that it is his one successful excursion into gentle humour and sentiment. It is only with Tom Cobb and Engaged, however, that one at last encounters the true Gilbert. In these two works he takes all that he had taken seriously in his earlier comedies and turns it upside-down to produce two wildly individual and fantastic comedies. With the satire of Engaged, Gilbert finally breaks down the moral and sentimental barriers which had impeded the

development of English comedy for most of the nineteenth century. His refusal to take Victorian civilization seriously marks the death of sentiment and the beginning of the return of common sense to English comedy.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1. Thorndike, English Comedy, p. 209.
2. Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, p. 330.
3. Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, p. 63. For other remarks of a similar nature, see Louis Kronenberger, The Thread of Laughter (New York: Hill and Wang, 1952), pp. 203-206; Newell Sawyer, The Comedy of Manners from Sheridan to Maugham (New York: Barnes and Co., 1961), Chapters II and III.
4. Macqueen-Pope, Haymarket, p. 290.
5. Tom Taylor, Victims (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.), p. 19. G.C.C.
6. Tom Taylor, The Overland Route (London: John Dicks, n.d. No. 1,062 in Dicks' Standard Plays.) G.C.C.
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8. T. Edgar Robertson, A Memoir of Edward Askew Sothorn (London: Richard Bentley, 1889).
9. George Henry Lewes, On Actors and the Art of Acting (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968) contains accounts of most of the great Victorian comedians.
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12. Bancroft, The Bancrofts, pp. 100-101.
13. Errol Durbach, "Remembering Tom Robertson", Educational Theatre Journal, XXIV (October, 1972), p. 285.
14. T.W. Robertson, "Caste", Nineteenth Century Plays, George Rowell, ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

15. Ibid., p. 405.
16. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, "Money", English Plays of the Nineteenth Century: III, Comedies, Michael Booth, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp. 170-171.
17. T.W. Robertson, Society (London: Samuel French, n.d.), p. 12. G.C.C.
18. Robertson, "Caste", Nineteenth Century Plays, p. 355.
19. Ibid., p. 392.
20. Bancroft, The Bancrofts, p. 106.
21. For further discussion of Robertson and the Bancrofts, see Michael Booth, "Introduction", English Plays: III, pp. 33-43; Allardyce Nicoll, Late Nineteenth Century Drama, Chapter IV: and Ernest Watson, Sheridan to Robertson, Chapter XVIII.
22. Robertson, "Caste", Nineteenth Century Plays, p. 358.
23. Tom Taylor, "New Men and Old Acres", English Plays: III, Booth, ed.
24. H.J. Byron, War to the Knife (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
25. H.J. Byron, Our Boys (London: Samuel French, n.d.), p. 26.
26. H.J. Byron, Cyril's Success (London: Samuel French, n.d.), p. 34. G.C.C.
27. For more examples of the theme of marriage in mid-Victorian comedy, see Michael Booth, "Introduction", English Plays: III, pp. 27-29.
28. For an interesting discussion of how the concept of Virtue Triumphant permeated all nineteenth-century drama, see Maurice Willson Disher, Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and its Origins (London: Muller, 1949).

29. W.S. Gilbert, An Old Score (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C.
John Hollingshead had taken over the Gaiety Theatre in 1868, and Gilbert's work was one of the first comedies he produced. W. Macqueen-Pope, Gaiety: Theatre of Enchantment (London: W.H. Allen, 1949), pp. 90-91.
30. Joseph Knight (?), review of An Old Score, The Athenaeum, No. 2179, July 31, 1969, pp. 154-155.
31. Gilbert, An Old Score, p. 39.
32. Ibid., p. 8.
33. Macqueen-Pope, Gaiety, p. 91.
34. Knight (?), review of An Old Score, p. 154.
35. Jane W. Stedman, "General Utility: Victorian Author-Actors From Knowles to Pinero", Educational Theatre Journal, XXIV (October, 1972), p. 289.
36. W.S. Gilbert, Randall's Thumb (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.) Marie Litton was the manager of the Court Theatre in 1871. See note 89 to Chapter III.
37. For comic reversals of roles, see especially the musical plays in Jane W. Stedman, ed., Gilbert Before Sullivan: Six Comic Plays (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967).
38. W.S. Gilbert, On Guard (London: Samuel French, n.d.). G.C.C. See note 89 to Chapter III.
39. Joseph Knight (?), review of On Guard, The Athenaeum, No. 2297, November 4, 1871, p. 601.
40. W.S. Gilbert, On Guard, pp. 21-22.
41. Ibid., p. 6
42. Terence Rees, Thespis: A Gilbert and Sullivan Enigma (London: Dillon's University Bookshop, 1964), p. 22.
43. See Chapter III, p. 57.
44. W.S. Gilbert, "Sweethearts", Original Plays: Second Series (London: Chatto and Windus, 1922).
Subsequent page references to this edition will be given in the text.

45. See note 37 above.
46. W. Craven Mackie, "The Bancrofts' Repertory, 1865 to 1885", Educational Theatre Journal, XXVII (March, 1975), pp. 98-110.
47. Bancroft, The Bancrofts, pp. 198-201.
48. W.S. Gilbert, "Tom Cobb", English Plays: IV, Booth, ed. Subsequent page references to this edition will be given in the text. Marie Litton, for whom Gilbert had written at the Court from 1871 to 1874, was the manager of the St. James' in 1875 and 1876. W. Macqueen-Pope, St. James': Theatre of Distinction (London: W.H. Allen, 1958), pp. 61-62.
49. J.T. Allingham, "Fortune's Frolic", The London Stage: A Collection of the Most Reputed Tragedies, Comedies, Operas, Melo-Dramas, Farces, and Interludes (London: G. Balne, 1824).
50. The comic Irishman was a stock nineteenth-century character. Booth, "Introduction", English Plays: III, p. 8.
51. Taylor, Victims, p. 53.
52. Taylor, "New Men", English Plays: III, p. 306.
53. McMullen, An Introduction to the Aesthetic Movement.
54. Michael Booth, "Preface to Tom Cobb", English Plays: IV, p. 259.
55. Eric Bentley, "The Psychology of Farce", Let's Get a Divorce and Other Plays (New York: Hill and Wang, 1958), p. xiii.
56. See Chapter III, p. 33.
57. W.S. Gilbert, "Engaged", English Plays: III, Booth, ed. Subsequent page references to this edition will be given in the text. In 1877 the Haymarket was still under the management of the aging J.B. Buckstone. Macqueen-Pope, Haymarket, p. 307.
58. George S. Kaufman's The Still Alarm is a modern play which uses the same device, only the catastrophe is a fire, not a train accident.

59. Michael Booth, "Preface to Engaged", English Plays: III, p. 329.
60. Leopold Lewis, "The Bells", Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century, Robert Corrigan, ed. (New York: Dell, 1967).
61. The National Theatre production in 1975 made this sexuality more explicit through fondling of breasts, pinching of buttocks, unlacing of corsets, etc.
62. Martha Vicinus, ed., Suffer and Be Still: Women In The Victorian Age (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), pp. ix-x.
This ideal of woman undoubtedly contributed to the mediocrity of most Victorian comedy; for, as George Meredith observed, good comedy only flourishes where "women are on the road to an equal footing with men." Meredith, "An Essay on Comedy," Comedy, Sypher, ed., p. 32.
63. This device was stolen by Wilde for use in The Importance of Being Earnest. Oscar Wilde, "The Importance of Being Earnest", Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century, pp. 448-450.
64. Henri Bergson would regard this as the living asserting itself over the mechanical. Henri Bergson, "Laughter", Comedy, Wylie Sypher, ed. (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1956).
65. Robertson, Society, p. 46.
66. Ibid., p. 10.
67. Bulwer-Lytton, "Money", English Plays: III, pp. 237-238. For other examples of satire of wealth in nineteenth-century drama, see Michael Booth, "Introduction", English Plays: III, pp. 22-25.
68. "Melodrama ... was the dominant modality of all nineteenth-century British life and thought." Robert Corrigan, "Melodrama and the Popular Tradition in the Nineteenth-Century British Theatre", Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century, pp.14-15.

69. Gilbert's note to the play states that "the characters, one and all, should appear to believe, throughout, in the perfect sincerity of their words and actions. Directly the characters show that they are conscious of the absurdity of their utterances the piece begins to drag." English Plays: III, Booth, ed., p. 330. For critical reaction to Engaged, see "Appendix: Criticism of Engaged" in the same edition.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: GILBERT AND HYPOCRISY

Almost a month after Engaged appeared at the Haymarket, The Sorcerer was presented at the Opera Comique. Henceforth Gilbert's creative energies were to be almost totally devoted to the writing and production of comic operas in collaboration with Arthur Sullivan. 1877 therefore marks the end of Gilbert's apprenticeship in the theatre and the beginning of a more famous and profitable period during which his name was to become a household word. Yet after reading and studying Gilbert's early comedies, one is tempted to regard his entry into the field of comic opera with a degree of regret. Granted, the Savoy Operas are masterpieces of wit and charm; but, for this writer at least, the earlier work reveals complexities and profundities in Gilbert's thought that are lost amid the music and verse of the operas.

Of course, it is possible to see Gilbert's career in

comic opera as the natural culmination to his early work. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that the period from 1867 to 1877 is the formative period in his dramatic career, during which he struggles to find the best mode of expression for his peculiar vision of life. He begins as an apprentice, writing farces, burlesques, and comedies in the style of his contemporaries. In each of these areas, the apprenticeship breaks down, and Gilbert launches out on his own in new and often daring ways. After a few abortive attempts, he rejects farce as a medium for his comic expression, but not without having tinged the form with wit and satire, most notably in The Realm of Joy. His work in extravaganza is more original: he completely reshapes the form to produce a series of poetic comedies that combine whimsy and satire. In comedy, his unsatisfactory attempts to emulate the standard Victorian comic formula are followed by two absurd satiric pieces, Tom Cobb and Engaged. In all three areas, the same trends can be observed, trends from conventionality to originality that converge on the single term, satire. However diverse and trite Gilbert's output is in 1867, by 1877 it consists chiefly of satire. Moreover, it is satire expressed through fantasy: it has been noted how Engaged returns us to the world of fairy comedy. Satire and fantasy: these are the two chief ingredients of the Savoy Operas. In this formative decade, then, Gilbert is

slowly moving towards the modality of the comic opera libretti: by 1877, all that were lacking were songs and verse, and these were easily supplied by his career as a burlesquwright and comic poet.

However, the intent of this thesis has not been to illustrate how the early work foreshadows the Savoy libretti. Rather, it has aimed to demonstrate that the early work, particularly in the lengthier comic forms, is in many ways more interesting than the later operas. The early comedies reveal a Gilbert more complex, more cynical, more revolutionary than the librettist. The satire of the Savoy Operas is usually directed against specific human follies and institutions; the early comedies reveal that this particularized satire grows out of a deeper dissatisfaction with mankind in general. Instead of poking fun at the House of Peers or the Aesthetic Movement or the British Navy, the early comedies ridicule fundamental imperfections in man's nature. Gilbert's favourite object of scorn is hypocrisy, the discrepancy between outer manner and inner feeling. The Palace of Truth and Engaged see man as an essentially hypocritical creature whose sentiments and pretensions rarely coincide with his true desires and appetites. Beneath the veneer of civilization lurks a rather nasty creature who is impelled by all sorts of base motives. In short,

Darwinian man, though well-behaved,
At best is only a monkey shaved!1

Gilbert's satire of hypocrisy extends to include the original meaning of "hypocrite," which is "actor." The essence of Gilbertian comedy, of topsyturvydom, is the theatricality of life in a world where the individual assumes a variety of masks and roles. Sometimes, Gilbert treats this theme playfully, as in Highly Improbable, where the daughters dress up as a lawyer, a sailor, and a doctor; sometimes sentimentally, as in Sweethearts, where love overcomes the play-acting of life; sometimes cynically, as in The Palace of Truth, where man cannot cope without hypocrisy; and most often satirically, as in The Realm of Joy, where base motives masquerade as morality, and Engaged, where appetites masquerade as ideals. Gilbert's fascination with hypocrisy, with man the play-actor, is endless; he is by turns amused, touched, angered, and scandalized by the theatre of life.

His concern with hypocrisy is not merely a private obsession: it strikes directly into the heart of Victorian civilization. As Walter Houghton points out, the Victorian era was the great age of hypocrisy:

Of all the criticisms brought against them by the Lytton Stracheys of the twentieth century, the Victorians would have pleaded guilty to only one. They would have defended or excused their optimism, their dogmatism, their appeal to force, their strait-laced morality, but they would have confessed to an unfortunate strain of hypocrisy. To understand the charge, it must be broken down into three specific

counts. One, they concealed or suppressed their true convictions and their natural tastes. They said the 'right' thing or did the 'right' thing; they sacrificed sincerity to propriety. Second, and worse, they pretended to be better than they were. They passed themselves off as being incredibly pious and moral; they talked noble sentiments and lived -- quite otherwise. Finally, they refused to look at life candidly. They shut their eyes to whatever was ugly or unpleasant and pretended it didn't exist. Conformity, moral pretension, and evasion -- those are the hallmarks of Victorian hypocrisy.²

Gilbert is the first Victorian dramatist to slash open the ornate veil of hypocrisy that sheltered Victorian life. As such, he is the most important dramatist of the mid-Victorian era, for he removed many of the moral restraints and inhibitions which had checked the development of English drama for much of the nineteenth century, and brought a new freedom, the freedom to criticize, to the English stage. Engaged cleared the stage of its sentimental clutter and prepared the way for Shaw, among others. While Engaged may not seem like a very realistic play, its vision of man is more truthful than any presented before on the nineteenth-century stage. This is not to suggest that Gilbert reformed English drama single-handedly, for at the same time he was creating a more favourable intellectual climate for the growth of comedy, theatrical conditions were changing. The reforms of the Bancroft management, the interest and patronage of the Queen in the theatre, the development of

the music hall which siphoned off the masses, the introduction of a royalty system, and the diminished influence of the censor all helped to create a better environment for the development of drama. However, the preceding chapters will have made clear that the English dramatic renaissance of the 1890's owed at least as much to Gilbert as to these conditions. The debt of Shaw, Wilde, Jones, Pinero, and others to Gilbert is incalculable.

Gilbert, then, stands at the threshold of modern drama. Many of his thematic concerns -- most especially, the theatricality of life and the tension between society's rigid structure and the individual's instincts and impulses -- anticipate those of later dramatists such as Pirandello and Ionesco. On the level of form, his methods of combining satire and fantasy foreshadow the expressionistic, non-realistic techniques of the twentieth century. In short, the more one studies Gilbert, the more one is convinced of his central position in the birth of modern drama. In many ways, he is more modern than Victorian, and his connection to twentieth-century theatre invites much further study and comment.

However, this thesis has concentrated on Gilbert's relationship to his own age and his own theatre. 1877 was not only the year of Engaged and The Sorcerer; it also marked the first appearance of Meredith's "Essay on Comedy".

These events taken together make 1877 the most important year for English comedy in the nineteenth century, for at the same moment the leading comic theorist was calling for a return to wit and intelligence in comedy, the leading comic practitioner was restoring and fulfilling those ideals on the stage.

NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

1. Gilbert, "Princess Ida," The Savoy Operas, p. 322.
2. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, pp. 394-395.

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3. W.S. Gilbert: Biography and Criticism
4. Victorian Drama: History and Criticism
5. General History, Literature, and Criticism

Note: The abbreviation G.C.C. indicates that an entry is to be found in the collection of Victorian drama contained in the Garrick Club Collection of the University of Calgary Library.

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