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Parody and Poetic Tradition: Gilbert and Sullivan's *Patience*

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Parodies of aestheticism were common fare by the time *Patience* was produced in 1881. Even so, *Patience* was recognized as "the most subtle and incisive of all the contributions to the exhaustive satire of aestheticism." It is "deeper than the rest," said the astute reviewer for the *Illustrated London News*, because it performs "a travesty not only on the mere decorative craze, *but upon the form of literature* that is supposed to be held in high esteem by the ardent lovers of the beautiful in art" (italics mine).[1] As this contemporary assessment shows, reference to "the decorative craze" was one contemporary default parameter for characterizing aestheticism. In our own day, instead, it is most common to associate aestheticism with a fin-de-siècle loosening of Victorian norms of gender and sexuality. Between then and now, however, the point articulated by the reviewer for the *Illustrated London News* has been overlooked, while W. S. Gilbert's deep engagement with nineteenth-century poetry and poetics has been relatively unacknowledged.[2]

Patience launched a complex genre parody, directed against Victorian poetry in general. The parody is developed through the rivalry between Reginald Bunthorne, an "aesthetic poet," and Archibald Grosvenor, an "idyllic poet." Thus dividing Victorian poetry into two camps and making fun of both, the libretto manages, by implication, to comment on a long nineteenth-century history of Romantic and Victorian poetry, and it shows Gilbert to have been exceptionally well-informed about poetic controversy in the decades before *Patience*. The fact that this aspect of *Patience* has not been explored is all the more surprising, since it bears directly upon the opera's concern with changing gender norms, as well as its analysis of class.

The Clerical Version

Before his collaboration with Sullivan began, Gilbert published comic ballads under the pen name "Bab" (short for "Babby," his infant nickname). Most of them were published in *Fun* magazine, a popular humor magazine that was, for a while, the chief rival to *Punch*. These *Bab Ballads* took part in the Victorian efflorescence of comic and nonsense verse and were also a late flowering of the widespread interest in ballad revivals and ballad parodies that spans the nineteenth century. The germ of *Patience* appears in one of Gilbert's

Bab Ballads, "The Rival Curates," first published in 1867.

In "The Rival Curates," two clergymen vie for the honor of being known as the mildest and most insipid curate in the neighborhood. Gilbert had written about two-thirds of an opera libretto based on his ballad, when he abandoned it in favor of the rivalry between two "Aesthetic fanatics, worshiped by a chorus of female aesthetics" (Stedman, p. 287). As he later explained, he "became uneasy at the thought of the danger [he] was incurring by dealing so freely with members of the clerical order, and [he] felt . . . crippled at every turn by the necessity of protecting [himself] from a charge of irreverence."[3] The Church was still off-limits for theatrical parody and satire. Luckily for us, the clerical version of *Patience* survives in manuscript and offers clear evidence that curates prefigured the aesthetes.[4] The name of the central clergyman, praised for "his exceeding mildness" and "his lamblike innocence" provides one hint of what the clerical version of the opera might have promised. That character was to have been called "The Reverend Lawn Tennison." His name gathers together a quiver of barbs, aimed against the supposed blandness of curates, against haute-bourgeois leisure pastimes, and against the Poet Laureate. As we will see, Tennyson remains an active object of parody in the final version of *Patience*. But for now, we should pause briefly to appreciate the cleric behind the aesthete, whose "style is much too sanctified, [whose] cut is too canonical."[5]

"The Rival Curates" tells of Mr. Clayton Hooper, of Spiffton-extra-Sooper, and his rival Hopley Porter, curate of nearby Assesmilk-cum-Worter. These amusing place-names emphasize the premise that curates might be associated with bland fatuity and excessive mildness. (For the text of the poem, see Appendix.) In this ballad, the sort of insipidity and "blankness" of mind supposedly promoted by the curacy is thoroughly entangled with conventions of gender and sexuality. Hopley Porter displays a competitive effeminacy through his participation in the craft hobbies of his female parishioners—reminding us that the term "effeminate" described a man who sought the company of women before it indicated a feminine man. But Clayton Hooper's eventual defeat of Hopley Porter owes not to his mildness but to his militancy, for he dispatches minions to threaten Porter with assassination if he does not yield. The premise of a rivalry in mildness becomes even funnier when it is pursued with a militant zeal that would seem to be its opposite. Plenty of Biblical precedent upholds the notion that Christian virtue must have its militant aspect.[6] But here, the focus is on the theatrical imitation of militant Christian virtue, along with the even more risky suggestion that Christian virtue might always be a performance, a parodic *imitatio* that covers the stronger human emotions of aggression, hostility, and sexual desire.

In other words, the parody strikes out against a clerical pretense of abstinence from strong emotion. On the other hand, Hopley Porter's parodic

"conversion" to vulgar heterosexuality is depicted as the fulfillment of strong desires, hitherto theatrically disguised, now suddenly enacted with a pleasure that is only heightened by the "compulsion" under which he acts. (Likewise, in Act II of *Patience*, Reginald Bunthorne defeats his poetic rival with the threat of a curse, forcing him to yield "on compulsion" and to become the vulgar, "every-day young man" he has "long wished" to be [p. 194]). Compulsory heterosexuality itself, in other words, comes in for its share of a parody that is primarily directed against the clergy who renounce or avoid it.

While the mild, asexual bearing of Clayton Hooper is characterized as "high," the vulgar, conventionally heterosexual behavior of his rival is decidedly "low." These relative status assignments recall the disposition of parties in the nineteenth-century controversies unfolding within the Church of England between "low Church" and "high Church" Anglicans. For the latter, the aim was to recreate the one true Church, to repair the historical discontinuity instituted by the Protestant break from Roman Catholicism. However, the Protestant dynamic of schism continued its relentless momentum, precipitating ever more precisely differentiated denominations of interpretive community. Low Church Anglicans were most often commoners, somewhat closer rhan other Anglicans, in their views, to Dissenters, who believed in direct access to God through the individual experience of strong feelings. Variously expressed as emotional oratory, tears, or song, these strong feelings were themselves deemed vulgar by those with a more restrained sense of devotional convention, like high Church Anglicans, who were known for their restraint, their submission to priestly mediation, their adherence to ritual, and their lack of ostentatious emotional display. To conventional worshipers, their restraint and their love of ritual seemed quite ostentatious indeed.

Low Church and high Church movements were both associated with a poetry and a poetics. The Wesleys' great hymns, over eight thousand of them, and John Keble's *The Christian Year* (1827), one of the most popular books of poetry in the entire nineteenth century, were organized according to occasion and chiefly written in common ballad meter or one of its many derivatives. (Thus they too must be seen in relation to the history of ballad revivals.) While low Church hymnody was expressive, high Church poetry was reserved. In fact, "reserve" was a technical term both in high Church theology and poetics. A doctrine of accommodation practiced by God, as well as a set of practices enjoined upon believers, including poets, "reserve" was based on the belief that humans (in relation to God) and readers (in relation to poets) could comprehend only gradually, according to their limited capacities. Thus, with elaborate reticence and an "economy" of reserve, high Church poets practiced a "chaste" and tactful regard for the exact amount of expressiveness called for—just so much, and no more.[7]

In social behavior, the reserve of high Church practitioners was popularly

imagined as the disguise of a covert agenda. Frequently that agenda was taken to be sexual. Charles Kingsley was driven mad with rage against Newman's mild demeanor, which seemed to Kingsley a sign of depravity attendant upon his refusal of heterosexual "marriage and the giving in marriage." The homoerotic charge of Newman's mildness has, with reason much better than Kingsley's, often been alleged.[8] On the other hand, as Tricia Lootens has argued, priestly mildness was also suspected of covering heterosexual license, for to many the privacy of the Roman Catholic confessional seemed suspiciously like a trysting place, where a woman, meeting to share intimate secrets tête-à-tête with a man, was in some degree of danger.[9] In other words, the mildness of high Church Anglican and Catholic clergy was popularly believed to be dangerous because it might disguise either secret homoerotic or secret heteroerotic exchanges. Needless to say, the low point of view, from which high Church celibates were seen as sexually sophisticated hypocrites, was a Protestant one.

Both low Church and high Church movements were revival movements —the one a revival of direct access to, and emotional expression of, religious feeling, the other a revival of a past institution, the pre-Reformation, still-unified and comprehensive Church. In this sense, the clerical version of *Patience* and its later, poetic version are linked, since the aesthetes, too, were revivalists, like their predecessors, the Pre-Raphaelites, who sought to reinstate a purer, more natural art practice by going back before Raphael spoiled everything with his suave smoothness. A rich and contradictory signifier in the Victorian period, "medieval" thus alludes both to pre-Protestant and pre-Raphaelite ideals. As Stedman points out, writing of the clerical version of *Patience*, all "the references to medieval art and Early English belong as much to a caricatured [high Church] Oxford Movement as to a parodied Aesthetic one" (p. 308).

Thus Reginald Bunthorne's "high aesthetic line" picks up where the high Church leaves off. In both clerical and aesthetic contexts, it makes sense for Bunthorne to call his aesthetic poses "stained-glass attitudes" and to counter vulgar jostling with high apostling:

> Though the Philistines may jostle, you will rank as an apostle in the high aesthetic band
> If you walk down Piccadilly with a poppy or a lily in your mediæval hand. (p. 169)

Bunthorne hates his rival's "confounded mildness" and vows: "I will show the world I can be as mild as he. If they want insipidity, they shall have it. I'll meet this fellow on his own ground and beat him on it" (p. 187). Lady Jane encourages this plan, urging Bunthorne to "go to him and say to him with compliment ironical . . . 'Your style is much too sanctified—your cut is too canonical!'" (p. 188). During their wonderful duet, Jane helps Bunthorne imagine telling Grosvenor off:

To doubt my inspiration was regarded as heretical—
Until you cut me out with your placidity emetical. (p. 188)

Gilbert's brilliant stroke of rhyming "heretical" with "emetical" is more than incidental sonic wit, for Bunthorne's aesthetic poetry offers emesis as a metaphor for poetic expression in general.

Aesthetic Poetry

As Max Beerbohm pointed out, *Patience* stands out among all the other parodies of aestheticism because it highlights a structural opposition between the "aesthetic poetry" of Reginald Bunthorne and the "idyllic poetry" of Archibald Grosvenor.[10] This opposition is crystallized in two parallel scenes of reading, when Bunthorne in Act I and Grosvenor in Act II perform their poetry to please the adoring "aesthetic maidens." Thus focusing Act I around its parody of aesthetic obscurantism, the opera prepares for its critique of middlebrow simplicity in Act II.

The pastiche, composite form of Gilbertian topicality works especially well in the figural construction of Bunthorne. As Stedman stresses, "the *Times* commended Gilbert for avoiding any distinct personal references."[11] Nevertheless, journalists and critics over the years have played the guessing game, attempting to read *Patience* as an *opéra à clef* and to match Bunthorne with one or another of his historically proximate models. Associated directly with many specific contemporary figures, but fully identifiable with none of them, his characterization suggests affinities with Whistler, Wilde, Burne-Jones, Pater, Rossetti, Morris, and Swinburne. *Punch* suggested that Gilbert should have written a "Pater song," instead of a patter song, for his protagonist.[12] The libretto's many references to the decorative arts suggest William Morris, the "poet-decorator," as one model.[13] Attachment to "stained-glass attitudes" (p. 168) suggests Burne-Jones, while "blue-and-white" (p. 177) alludes to Wilde's famous remark about "living up to" his china. George Grossmith, who created the role of Bunthorne, sported a wig with back curls and a prominent white forelock, an eyeglass, and dancing shoes—all Whistler's trademarks—and imitated Whistler's famously affected "Ha-ha!" as part of his stage business.[14] Bunthorne's poetic style is a parody of Swinburne and Tennyson, but when he prefaces the reading of his poem by calling it a "wild, weird, fleshly thing" (p. 165), he explicitly associates himself with the Pre-Raphaelites, through his blatant allusion to James Buchanan's well-known 1871 diatribe against them, "The Fleshly School of Poetry." This explicit allusion perhaps explains why Rossetti imagined "that Bunthorne was meant for himself." Max Beerbohm, who reports this tid-bit of gossip, corrects Rossetti's self-centered mistake, insisting that "nobody supposed Bunthorne to be meant for Whistler or even for Oscar Wilde," much less for Rossetti ("Note on 'Patience,'" [pp. 3-4]).

However, when Bunthorne introduces his poem by calling it a "wild, weird fleshly thing," he invites recollection of the controversy provoked ten years earlier, when Buchanan attacked the Pre-Raphaelite poets in general—and Dante Gabriel Rossetti in particular.[15] Buchanan's chief target of attack was the open sensuality of Rossetti's poetry, especially his daring attribution of spiritual value to sexual love. Buchanan especially despised "Nuptial Sleep," published in Rossetti's *Poems* (1870) as sonnet five in the original *House of Life* sequence. (The poem was removed from the sequence in the 1881 volume *Ballads and Sonnets*, suggesting that Buchanan's attack was still being felt in the year *Patience* was produced.) "If animal faculties without brains will make poems, nothing is easier in the world," he rages (p. 347). He objects that Rossetti's poetry attempts "to aver . . . by inference that the body is greater than the soul, and sound superior to sense" (p. 335). Thus Buchanan denigrates poetic sound by associating it with the lowly body, whereas poetic "sense" (by which he means content or meaning) is associated with the higher faculty of the soul.

In Buchanan's protest against making "sound superior to sense" we can detect the middlebrow reader, who would like to know immediately what a poem means.[16] He then extrapolates a reflection on gender: "the poet . . . must be an intellectual hermaphrodite, to whom the very facts of day and night are lost in a whirl of aesthetic terminology" (p. 335). If sound and sense, or body and soul, become confused, the distinctions of gender difference must become confused as well. Musing about all this, Buchanan wonders if the poet might be joking. Could he really be saying what Buchanan thinks he is saying? Why won't the poet just come right out and say what he means, like an earnest, straightforward, manly man? How dare the poet think he can get away with speaking of something so "nasty," by obfuscating its nastiness with beautiful sounds?

But the "nasty" attention to bodily feeling (and poetic sound) is not the only thing that enrages Buchanan. He also rants against certain stylistic features associated with Pre-Raphaelite medievalism. Anything uncommon or smacking of the past comes in for his critique of "affectations" in poetic attitude, diction, and versification. Referring to Rossetti's "The Blessed Damozel," Buchanan complains: "On the whole, one feels disheartened and amazed at the poet who, in the nineteenth century, talks about 'damozels,' 'citherns,' and 'citoles.'" As we can see, Buchanan allies himself with the nineteenth-century present, against Rossetti's attempt to reclaim the diction of an idealized past. His charge of "affectation" is launched against any deviation from ordinary, everyday speech. He loathes the practice of contemporary poets' "affecting the construction of their grandfathers and great-grandfathers, and . . . the poets of the court of James I . . . to rhyme 'was' with 'grass,' 'death' with 'lièth,' 'love' with 'of,' 'once' with 'suns,' and so on *ad nauseam*" (p. 346). Eventually, "English speech seems the speech of raving madmen" (p. 348).

Similarly, he is disgusted by the ballad refrain, "the device of a burthen, of which the fleshly persons are very fond" (p. 348). But he reserves particular scorn for the "habit of accenting the last syllable in words which in ordinary speech are accented on the penultimate" (p. 345). He gives a few examples by way of parody, one from Rossetti's "Love-Lily." Buchanan despises the fact that Rossetti has crafted the rhythm so as to throw the stress on the second syllable of "lily," and he italicizes that syllable, shrieking its concluding "*ee*" sound in order to make his point: "Between the hands, between the brows, / Between the lips of Love-Lil*ee*!"

The libretto of *Patience* features every one of the poetic devices Buchanan found so objectionable. In their opening chorus, the lovesick maidens "play on lutes, mandolins, etc.," as they sing a prototypical ballad refrain, "Ah, miserie!"[17] And in the aesthete's famous patter song—after Bunthorne melodramatically confesses that his aesthetic demeanor is an affected pose—he teaches the audience how to perform it by offering a veritable list of the things Buchanan railed against:

> If you're anxious for to shine in the high aesthetic line as a man of culture rare,
> You must get up all the germs of the transcendental terms, and plant them everywhere.
> You must lie upon the daisies and discourse in novel phrases of your complicated state of mind,
> The meaning doesn't matter if it's only idle chatter of a transcendental kind.
>
> And every one will say,
> As you walk your mystic way,
> "If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for me,
> Why, what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be!"
>
> Be eloquent in praise of the very dull old days which have long since passed away;
> And convince 'em, if you can, that the reign of Good Queen Anne was Culture's palmiest day.
> Of course you will pooh-pooh whatever's fresh and new, and declare it's crude and mean,
> For Art stopped short in the cultivated court of the Empress Josephine. (pp. 168-169)

The aesthete's patter song clearly separates high and low points of view by contrasting obscurantism with plain speaking, an absurd devotion to the past with a staunch commitment to the present. From this point of view, he

projects an ordinary "every one," who notes that the aesthete's terminology and tastes are designed to place him above everyone else. Poetic diction and revivalist tastes in art are marked as utterly affected, but the aesthete's sexuality, too, comes in for pointed commentary:

> Then a sentimental passion of a vegetable fashion must excite your languid spleen,
> An attachment *à la* Plato for a bashful young potato, or a not-too-French French bean! (p. 169)

An extremely slow, "vegetable" love is familiar from Marvell's well-known heterosexual address "To His Coy Mistress." But this parody emphasizes instead the supposedly sexless or homosexual preferences of the aesthete, for "an attachment *à la* Plato" could indicate either, or both. It also implicitly involves the parody of someone like Buchanan, who attacks sexual ambiguity or sexual expression of any kind.

Finally, Bunthorne's last words in the opera allude directly to Buchanan's attack, while his pose alludes directly to Du Maurier's famous anti-aesthetic caricatures in *Punch*.[18] Goading the Philistine hatred of poetic archaism, Bunthorne not only accents the last syllable of "lily," but also rhymes the word with "die." Realizing in the end that nobody will be his bride, he sings:

> In that case unprecedented,
> Single I must live and die—
> I shall have to be contented
> With a tulip or li*ly* !
>
> [*Takes a lily from button-hole and gazes affectionately at it*] (p. 197)

Thus conforming to the popular caricature of lily-loving aesthetic contemplation and renunciation of ordinary bodily needs, Bunthorne plays into the Philistine caricature of the aesthete in the end (though *Patience* as a whole takes a more complex view, as we shall see).

Bunthorne's poetry, too, is ostentatiously "aesthetic." The best way to hear Gilbert writing within the swirl of contemporary poetic controversy is to listen while Bunthorne reads a sample of his aesthetic poetry, "Oh, hollow! Hollow! Hollow!" The scene occurs early in Act I, after the wonderful ensemble that pairs the maidens' doleful adoration ("Mystic poet hear our prayer") with the Dragoon Guards' pattering protest ("Now is not this ridiculous—and is not this preposterous?"). Bunthorne is

> [. . . *seen in all the agonies of composition. The Ladies are watching him intently as he writhes. At last he hits on the word he wants and writes it down. A general sense of relief.*] (p. 164)

"Finished!" he proclaims, in a parodic burst of dramatic self-satisfaction. "At

last! Finished!" (pp. 164-165).[19] Colonel Calverley—who, like Patience herself, confuses aesthetic contemplation with physical illness—asks Bunthorne if he feels better now. He replies: "The poem is finished, and my soul had gone out into it. That was all. It was nothing worth mentioning, it occurs three times a day" (p. 165).

During his "agonies of composition," Bunthorne writhes like the "writhing maid" in the poem he is about to recite. When he hits on the *mot juste*, "a general sigh of relief" is emitted by all. These details link poetic composition to the bodily evacuation of its contents, while the regularity of its occurrence ("three times a day") links expression to the low activities of eating and digestion—the very bodily processes ignored by the aesthete, as he is popularly conceived. Gilbert turns that stereotype against itself, when Lady Jane waxes on about the "transcendentality of delirium—an acute accentuation of a supremest ecstasy—which the earthy might mistake for indigestion. But it is *not* indigestion—it is aesthetic transfiguration!" (p. 160). Continuing these double entendres about bodily content filling and emptying, Bunthorne remarks to Patience: "The bitter-hearted one, who finds all else hollow, is pleased with thee. For you are not hollow. *Are you!*" To which Patience replies: "No thanks, I have dined" (p. 170). Not only does she admit to eating, she is correlatively unpoetic and literal-minded, hearing words in their lowest, most colloquially available senses. With her simple hermeneutics, based on the sound of common sense, Patience imagines that Bunthorne's poem, "Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!" will be a hunting song. She hears in "hollow" the everyday "hulloa" of the hunting cry. These punning misunderstandings reveal her unsophisticated literal-mindedness, while also providing a foil for poetic double-meaning and (by the way) parodying the over-used pun in theatrical burlesque and extravaganza. "Tell me, girl, do you ever yearn?" asks Bunthorne. And Patience, "[misunderstanding him]," answers "I earn my living" (p. 170). This particular sonic confusion—between "yearning" and "earning"—also highlights the class-inflected nature of difference in attitudes toward aestheticism.

No, Bunthorne explains, it is not a hunting song. It is "the wail of the poet's heart on discovering that everything is commonplace" (p. 165). Slyly, the title of the poem suggests a parody of Tennyson, for the deep assonance of the word "hollow,"as well as its ghastly, depressive burden, was known to be a favorite of his.[20] Bunthorne's poem is meant to be pretentious, dense, and nearly impenetrable. Part of the joke inheres in its interpretive difficulty. A dawning awareness that the poem's content is scatalogical is the hermeneutic prize, vouchsafed to those who can penetrate its dense veils of sound to get the dirty joke.

Bunthorne suggests an attitude for the maidens' reception: "To understand it, cling passionately to one another and think of faint lilies. [*They do so as he recites*]."

What time the poet hath hymned
The writhing maid, lithe-limbed,
    Quivering on amaranthine asphodel,
How can he paint her woes,
Knowing, as well he knows,
    That all can be set right with calomel?

When from the poet's plinth
The amorous colocynth
    Yearns for the aloe, faint with rapturous thrills,
How can he hymn their throes
Knowing, as well he knows,
    That they are only uncompounded pills?

Is it, and can it be,
Nature hath this decree,
    Nothing poetic in the world shall dwell?
Or that in all her works
Something poetic lurks,
    Even in colocynth and calomel?
        I cannot tell. (p. 165)

Bunthorne's poetry is the opposite of Patience's literal-mindedness, the opposite of Buchanan's middlebrow desire for meaning. Its meaning cannot easily be discerned, for the sound and specialized language obscure the sense. Interpretation can only be managed by the cognoscenti in the audience who know that colocynth and aloe are botanical purgatives, while calomel is a chloride of mercury, all the "uncompounded" ingredients of emetic and laxative pills.[21] Approaching the poem's content, we might be briefly teased into a philistine attitude very much like Buchanan's. Could he be joking? Is he really saying what we think he's saying? Penetrating further, we see that the poem is based on a riddle about poetic content: what else besides "the soul" is contained within the body, is the result of digestion, and provides a "general sense of relief" when it is expressed and goes out of the body? Could the libretto be any clearer about the poem's excremental theme than to have the maidens call it "fragrant . . . precious . . . nonsense" (p. 166)?

Bunthorne has already offered his own alternative interpretation of the poem: it is the "wail of the poet's heart on discovering that everything is commonplace." From this point of view, the poem is a little parable about gender, sexuality, and poetics. Imagining a maid who fails to recognize the meaning of her own "inner" feelings, the poem portrays her writhing in what looks like erotic yearning, but is, instead, the sign of constipation. The poet knows what she does not know: the real meaning of her bodily woes. Passionate feeling is

parodically reduced to low bodily necessity, while at the same time the poem both narrates and performs a parodic sublimation, transforming unmentionable feelings into beautiful, "poetic" language. Meanwhile the scatalogical joke tacitly equates romantic love, poetry, and impacted excrement. Within this equation, poetic expression and interpretation amount to the difficulty of hypothesizing the content of a beautiful, enigmatic form. Conventionally, beautiful form is represented by a woman's body.[22] But beautiful forms can lie; even this tried and true signifier can turn out to be hollow, or even worse, the opposite of hollow—yet its near equivalent—full of shit.[23]

"Oh, Hollow!" mimics this deflating discovery. Bunthorne's poem, then, takes up the problem of poetic form and content, allegorizing the difficulty of knowing what's "inside" an obscurely sonorous form. For coded (and indeed, nearly hidden) in the poem's almost impenetrably intertwining sonorities, the content is quite low indeed. With a sly nod to Buchanan, this poem provides a blatantly gorgeous form for its lurking, "nasty" content. Thus Bunthorne makes the distinction between "high" and "low" turn on a gendered obfuscation of bodily necessity. Like Patience, the "writhing maid" of the poem does not understand her feelings, and in this we can see a parody of one strand of Victorian gender ideology, the way femininity entails ignorance of bodily, especially sexual, feeling. The difficulty of interpreting the poem mimics the beautiful body's difficulty in delivering itself of its content. And indeed, that difficulty is a large part of the pleasure, evoking "a general sense of relief." Poetic obscurity gets the risqué content past the censor, while it provides a sense of in-crowd satisfaction to those knowing members of the audience who find themselves able to get the joke.

One major point of the poem's difficulty has to do with its sound effects. Just as Buchanan feared, sound has been elevated above sense. Like Tennyson enjoying the sound of "hollow," like Oscar Wilde grooming his rhythmic speaking style, the aesthetic poet loves the sound of his own voice. In this respect, Bunthorne's poem is a parody of Swinburne—himself a great poetic parodist, especially of his own poetry, and precisely on this very point, for his ultra-gorgeous difficulty does sometimes verge on impenetrability. Swinburne knew that his involved sonorities and grammatically shifting repetitions could make it difficult to know what his poems mean. His self-parodies suggest that sometimes a poem "means" primarily its sound.[24] But Bunthorne's poem parodies Swinburne's risqué content as well. When *Poems and Ballads* burst upon the scene in 1866, the volume marked a sensation in the history of nineteenth-century poetic content; no one had published such sexually explicit poetry before, not even Rossetti. By the time *Patience* opened, everyone who knew anything about contemporary poetry would have known about Swinburne's shocking heterosexual, sadomasochistic, and homoerotic content.

Thus the poem's difficulty is not only due to its semantic obscurity and

its sound effects, but also to its overt refusal to be interpreted. The figure of "Nature" is explicitly divided against herself. She has definitely issued a decree, but what does it mean? Two absolutely contradictory, hypothetical positions are put forward. Either Nature has decreed that "Nothing poetic in the world shall dwell," or she has decreed that "in all her works / Something poetic lurks," even in the ingredients for a laxative pill. Either poetry is everywhere or it is nowhere. The poet's only first-person intervention comes at the end, when he admits that he "cannot tell" which of these alternatives is the case. In other words, the meaning of the poem is a reflexive and anguished uncertainty about the nature of poetry itself, a pure lyric refusal of constative or narratable content. Thus Bunthorne's poem is intensely "aesthetic," for it detaches art from any utilitarian, instrumental, or even referential purpose.

Scatalogical content is a staple in satirical and parodic verse, where the pseudo-shocking notion that female bodies, too, engage in excremental activity is a conventional revelation. Jonathan Swift provides the best-known prototype, with his tongue-in-cheek discovery: "Oh! Celia, Celia, Celia shits!" But Henry Carey's famous parody of Ambrose Philips, which gives us the useful term "Namby-Pamby," may well have directly influenced the composition of "Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!"

> Namby-Pamby's doubly mild,
> Once a Man, and twice a Child;
> . . . . . .
> Now he pumps his little Wits;
> Sh—ing Writes and Writing Sh—ts,
> All by little tiny Bits.

Philips's poetry is not the only thing associated with excrement in "Namby-Pamby," for Miss Carteret, the subject of Philips's sycophantic verse epistle to her father, which is, in turn, the object of Carey's parody, is coarsely characterized as "Piddling Ponds of Pissy-Piss; / Cacking-packing like a Lady" (ll. 32-33).[25] In other words, this dual association of excretion with bad poetry and with female bodies, despite its conventionality, was meant to shock with the strength of poetic disgust.

After the turn of the nineteenth century, however, the excremental metaphor gains in theoretical complexity. The Spasmodic poetry of the 1850s, roughly contemporaneous with the first wave of Pre-Raphaelitism, takes Wordsworth's defining notion of "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" to an extreme, attempting to represent violently powerful feelings in the process of being experienced— that is to say, distinctly not "recollected in tranquillity." In fact the attribution of "spasmodic" to name this group of poets refers chiefly to their penchant for violent outpourings.[26] For example, in *Balder* (1853), Sydney Dobell characterizes tyranny by its excremental effects:

> The hot and hideous torrent of his dung
> Roared down explosive, and the earth, befouled
> And blackened by the stercorous pestilence,
> Wasted below him, and where'er he passed
> The people stank.[27]

Balder was not itself meant as parody—at least, most critical opinion holds that it was not. But its high seriousness, extreme situations, and violent imagery immediately provoked a response in *Firmilian* (1854), the brilliant parody by William Edmonstoune Aytoun, which picks up on the excremental figure:

> 'Twas a grand spectacle! The solid earth
> Seemed from its quaking entrails to eruct
> The gathered lava of a thousand years
> Like an imposthume bursting up from hell![28]

Here the excremental metaphor is joined to the metaphor of volcanic eruption, one of the quintessential figures of the Spasmodic movement, as it had been for the poetesses earlier in the nineteenth century.[29] In addition to its well-known parodic references to the Pre-Raphaelites and their circle, then, the poem Gilbert crafts for Bunthorne parodies the Spasmodic line of nineteenth-century poetics as well.

The scene of Bunthorne's reading alludes to yet one more nineteenth-century poetic movement that was famously invested in the effort to represent powerful feeling. After Bunthorne performs "Oh, Hollow!" Saphir tries to explain to the Dragoon Guards why the maidens can never marry them. In doing so, she connects aesthetic poetry to a poetic craze of the late eighteenth century: "You are not Empyrean," she explains. "You are not Della Cruscan. You are not even Early English. Oh, be Early English, ere it is too late!" The preposterous historical sequence suggested by her exhortation fits into the fun being poked at aesthetic revivals in general. Interestingly, Saphir makes "Della Cruscan" a term of aesthetic praise even more intense than "Early English." Extremely popular in the 1780s, like the Pre-Raphaelites, the Della Cruscans purported to speak of and from an earlier time, and like the Pre-Raphaelites, they were accused of affectation. Like the Spasmodics, the Della Cruscans seemed to some to have gone too far toward the direct representation of powerful feeling in the process of expression. As Jacqueline M. Labbé has explained, Della Cruscan poetry "offends the sensibilities of sensibility; it is too physical, too open, too desiring, too expressive . . . allow[ing] for the poeticising of erotic attraction."[30] In a sort of Buchanan-like revulsion, William Gifford reacted quite intemperately to this "epidemic malady . . . spreading from fool to fool," by writing the *Baviad* (1791), a book-length Tory parody of the Della Cruscans, which lashed out against their sentimentality and their

habit of complimenting one another in print. (This latter charge, specifically directed against a circle or school or poetry, was also leveled against the Pre-Raphaelites.) Gifford's parodic attack had a markedly negative effect on the reputation of the Della Cruscans.[31]

For many decades before *Patience* was produced, in other words, attempts to express powerful feelings, and parodies of those attempts, had formed one main current of late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poetics. Bunthorne's poem bundles together these poetic movements, issues, and past parodies in one densely compacted place, suggesting that the high feelings of romance and yearning are actually prompted by low bodily functions, lower even than the ones Buchanan had imagined. Making fun of both extremes of Philistine caricature—of the high Church desire to repress the demands of the body and of the aesthetic desire to revel in bodily feeling—this parody also raises several serious theoretical issues: the relation between form and content; the relative value of sound and sense; and the interpenetration of lyric, narrative, and moral impulses.

In fact, "Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!" offers a sort of parodic *summa* of nineteenth-century poetry and poetics. Commenting on the relation between Romantic and Victorian poetry, it makes fun of romantic interiority and expressiveness in general. According to Bunthorne's poem, the "spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings" has been stopped. Feeling is now entirely mystified, sublimated, misrecognized, and self-consciously poeticized. Romantic overflow has been replaced by a form of exaggerated Victorian reserve, its gushing evacuations succeeded by an equally problematic constipation.

Idyllic Poetry

Designated "an idyllic poet" in the dramatis personae, Archibald Grosvenor and his poetry come in for their share of parody, too. His name immediately suggests the Grosvenor Gallery, which Sir Coutts Lindsay had opened in 1877 in London's fashionable Mayfair district. Grosvenor, like his namesake, but with more personal vanity, claims to be "a Trustee for Beauty." At its founding, the Grosvenor Gallery had rebelliously positioned itself against the Royal Academy and set itself up as the champion of new art. Initially associated with the Pre-Raphaelites and with Whistler (drawing hostile reviews through those associations), the Grosvenor nevertheless soon acquired a high cultural authority of its own. In both respects, by 1881 it was ripe for parodic deflation.[32]

Up until opening night, Grosvenor's first name was to have been "Algernon," not "Archibald." Surely Gilbert made this last-minute change in order more clearly to differentiate Grosvenor from Bunthorne, and thus more clearly to identify the parody of Swinburne with Bunthorne. After all, Grosvenor too claims to be "aesthetic," yet his way of being aesthetic is not

at all like Bunthorne's—or like Algernon Swinburne's. Highlighting his opposition to Bunthorne's "complicated state of mind," Grosvenor describes himself as the "Apostle of Simplicity." In fact, the opera makes it clear that Grosvenor is not only simple but simplistic, like Patience, like the Dragoon Guards. Furthermore, his simplicity is a theatrical pose, every bit as much as Bunthorne's "high aesthetic line." In other words, according to *Patience*, the idyllic poet is not unaffected, merely affected in another style, thinly disguising his inflated vanity with a pretense of humility. Again, it is this structural rivalry between two kinds of Victorian poetry, each associated with its own special forms of excess, that marks the superiority of *Patience* to other parodies of aestheticism.

Associating Grosvenor with "idyllic poetry" suggests a wide range of high and low poetic practices, stretching from the early to the later nineteenth century. A scholarly interest in the Greek idyllists dates from the 1830s. Often said to derive its name from *eidyllion*, a "little picture," the idyll was assumed to offer set pieces of the simple life.[33] Significantly, however, in translations and studies of the Greek idyllists, a debate about the senses of "simplicity" can be traced across the period. (The parody of simplicity represented by Patience and Grosvenor is a latter-day participant in that long debate.) Some contenders rely on the pastoral distinction between urban and rural life, focusing on lowly rural folk and on the simple expressiveness of their common language; and in this sense, the Victorian understanding of idyllic poetry can be seen as a continuation, revision, and simplification of Wordsworthian romanticism. Others concentrate on the literary-historical relations of priority and belatedness, marking out a preference for earlier or later phases of idyllic composition. For some of these, only Theocritus, the original idyllist, expresses true simplicity, whereas for others (John Keble, for example), later idyllists (Virgil, for example) express a deeper simplicity, insofar as their work incorporates the point of view of a modern world and its complexities, against which idyllic simplicity forms an explicit gesture of contrast and "relief."[34] These historicizing views bespeak the Victorians' self-conscious sense of living in a late age, their sense of multiple and competing pasts, and their anxious attempts to revive them all.

By the 1880s, however, idyllic poetry is less associated with a scholarly sense of the classical past than with an attempt to represent simplicity in the present, with a middlebrow moralism, and with domestic narrative. The nineteenth-century English idyll becomes not so much a little picture as a little narrative. In the libretto for *Patience*, Gilbert adopts this later perspective, imagining idyllic poetry not as a learned form, inherited from classical antiquity, but as the form enjoyed by a low or middlebrow reader such as Buchanan or Grosvenor.

Buchanan's reverence for Tennyson was the easily discernible flip side

of his middlebrow reaction against Rossetti and Swinburne. In the elaborate conceit with which he begins "The Fleshly School of Poetry," Buchanan compares Tennyson to Hamlet and the Pre-Raphaelites to "walking gentlemen" like Osric, minor characters on the stage of nineteenth-century poetry, who briefly appear and will soon be forgotten. What we already know of Buchanan's tastes should give us a good idea of where Tennyson might fit on the map of Victorian poetry drawn by Gilbert in *Patience*, especially if we recall that "the Reverend Lawn Tennison" was to have been the main character in the clerical version of the opera. In the figure of Grosvenor, then, we have, in part, Gilbert's response to Buchanan's middlebrow reading of Tennyson.

Tennyson's idylls fall into early and late phases themselves. Many readers at the time of *Patience* would most immediately recall the *Idylls of the King*, in which Tennyson recasts the Arthurian cycle as a set of familiar, domestic narratives.[35] This strategic lowering to the domestic level is what bothered Swinburne. In his brilliantly scathing essay, "Under the Microscope," Swinburne attacks Buchanan for the diatribe against "the fleshly school," but he also intimates that Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* would be just the sort of poetry that Buchanan might like. He accuses Tennyson of having reduced the courtly cycle of Arthurian romance to a domestic novel about adulterous intrigue, protesting the debasement of Vivien to the status of a common prostitute and Arthur himself to "a mere wittol" (that is, a mere cuckold). Of course, Tennyson's *Idylls* were intended to bring the stories of King Arthur's court down to earth, preserving their "Early English" historical value, while focusing the narrative interest on the domestic drama. But Swinburne detested all that, regarding the *Idylls of the King* as domesticated prurience trading on an Early English dignity.[36]

An earlier—and in this context, one might say a purer—form of the Tennysonian idyll dates from his 1842 volume, later entitled *English Idyls, and Other Poems*. Taking his cue from the fact that Tennyson calls them "English idyls," Herbert Tucker examines their "domesticating tactics." In Tucker's view, Tennyson's idyllic mode is not only "domestic," because it focuses on simple, familiar home life, but is also "domesticating," because it advances a particular vision of how to be English. Hoping, with "the arts of the joiner," to lock together and to smooth over internal political differences, Tennyson's idylls insistently show that they speak from, of, and to a common, national life. Their suggestion, as well as their occlusion, of contemporary political difference allows them to be culturally therapeutic, or "topical . . . in a double sense," as Tucker argues.[37] Thus "the craft of the [Tennysonian] idyll . . . rides on a network of suppressions" (p. 293). Tucker takes "The Gardener's Daughter, or The Pictures" as a prototypical realization of these aims, arguing that the poet juxtaposes ekphrastic and narrative elements in a purposively uneasy way, so that the seams will show. This strategy allows readers to see its

"studied banality" positioned against its "descriptive word-painting, which is anything but dull" (p. 279). Tennyson's early practice, in other words, brilliantly moves the Victorian idyll from picture to domestic narrative, displaying his awareness of this generic shift.

Browning published his *Dramatic Idyls* in two series (1879, 1889). Thus we can see that the idyll was still current coin when *Patience* opened in 1881. Tennyson deplored Browning's adoption of the term, claiming (rightly) that Browning was not using it in any truly literary or generic sense. Surely, too, Tennyson imagined that he had made the term his own. "I wish Browning had not taken my word Idyll," he wrote, to his friend William Allingham (qtd. in Peterson, p. 53). However, Coventry Patmore had already appropriated the idyll, too, heightening its traditional association with domestic ideals, for the narrative portions of *The Angel in the House* (1854, 1862) were called "idyls" in the poem's early editions. Patmore has often been suggested as a model for Grosvenor, because of his excessive mildness and "insipid amiability."[38] His high Church commitments should interest us as well. In *The Angel in the House* we can see Patmore domesticating those commitments and re-investing them in the confidence, purity, and chastity of conjugal love between the allegorically named "Felix" and "Honoria" (a happy man because he is married to an honorable woman). Thus his idylls return us not only to domestic associations, but also to the clerical version of *Patience*; and thus we can see that the clerical, antecedent version substantially influenced the parodies of idyllic, as well as aethetic, poetry in *Patience*.[39]

Though he was a master prosodist, Patmore practiced a kind of latter-day Tractarian reserve with respect to his extraordinary metrical gift. Exquisite to the knowing few, his stanzas seemed to many only to ring infinitesimal changes on a jog-trot tetrameter. Edmund Gosse, whose tastes were more aesthetic than idyllic, called Patmore the "laureate of the tea-table, with his humdrum stories of girls that smell of bread and butter."[40] Knowing Patmore's prosodic genius, Gosse complained of his ascetic self-restrictions: "So admirable an artist has rarely been content to do so little with his art; so brilliant and pungent a thinker has perhaps never been content so long to dwell on the very borderland of insipidity. . . . Dowered with a rare ear for metrical effect, . . . he has of set purpose chosen the most sing-song of English meters as the almost exclusive vehicle of his ideas" (p. 771). The basic metrical pattern of which Gosse complains will be Grosvenor's, too—tetrameter rather than the blank verse associated with the Tennysonian idyll.

Now, as we turn to Grosvenor's scene of reading, we should remember that his poetry is meant to be heard as the opposite of aesthetic poetry: not "fleshly," but pure; not complicated, but simple; not lyrical, but narrative; not disinterested but moralistic. Like Bunthorne, Grosvenor is a composite character, bundling together a parody of high Church mildness with a parody

of low Church self-righteousness. Stedman points out that the earliest version had Grosvenor reading from a "black-letter rubricated" tome, and she argues that without this prop the literary parody of his "tractlike verses" might be lost.[41] But his verses are not only "tractlike" because they might suggest Tractarianism, but also "tractlike" because they display a certain low-Church homiletic moralism that had been available to parody for a long time. (Think of the Reverend Brocklehurst's initial interaction with Jane Eyre, when he recommends that she read *The Child's Guide* for her improvement, itself a parody of the Reverend William Carus-Wilson's *The Children's Friend*.) Like these simplistic tracts, poetry written for children made its moral design, and its pedagogical purpose, risibly visible.[42] So, too, do Grosvenor's poems.

"Here is a decalet—a pure and simple thing, a very daisy," Grosvenor announces to the aesthetic maidens, who have begged him to read. If we recall that Bunthorne (in order to prepare them for "Oh, Hollow! Hollow! Hollow!") instructed the maidens to "cling passionately to one another and think of faint lilies," we will recognize the humor when Grosvenor admits that "to appreciate [his decalet], it is not necessary to think of anything at all."[43] This blatant parallelism between the two scenes of reading emphasizes the parodic intent of what is to come. Imagine the following verse being recited in a loud, bland, pretentious, yet heavily "oratorical," style:

> Gentle Jane was good as gold,
> She always did as she was told;
> She never spoke when her mouth was full,
> Or caught bluebottles their legs to pull,
> Or spilt plum jam on her nice new frock,
> Or put white mice in the eight-day clock,
> Or vivisected her last new doll,
> Or fostered a passion for alcohol.
> And when she grew up she was given in marriage
> To a first-class earl who keeps his carriage! (pp. 182-183)

Grosvenor proudly claims that "there is not one word in that decalet which is calculated to bring the blush of shame to the cheek of modesty." Angela agrees: "Not one; it is purity itself" (p. 183). The insistently anti-fleshly implications of this idyllic purity cut in several directions here: against mildness, against bourgeois rectitude, and especially against its strict codes of feminine modesty and ignorance of sexual complication. (Patience herself is also a parody of feminine "innocence.") This sort of empty-headed purity, argues *Patience*, should be just as suspect as the aesthetic poet's beautifully dirty wail. Unlike Bunthorne's sonorous evacuation, Grosvenor's namby-pamby decalets are overloaded with childish, utilitarian content:

Teasing Tom was a very bad boy,
A great big squirt was his favourite toy;
He put live shrimps in his father's boots,
And sewed up the sleeves of his Sunday suits;
He punched his poor little sisters' heads,
And cayenne-peppered their four-post beds,
He plastered their hair with cobbler's wax,
And dropped hot halfpennies down their backs.
The consequence was he was lost tot*all*y,
And married a girl in the *corps de bally*! (p. 183)

The pointed emphasis, in the penultimate line, on the penultimate syllable of "tot*all*y" should convince anyone that Gilbert was enjoying his great skill in versification. The joke cuts simultaneously against Grosvenor's putative lack of technical skill in versification (since he must distort the rhythm in order to achieve his rhyme); against his class-inflected accent (for the word must rhyme with the Cockney pronunciation of ballet); and against the aesthetic affectation of archaic pronunciation. This is a deliciously low parody of high aesthetic poetry. Instead of a "li*ly*" forced to rhyme with "die," we have everyday demotic speech calling the tune, as "tot*all*y" twists to rhyme with "*bally*."

The maidens' exaggeratedly rapturous response lampoons the high seriousness of Grosvenor's simple-mindedness. Lady Jane interprets, while simultaneously lecturing the others: "Marked you how grandly—how relentlessly—the damning catalogue of crime strode on, till Retribution, like a poiséd hawk, came swooping down upon the Wrong-Doer? Oh, it was terrible!" (p. 183). Her mock-heroic enthusiasm, which settles into a portentously iambic rhythm, inflates low poetry with the rhetorically heightened sound of significance. Both Bunthorne's and Grosvenor's poems deal in mock-heroic inflation, but of different sorts. Whereas "Oh, Hollow!" elevates low bodily functions through the beautiful sound, semantic difficulty, and obscure content that mark high poetry, Grosevnor's decalets elevate low narrative content to high moral grandeur. While Bunthorne's poetry is densely compacted and obscure, Grosvenor's supposes that the relation between sound and sense is a facile transparency, both sound and sense contributing to the same sentimental moralism.

Grosvenor's poems are distinctly middlebrow, a parody of simplistic moral design supporting the social status quo. In these poems, feminine docility is rewarded with an upwardly mobile, noble marriage, while masculine high-jinks are punished with a downwardly mobile, theatrical one. Thus the poetic parody here turns against a sort of "poetic justice" that is not poetic at all, but narrative. In other words, Grosvenor's poetry is not "aesthetic," because it is instrumental and moralistic in intent; nor is it even "poetry," because it

is like a novel (or the parody of a novel), with social rewards of upward and downward mobility being doled out on the marriage market.

All this simple-minded simplicity links "idyllic poetry" to the character of Patience and prefigures her pairing with Grosvenor in the end. When Bunthorne decides to change his personality in order to attract Patience, he adopts these same simplistic attitudes, alerting his audience to the opera's ironic interpretation of them: "Henceforth I am mildly cheerful. My conversation will blend amusement with instruction" (p. 195). He vows to modify his aestheticism until it becomes "the most pastoral kind," singing "'High diddle diddle'/ Will rank as an idyll / If I pronounce it chaste!" (p. 194). This parodic comment on Grosvenor's idyllic poetry leads outward toward the opera's critique of the "every-day" attitudes that are seemingly vindicated, but are actually undercut, by its plot in the end.

In this respect, the fact that Gilbert names his Colonel "Calverley" is a small detail that speaks volumes. The Colonel in *Patience* is the middlebrow voice of common sense (as he was in Du Maurier's *Punch* cartoons and F. C. Burnand's burlesque on aestheticism, *The Colonel*).[44] His name secures the association between simplistic common sense and idyllic poetry, an association also supported in the plot through the military men's opposition to "literary men" and through Patience's eventual alliance with Grosvenor. For Colonel Calverley is named after Charles Stuart Calverley, an idyllist and a parodist. Through this association between common sense and idyllic poetry, we can see that the opera opens common sense itself to a critique as scathing as the opera's critique of aestheticism.

Charles Stuart Calverley participated in a second wave of the idyll craze, publishing his translations of Theocritus in 1869.[45] But even during his idyllic days, and certainly after, he was best-known for his great poetic parodies, including his ode "To Beer," which is a pastiche parody of Keats's Odes,[46] and his brilliant parody of Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, entitled *The Cock and the Bull* (1872). In a mere 129 lines, Calverley manages to include parodic references to over one hundred specific passages from across the length of Browning's 21,000-line poem. This drastic act of reduction is, of course, one point of the parody, which clearly implies that Browning's poem is exceptionally long-winded. Calverley's imitation of Browning's mannered representation of speech, especially the inconsequential wandering that secures its dramatic status, is another point of his parodic barb.[47]

Calverley made fun of the nineteenth-century ballad revivals, too, producing such powerfully concentrated insipidity as the following:

> The farmer's daughter hath soft brown hair;
> (Butter and eggs and a pound of cheese)
> And I met with a ballad, I can't say where,
> Which wholly consisted of lines like these. ("Ballad," ll. 21-24)

Surely this is a direct reference to Tennyson's "The Gardener's Daughter," the idyll from his 1842 volume that ekphrastically reveals Rose, as "she stood, / A single stream of all her soft brown hair / Pour'd on one side" (ll. 126-128). Calverley's parenthetical second line, repeated in each stanza throughout the poem, reduces the ballad refrain to items on a shopping list, just as, in their duet late in the opera, the rival poets will become consumers, singing lists of brand names and shopping venues associated with their cultural types.

Proponents of the simple-minded, idyllic mode are destined to prevail in this battle of the poetic genres. In any case, they are rewarded by the multiple marriages that constitute the opera's giddy conclusion. But this ending is itself parodic. The large number of marriages hyperbolically exaggerates the conventional resolution of comedy, while the notion of marriage as reward has itself been put into question through the opera's parody of idyllic poetry.[48] In the end, when Grosvenor reappears with his hair cut, wearing "an ordinary suit of dittoes and a pot hat" (jacket with trousers in matching plaid and a derby), while the aesthetic maidens reappear wearing fashionable contemporary outfits, it is visually clear that the social trend toward aestheticism has been redressed. Their new, anti-aesthetic costumes are meant to throw aestheticism into the past against the colorful relief of the present moment, but also to indicate a distinct come-down in both class and brow-elevation level. Surely, then, the ultimate humor of the opera resides in the fact that parody has already hollowed out the representations of these triumphantly commonplace folk. Surely, in the end, "the wail of the [aesthetic] poet's heart on discovering that everything is commonplace" still hangs in the air: "Oh, Hollow!"

Notes

1 Anon., "Patience; Or, Bunthorne's Bride," *Illustrated London News*, June 18, 1881, p. 598. The reviewer for the *Times* echoed the point, praising the "clever parody of certain tricks and mannerisms of modern poetry" (quoted in Jane W. Stedman, "The Genesis of *Patience*," in *W. S. Gilbert: A Century of Scholarship and Commentary*, ed. John Bush Jones [New York: New York Univ. Press, 1970], p. 309).

2 Audrey Williamson's short discussion of the "rivalry in poetic styles" is a signal exception (*Gilbert & Sullivan Opera: A New Assessment* [New York: Macmillan, 1953], p. 84).

3 W. S. Gilbert, "Author's Note" to *Patience; or Bunthorne's Bride* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1902), p. vi. The character of Dr. Daly, Vicar of Ploverleigh in *The Sorcerer*, had previously been received with some disapproval.

4 The manuscript, reposing in the Gilbert papers, British Library, is transcribed in Stedman, "Genesis," pp. 290-310. Stedman's essay (pp. 285-318) is the most comprehensive source for the history of the opera's composition.

5 W. S. Gilbert, *The Complete Plays of Gilbert and Sullivan*, illus. W. S. Gilbert (New York: W. W. Norton, 1976), p. 188. All quotations from *Patience* are from this edition.

6 For example, Ephesians 6.11-17: "Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able

to stand against the wiles of the devil."

7 On "reserve" and "economy," see G. B. Tennyson, *Victorian Devotional Poetry: The Tractarian Mode* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981).

8 Dwight Culler, introduction to John Henry Cardinal Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956); Vincent A. Lankewish, "Love Among the Ruins: The Catacombs, the Closet, and the Victorian 'Early Christian' Novel," *VLC* 28 (Fall 2000): 239-273.

9 Tricia Lootens, "Spiritual Seductions: Mid-Victorian Worries and the *Connelly v. Connelly* Case." Paper delivered at the Northeast Victorian Studies Association Conference at the University of Hartford, April 1997.

10 Max Beerbohm, "A Note on 'Patience' " (unpaginated pamphlet written on the occasion of a revival of *Patience* [London, 1918], Collection of F. W. Wilson), [p. 2].

11 Jane W. Stedman, *W. S. Gilbert: A Classic Victorian and His Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996), p. 184.

12 *Punch*, April 25, 1881, quoted in Stedman, *W. S. Gilbert*, p. 182.

13 *Illustrated London News*, June 18, 1881, p. 598. References to the eclectic nature of Victorian decorating tastes (so eclectic as to seem absurd) abound in *Patience*, and far exceed any specific reference to Morris. Thus, Lady Jane: "Still, there is a cobwebby grey velvet, with a tender bloom like cold gravy, which, made Florentine fourteenth-century, trimmed with Venetian leather and Spanish altar lace, and surmounted with something Japanese—it matters not what—would at least be Early English!" (p. 166). In this respect, the radically eclectic aesthetic interior serves as a humorous model for the pastiche topicality of the opera itself.

14 Ronald Anderson and Anne Koval, *James McNeill Whistler: Beyond the Myth* (London: John Murray, 1994), p. 246. Many thanks to Lesley Higgins for her expertise and generosity. On the "Whistler make-up," see also Sir Henry Lytton, *The Secrets of a Savoyard*, quoted in Williamson, p. 83.

15 "Thomas Maitland" [James Buchanan], "The Fleshly School of Poetry: Mr. D. G. Rossetti," *Contemporary Review* 18 (August–November 1871): 334-350.

16 Wilde's rhythmic speech was taken in this same way: "he accents almost at regular intervals without regard to the sense" (*New York Tribune*, January 3, 1883).

17 The ballad refrain was a conventional butt in Victorian poetic parody. George du Maurier's "A Legend of Camelot" (*Punch*, March 3, 1866) sports the reductive ballad refrain "O miserie!" Its accompanying illustrations lampoon the Pre-Raphaelite art of Morris and Rossetti, the heroine's hair billowing around her in huge waves. See also H. Duff Traill, "After Dilettante Concetti" (1882), a poem in two parts: the first, parodying Sonnet XCVII from Rossetti's *House of Life*, disparages the "ballad-burden trick, now known too well" and the "foolish, empty-jingling 'burden'"; the second, a parody of Rossetti's "Sister Helen," savagely imitates the burden, transforming its refrain "(Oh Mother, Mary Mother, / Three days to-day, between Hell and Heaven!)" into "(O Mother Carey, mother! / What fowls are a-wing in the stormy heaven!)." Duff Traill varies the first phrase of the second line in a delicately fatuous imitation of Rossetti's variations, though he seems not to notice the ostentatiously literary nature of this revival device, which is not meant to be sung, but to be seen and read, as the italicized artifact of print culture that it is. "After Dilettante Concetti" may be found in Jerome H. Buckley, *The Pre-Raphaelites* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 473-475.

18 Especially the well-known "An Aesthetic Midday Meal" (*Punch* 79 [July 17, 1880]), which pictures Postlethwaite at a restaurant table, gazing at a lily in a glass of water, while telling the waiter that he presently has all that he requires. His languid body language expresses his effeminancy, while his refusal of food suggests that bodily necessities are too lowly for someone engaged in aesthetic contemplation.

19 Charles La Porte has suggested (in conversation, March/April 2005) that Bunthorne's histrionic "it is finished" alludes to the Spasmodic poets' intensive reflexivity about their compositional process, signally represented in Alexander Smith's *A Life-Drama* (1852-53).

20 Most critics hear a self-reference in the voice of the deep-chested poet of "The Epic" (who "Read [from his poem], mouthing out his hollow oes and aes," [l. 50]), since Tennyson was famous for reading in a "hollow-sounding" style. A passage in *The Passing of Arthur* from *Idylls of the King* might suggest the provenance of Bunthorne's title:

> In Lancelot's war, the ghost of Gawain blown
> Along a wandering wind, and past his ear
> Went shrilling, "Hollow, hollow all delight!"

(*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1987], 3: 549; ll. 33-35). All future quotations from Tennyson are from this edition. Again thanks to Charles LaPorte.

21 See Roy Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: A Medical History of Humanity* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 266-269, 674-675. "Calomel (mercurous chloride) appeared in every physician's bag throughout the nineteenth century, and was an active ingredient in the 'blue pills' prominent in nineteenth-century English therapeutics" (p. 266). One satirical American folk song of the mid-nineteenth century, "Calomel," protests the ubiquity of this prescription. See Louise Pound, ed., *American Ballads and Songs* (New York: C. Scribner's, 1972), p. 126, #54. The Hutchinson Family Singers also offered an "Anti-Calomel" song. See J. J. Hutchinson, "'Go Call the Doctor, & Be Quick!' or Anti-Calomel," in *Songs of the Hutchinson Family* (New York, 1844). Many thanks to Ann Jurecic for her expertise.

22 For the definitive study of this trope in British aestheticism, see Kathy Alexis Psomiades, *Beauty's Body: Femininity and Representation in British Aestheticism* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1997).

23 Harry G. Frankfurt has discussed the connections between shit and bullshit, as well as their opposition to aesthetic form: "Is [the bullshitter's] product necessarily messy or unrefined? The word *shit* does, to be sure, suggest this. Excrement is not designed or crafted at all; it is merely emitted, or dumped. It may have a more or less coherent shape, or it may not, but it is in any case certainly not wrought" (*On Bullshit* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2005], pp. 21-22).

24 Of Swinburne's self-parodies that focus especially on sound obscuring sense, see especially "Poeta Loquitur" ("a maze of monotonous murmur / Where reason roves ruined by rhyme") and "Nephilidia" (*The Poems of Algernon Charles Swinburne* [1904-05; New York: AMS Press, 1972). For a discussion of Bunthorne's poem echoing Swinburne's rhythms, see John Bush Jones, "In Search of Archibald Grosvenor: A New Look at Gilbert's *Patience*," in *W. S. Gilbert: A Century of Scholarship and Commentary*, pp. 245-247.

25 Jonathan Swift, "The Lady's Dressing-Room" (1732), l. 118, in *The Poems of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Harold Williams, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). Ambrose Philips, "To the Honourable Miss Carteret" (1725) in Samuel Johnson, ed., *Works of the English*

Poets: From Chaucer to Cowper, vol. 13 (London, 1810), p. 121. Henry Carey, N*amby-Pamby: or, a panegyrick on the new versification, address'd to* A– P–, *Esq.* (1725), in Henry Morley, ed., *Burlesque Plays and Poems* (London, 1885), pp. 136-138; ll. 37-43. Note: "cacking-packing" means excreting.

26 Carlyle first used the term of Byron. See Linda K. Hughes, "Alexander Smith and the Bisexual Poetics of *A Life-Drama*," *VP* 42, no. 4 (2004): 507 n22. I am indebted to Jason Rudy's work for my understanding of the Spasmodics, and to the special issue of *VP,* ed. Jason Rudy and Charles LaPorte (42, no. 4).

27 Sydney Dobell, *Balder. Part the First*, scene IX (London, 1854), pp. 47-48.

28 "T. Percy Jones" [William Edmonstoune Aytoun], *Firmilian, or The Student of Badajoz: A Spasmodic Tragedy* (Edinburgh, 1854), Scene IX, ll. 1-4.

29 See Kirstie Blair, "Spasmodic Affections: Poetry, Pathology, and the Spasmodic Hero," *VP* 42, no. 4 (2004): 482-483.

30 Jacqueline Labbé, "The Anthologised Romance of Della Crusca and Anna Matilda," *Romanticism on the Net* 18 (May 2000); http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/2000/v/n18/005916ar.html. See also Jacqueline Labbé, *Romantic Paradox: Love Violence and the Romantic Romance, 1760-1830* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000); Jerome McGann, *The Poetics of Sensibility: A Revolution in Literary Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); and Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), esp. chap. 3, "'That fluttering, tinselled crew': Women Poets and Della Cruscanism."

31 Vol. 4 of the multi-volume set on *British Satire 1785-1840* is devoted to Gifford, ed. John Strachan (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2003). The original Della Cruscans were a group of witty and learned conversationalists in sixteenth-century Florence. Known as the "crusconi" ("bran flakes"), they fought against dry academic discourse with their modern, ironic humor. In 1582, however, they acknowledged their serious purpose by naming their assembly the "Accademia della Crusca," which became the first national language academy in Europe, and the first to produce a modern (that is to say, vernacular) vocabulary (1612). The reference to this venerable institution of parodic modernity hovers in the background of the more proximate reference to the late eighteenth-century Della Cruscans.

32 Whistler's *Nocturne in Black and Gold* was exhibited in 1877, provoking Ruskin's response and Whistler's libel suit. For commentary on the hostile reviews, see Barrie Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry and Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 202-203. On changing attitudes toward the Grosvenor, see Susan Casteras and Colleen Denney, eds., *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale Center for British Art, 1996) and Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions: Change and Continuity in the Victorian Art World* (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1995). The Grosvenor Gallery closed in 1890.

33 John Addington Symonds offers this succinct definition of the idyll in his *Studies of the Greek Poets*: "the name of the Idyll sufficiently explains its nature. It is a little picture. . . . [T]he idyllist does not treat [his subjects] lyrically, following rather the rules of epic and dramatic composition" ("The Idyllists," *Studies of the Greek Poets*, 3rd ed.[London, 1893], 2:244-245). With thanks to Jason Rudy. See also Linda H. Peterson, "Domestic and Idyllic," in Richard Cronin, Alison Chapman, and Antony H. Harrison, eds., *A Companion to Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 42-58.

34 An anonymous review in the *Athenaeum* 439 (March 26, 1836): 221-222 opined that even Bion and Moschus were "late" literary revivals of an earlier, purer idyll, written

solely by Theocritus. On his idea of "relief," see John Keble, Lecture XXXI, *Lectures on Poetry, 1832-1841*, trans. Edward Kershaw Francis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), 2:279, 284-285, 288-289, 291. Once again, thanks to Jason Rudy. See also Peterson on the belatedness of the Greek idyll and its appeal to Tennyson for that reason (pp. 50-51).

35 The evolution of *Idylls of the King* spans a large portion of the poet's life. Brief publication history: first poem published in the 1842 volume ("Morte d'Arthur," later *The Passing of Arthur*); first volume publication in 1859; last volume publication in 1885 (see Ricks, 3:255-262). As Robert Pattison argued, "Tennyson's poetic career is a history of the idyll in miniature" (quoted in Peterson, p. 50).

36 Algernon Charles Swinburne, "Under the Microscope," most easily accessible (though excerpted) in *The Broadview Anthology of Victorian Poetry and Poetic Theory* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), pp. 1346-48. On Swinburne's general critique of the idyll, see Peterson, p. 57.

37 Herbert F. Tucker, "In England: Arts of the Joiner in the Domestic Idylls," *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), pp. 270, 299, 301.

38 Richard Garnett, quoted in Jones, "In Search of Archibald Grosvenor," pp. 247-251. Jones also suggests that Swinburne's parody of Patmore, "The Person in the House," published in his anonymous *Heptalogia* the year before *Patience* was produced, may have influenced Gilbert here.

39 Jones, pp. 243-256. This question has been something of a crux in commentary on *Patience*—whether the line "Your style is much too sanctified—your cut is too canonical" is merely a residue of the clerical version, or whether it makes substantial sense in the poetic version. As I do, Jones argues for the latter position (p. 251).

40 *Athenaeum*, June 12, 1886, p. 771.

41 Stedman, "Genesis of *Patience*," p. 304, quoting from the MS: "absorbed in his folio [words crossed out] / black-letter, rubricated."

42 Compare the sardonic verses cataloguing the extreme mischief-making of notoriously "bad" children by Wilhelm Busch (1832-1908), *Max and Moritz* (New York, Dover, 1962). The title poem was originally translated as "Max and Maurice" by C. T. Brooks and published by Roberts Brothers, 1871; "The Boy and the Popgun" and "The Boy and the Pipe" were originally translated by Abby Langdon Alger, and published in *The Mischief Book* by R. Worthington, 1880. Thanks to Andrea Immel, Curator of the Cotsen Collection, Princeton University Library.

43 Compare W. H. Mallock, "How to Make a Modern Pre-Raphaelite Poem" (1872), in which he cautions: "We would remark to beginners that this sort of composition must be attempted only in a perfectly vacant atmosphere; so that no grains of common-sense may injure the work whilst in progress" (Buckley, p. 472).

44 Some of Du Maurier's anti-aesthetic cartoons featured "Our Gallant Colonel" as the representative of common sense. (Those cartoons appeared in *Punch* from 1873-1882, roughly the same period as the collaboration between Gilbert and Sullivan up until *Patience*.) *The Colonel* by F. C. Burnand opened several months before *Patience* took the boards. Its eponymous avatar of common sense is pitted against the aesthetes Lambert Streyke and Basil Giorgione, who manipulate a wife, until in the end she returns to her everyday dress and her husband.

45 Also relevant to his career as an idyllist were his *Verses and Translations* (1862) and *Translations into English and Latin* (1866).

46 The conclusion of "To Beer" runs thus:

> But hark! A sound is stealing on my ear—
> A soft and silvery sound—I know it well.
> Its tinkling tells me that a time is near
> Precious to me—it is the Dinner Bell.
> O blessed Bell! Thou bringest beef and beer,
> Thou bringest good things more than tongue may tell:
> Seared is, of course, my heart—but unsubdued
> Is, and shall be, my appetite for food.
>
> I go. Untaught and feeble is my pen:
> But on one statement I may safely venture:
> That few of our most highly gifted men
> Have more appreciation of their trencher.
> I go. One pound of British beef, and then
> What Mr. Swiveller called a "modest quencher";
> That home-returning, I may "soothly say,"
> "Fate cannot touch me: I have dined to-day."

(*The Complete Works of C. S. Calverley* [London: G. Bell, 1926], pp. 27-28)

47 For example:

> You see this pebble-stone? It's a thing I bought
> Of a bit of a chit of a boy i' the mid o' the day—
> I like to dock the smaller parts-o'-speech,
> As we curtail the already cur-tail'd cur
> (You catch the paronomasia, play 'po' words?)
> Did, rather, i' the pre-Landseerian days.
> Well, to my muttons. I purchased the concern,
> And clapt it i' my poke, having given for same,
> By way o' chop, swop, barter or exchange—
> "Chop" was my snickering dandiprat's own term—
> One shilling and fourpence, current coin o' the realm.
> O – n – e one and f – o – u – r four
> Pence, one and fourpence – you are with me, sir?—
> What hour it skills not: ten or eleven o' the clock,
> One day (and what a roaring day it was
> Go shop or sight-see—bar a spit o' rain!)
> In February, eighteen sixty nine,
> Alexandrina Victoria, Fidei
> Hm—hm—how runs the jargon? being on the throne.
> (Calverley, pp. 110-111)

48 Thus the fact that "nobody [will] be Bunthorne's Bride" is a complicated exclusion. See my "Bunthorne in the History of Homosexuality," in *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody* (under contract, Columbia Univ. Press).

Appendix

The Rival Curates

by W. S. Gilbert (writing as "Bab")
Published in *Fun*, n.s. VI (October 19, 1867): 57.

List while the poet trolls
    Of MR. CLAYTON HOOPER,
Who had a cure of souls
    At Spiffton-extra-Sooper.

He lived on curds and whey,
    And daily sang their praises,
And then he'd go and play
    With buttercups and daisies.

Wild croquêt HOOPER banned,
    And all the sports of Mammon,
He warred with cribbage, and
    He exorcised backgammon.

His helmet was a glance
    That spoke of holy gladness;
A saintly smile his lance,
    His shield a tear of sadness.

His Vicar smiled to see
    This armour on him buckled;
With pardonable glee
    He blessed himself and chuckled:

"In mildness to abound
    My curate's sole design is,
In all the country round
    There's none so mild as mine is!"

And HOOPER, disinclined
    His trumpet to be blowing,
Yet didn't think you'd find
    A milder curate going.

A friend arrived one day
    At Spiffton-extra-Sooper,
And in this shameful way
    He spoke to MR. HOOPER:

"You think your famous name
For mildness can't be shaken,
That none can blot your fame—
But, HOOPER, you're mistaken!

"Your mind is not as blank
As that of HOPLEY PORTER,
Who holds a curate's rank
At Assesmilk-cum-Worter.

"*He* plays the airy flute,
And looks depressed and blighted,
Doves round about him 'toot,'
And lambkins dance delighted.

"*He* labours more than you
At worsted work, and frames it;
In old maids' albums, too,
Sticks seaweed—yes, and names it!"

The tempter said his say,
Which pierced him like a needle—
He summoned straight away
His sexton and his beadle.

These men were men who could
Hold liberal opinions:
On Sunday they were good—
On week-days they were minions.

"To HOPLEY PORTER go,
Your fare I will afford you—
Deal him a deadly blow,
And blessings shall reward you.

"But stay—I do not like
Undue assassination,
And so, before you strike,
Make this communication:

"I'll give him this one chance—
If he'll more gaily bear him,
Play croquêt, smoke, and dance,
I willingly will spare him."

They went, those minions true,
To Assesmilk-cum-Worter,

And told their errand to
    The REVEREND HOPLEY PORTER.

"What?" said that reverend gent,
    "Dance through my hours of leisure?
Smoke?—bathe myself with scent?—
    Play croquêt? Oh, with pleasure!

"Wear all my hair in curl?
    Stand at my door, and wink—so—
At every passing girl?
    My brothers, I should think so!

"For years I've longed for some
    Excuse for this revulsion:
Now that excuse has come—
    I do it on compulsion !!!"

He smoked and winked away—
    This REVEREND HOPLEY PORTER—
The deuce there was to pay
    At Assesmilk-cum-Worter.

And HOOPER holds his ground,
    In mildness daily growing—
They think him, all around,
    The mildest curate going.