"Mighty maiden with a mission":

Navigating the Proto-Feminism of Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*

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A thesis submitted to the University of Ottawa in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts degree in Musicology with a Specialization in Women's and Gender Studies

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Abstract

Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas continue to enjoy popularity worldwide, in both amateur and professional settings. Their 1884 collaboration *Princess Ida*¸ however, remains a contested work regarding its representation of women and feminism. In this thesis, I argue that Gilbert and Sullivan were attempting to satirize men's reactions to feminism, rather than feminism itself. This thesis situates *Princess Ida* within its Victorian social context to determine to what extent a proto-feminist interpretation of the operetta is valid. *Princess Ida* is based on, and a parody of, Tennyson's *The Princess* (1847). Tracing the chronology of Ida's story from its beginnings in Tennyson's poem through to Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta clarifies what Gilbert chose to satirize in his libretto. Victorian masculinity emerges as a central theme in *Princess Ida*, and the complexities of Gilbert and Sullivan's representations of men in their operetta informs my discussion of proto-feminism. This thesis historically contextualizes *Princess Ida* and examines the operetta through the lens of feminist critiques of Western art music.

Acknowledgements

To my advisor Dr Christopher Moore: a huge thanks for your support over the past two years. I appreciate how much care you give to your students' wellbeing as well as their academic achievements. Thank you for your guidance and patience as I completed this thesis a little later than originally anticipated!

To my thesis committee: thank you for taking the time to evaluate my work and for providing valuable feedback which has helped to shape me into a more exacting scholar.

To Susan Blythe-Schofield: thank you for helping me to remember how much I love to sing and for guiding me through ANOTHER round of master's auditions.

To my remarkable friends in Ottawa, Nova Scotia, and elsewhere: thank you for lending an ear and a strong beverage when needed. Your friendship is cherished. To Marty, thanks for helping me to format this beastie even though I'm technologically incompetent.

To my family, especially Mom, Dad, and Jigs: thank you for putting up with me while I struggled through this degree. Thank you for your (over)enthusiasm and tough love.

Introduction

Librettist William Schwenck Gilbert (1836-1911) and composer Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) famously collaborated on fourteen English light comic operas between 1871 and 1896. These operas greatly influenced the development of both operetta and musical theatre throughout the twentieth-century. Their works ridiculed many aspects of Victorian British society, including politics, gender ideologies, and social class. Most importantly for the purposes of this thesis, Gilbert and Sullivan's works all examine and satirize Victorian gender ideals and marriage dynamics to varying degrees. This focus on gender and marriage is most apparent in their 1884 collaboration *Princess Ida*, based on Lord Alfred Tennyson's 1847 poem *The Princess*. Gilbert's satire is frequently complex and multi-layered while Sullivan's music adds a certain amount of seriousness to many of the otherwise outlandish and stereotypical characters. Gilbert and Sullivan operettas continue to enjoy popularity worldwide in both amateur and professional settings. The enduring admiration of these works indicates their persisting relevance for academic discussion, despite the fact that they may seem backwards or quaint to current understandings of gender, race, class, and other complex issues. The Victorian era was a time of great political and social change in Britain, during which the British empire expanded, and the industrial revolution transformed consumerism. Women's rights had become a significant issue of debate in nineteenth-century Britain, centring around women's right to vote. The fight for women's suffrage was active during the time of Gilbert and Sullivan's collaboration, hence the frequent parodies of gender ideals which appear in their operettas. The increased awareness of women's rights also resulted in a shift in how Victorians understood masculinity, and this destabilization in the construct of gender roles is seen clearly in Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas.

Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* (1884) has experienced less success than most of Gilbert and Sullivan's other operettas despite its particularly beautiful and well-received musical score.[1] The comparative lack of success has extended from its premiere into modern times, as the operetta is performed considerably less often than other Gilbert and Sullivan works by both amateur and professional companies. This lack of popularity has often been attributed to its supposed blatant sexism and unappealing subject matter.[2] *Princess Ida* and its literary predecessors experienced polarized critiques which tend to label it rather adamantly as either misogynist or feminist. Despite this critical dichotomy, Ida's story portrays women as vivid and powerful while also scorning hyper-masculinity which points to its complexity regarding gender ideals. Because of these complexities regarding the interpretation of *Princess Ida*, an understanding of Victorian society is necessary to determine if the operetta is in fact truly misogynist or simply a product of its time.

This thesis begins with a literature review which thematically organizes some of the most important research concerning *Princess Ida* and Victorian gender ideologies. The literature review situates Gilbert and Sullivan within their Victorian context through an examination of the duo's personal histories, their place in Victorian society, their overarching views and treatment of women both as characters in their works and as employees, and discusses research which has focused on *Princess Ida* specifically. This thesis examines *Princess Ida* using a feminist critique of Western art music as modelled by Susan McClary, Catherine Clément, and Ralph P. Locke and argues that a proto-feminist interpretation of the operetta is possible despite the turbulent reputation of misogyny that it has endured throughout its history.[3] This is accomplished in Chapter 1 through an exploration of the work's

[1] Tony Joseph, *The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company: 1875-1982*, (Bristol: Bunthorne Books, 1994), 19.
[2] Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 222.
[3] Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Catherine Clément, "Through Voices, History," in *Siren Songs: Representations of Gender and Sexuality*

chronological development, beginning with Lord Alfred Tennyson's epic poem *The Princess* (1847), moving to Gilbert's burlesque *The Princess* (1870), and lastly the operetta itself. Tracing this chronology develops an important literary framework for the operetta which allows for greater understanding of Gilbert and Sullivan's ultimate intentions with the work. Chapter 1 contextualizes the operetta within Victorian middle-class society and explores the many valid interpretations of all three version of Ida's story. Chapter 2 examines representations of masculinity in Ida's story, and demonstrates the complexities of male Victorian feminist allyship. Ida's supposed yielding to gender norms at the end of her story is due to her recognition of her male allies and a self-imposed moderation of her extreme ideals rather than a sudden desire to conform to Victorian ideals of femininity and marriage. Chapter 2 situates Ida's actions within Victorian family dynamics and considers the mutual respect which exists between Ida and her male family members. This chapter examines the complex portrayals of male allyship and men's responses to feminism in the nineteenth-century. The aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that *Princess Ida* may be convincingly interpreted as proto-feminist on account of its compelling representations of complicated gender roles and its relatively progressive social position regarding women's rights during its premiere in the late nineteenth-century.

in Opera, edited by Mary Ann Smart, 17-28 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Ralph P. Locke, "What Are These Women Doing in Opera?" in *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, edited by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, 59-98, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

Chapter 1: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review situates current research on Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* thematically and chronologically and examines studies which are relevant to understanding both the operetta and Gilbert and Sullivan's intentions behind its creation. Firstly, this review contains an overview of research focusing on the Victorian social context of Gilbert and Sullivan's creative activities, their literary, musical, and professional treatment of women, and the operetta *Princess Ida*. Secondly, this review examines research which query the complexities of Tennyson's *The Princess*, which, as the inspiration for the operetta, is crucial for understanding *Princess Ida*. Lastly, this review is grounded in research which assesses Victorian women's experiences, because *Princess Ida* centres on Victorian gender ideals.

Gilbert and Sullivan

Biographies

Gilbert and Sullivan works remain among the most widely-performed operettas in the world.[4] Their collaborations helped bridge the gap between opera and musical theatre, and their influence on Western popular culture is undeniable.[5] Amateur opera societies still depend on Gilbert and Sullivan operettas as they are musically accessible, and their light-hearted parodies are relevant and enjoyable for today's audiences.[6] Many Gilbert and Sullivan biographies and collections exist and continue to be published. This section of the literature review examines biographies written by Jane W. Stedman and Benedict Taylor as these authors are commonly cited and their publications are informed and relevant. Stedman focuses on W. S. Gilbert while

[4] See Ian Bradley, "Something Lingering: The Enduring Influence of Gilbert and Sullivan through the Twentieth Century," in *Oh Joy! Oh Rapture!: The Enduring Phenomenon of Gilbert and Sullivan,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-26.
[5] John Kenrick, "Gilbert and Sullivan (1880-1900) – 'Object all Sublime'" in *Musical Theatre: A History*, (New York: Continuum, 2008), 75-94.
[6] Shani D'Cruze, "Dainty Little Fairies: women, gender, and the Savoy Operas." Women's History Review 9, no. 2 (2000): 346.

Taylor examines Arthur Sullivan. Gilbert and Sullivan were successful both individually and collaboratively, so it is useful to examine them as separate creators, allowing for a greater understanding of their distinct influences and artistic objectives before considering their partnership.

Jane W. Stedman's biography explores Gilbert's life, from his birth in 1836 to his death in 1911.[7] Stedman situates Gilbert's life and works chronologically within the context of Victorian English society. Source material in Stedman's book includes Victorian periodicals, contemporaneous critiques of Gilbert's work, interviews with direct descendants of Richard D'Oyly Carte, and Gilbert's own illustrations and writings. Richard D'Oyly Carte was Gilbert and Sullivan's impresario, responsible for the first collaboration between the duo, and the founder of the Savoy Theatre, a venue which primarily performed Gilbert and Sullivan works. Stedman's book is included in this literature review to provide background information about Gilbert's life, provide insight as to his political leanings, and highlight his development from an independent librettist to a collaborator with Sullivan. Understanding Gilbert's background is beneficial for understanding his intentions in his works, which is important when attempting to decode his cutting satire.

Benedict Taylor's book examines Sullivan's compositions as popular and representative examples of Victorian British music. Sullivan is one of the Victorian era's most popular composers, including his music which was created outside of his collaboration with Gilbert.[8] Taylor believes that current trends in Gilbert and Sullivan scholarship tend to neglect Sullivan's serious music in favour of studying his works in comic opera.[9] Sullivan's contribution to the Gilbert and Sullivan partnership is frequently under-appreciated, with

[7] Jane Stedman, *W. S. Gilbert: A Classic Victorian and his Theatre*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)
[8] Benedict Taylor, *Arthur Sullivan: A Musical Reappraisal*, (Abdingdon: Routledge, 2018), 1.
[9] Taylor, 95.

Gilbert emerging as the central figure of the Savoy operas,[10] even though Sullivan's thoughtful style of music provides a balance to Gilbert's potentially harsh satire.[11] Taylor suggests that Sullivan's career as a composer of grand styles of music contributes to the success of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, and examining his works independently of Gilbert's librettos provides insight to his objectives when setting the texts of the Savoy operas. Studying Gilbert and Sullivan's creations as collaborators is crucial for determining the intentions and effects of their operettas, but exploring their lives separately provides context for their individual perceptions of Victorian society and how they each approached the creations of their collaborative works.

Gilbert's Works in a Victorian Context

Gilbert and Sullivan works remain popular in the twenty-first century but are best understood with consideration of their Victorian English context. What seems quaint or offensive to today's audiences may very well have been progressive at the time of their creation. John Kertzer and Frederick Ahl emphasize this point in two articles which historically contextualize Gilbert and Sullivan's works rather than situating these operettas within modern society, current performance practice, and present ideas of social equalities. Kertzer and Ahl focus on Gilbert's texts within the context of justice and punishment, and censorship and classic

[10] The Savoy operas refer to the genre of light English comic opera developed in the nineteenth century, exemplified by the collaborative works of Gilbert and Sullivan. They are named after the Savoy Theatre, where many of Gilbert and Sullivan's works enjoyed great and long-lasting success under impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte. The Savoy operas signify Gilbert and Sullivan's works almost exclusively. Other light English operettas may also be considered under this label, but since they have largely faded from the performance canon, the Savoy operas are currently understood to mostly refer to Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas alone. This term will be used in this paper to indicate Gilbert and Sullivan's collaborations, and not other English comic operas.

[11] Several scholars view Sullivan's sympathetic and serious style of music as a counterpoint to Gilbert's harsh satire, particularly regarding *Princess Ida*. See John Kertzer, "Life Plus Ninety-Nine Years: W. S. Gilbert and the Fantasy of Justice." In *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 36, no. 2 (2003), 6. and Gayden Wren, *A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert and Sullivan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 158. Contrastingly, other scholars focus on Gilbert's librettos and do not consider the balancing effect that Sullivan's music has. Carolyn Williams focuses on Gilbert's text and Tennyson's poem and argues that Sullivan's music creates a "clash of tones" rather than a rebalancing of satirical impact. See Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 240.

literature, respectively.[12] John Kertzer explores the fallibility of authority and how the law became such a bounteous source of parody for Gilbert. He argues that Gilbert makes effective use of punishments which greatly outweigh their crimes in his texts, such as Princess Ida's condemnation of Hilarion and his friends to death for appearing on her revered island for women. This reflects and satirizes the reality of Victorian justice systems.[13] Kertzer states that Sullivan's music and Gilbert's text presents "conflicting visions of human nature."[14] He discusses how the words and music of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas seemingly contradict each other, with Sullivan's music offering compassion while Gilbert's text points out the folly of humankind. Kertzer argues that Gilbert's writings highlight "the dilemma that there is no justice without law, but laws may be unjust."[15] He demonstrates how Gilbert uses comedy to subvert convention in his works through creating problems for his characters which are both caused and solved by the law.

Ahl advocates for an examination of Gilbert's works within the context of Classic writers such as Sophocles because Gilbert uses similar techniques of paradox and double-meaning in his works. Especially relevant is Ahl's discussion of Gilbert's references to Classics literature in *The Princess* burlesque and Gilbert's libretto for *Princess Ida.* An example of this reference to the classics occurs during the first appearance of the women of Castle Adamant when Melissa sings, "Pray, what authors should she read / Who in Classics would succeed?"[16] Lady Psyche replies to her,

> If you'd climb the Helicon,
> You should read Anacreon,

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[12] Kertzer, John. "Life Plus Ninety-Nine Years: W. S. Gilbert and the Fantasy of Justice." In *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 36, no. 2 (2003), 1-18. and Ahl, Frederick. "Making Poets Serve the Established Order: Editing for Content in Sophocles, Virgil, and W.S. Gilbert." *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas* 10, no 2. (2012), 271-301.

[13] Kertzer states that "Justice envelops us in reciprocity, so that… crime and punishment can be perfectly calibrated. Literature, by contrast, depicts a lopsided world of accidents, disproportion, and irresolution." 5-6.

[14] Ibid., 6.

[15] Ibid., 11.

[16] W.S. Gilbert, *Princess Ida* in *The Savoy Operas: The complete text of all the Gilbert & Sullivan operas, 1875-1896.* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 271.

> Ovid's Metamorphoses,
> Likewise Aristophanes,
> And the works of Juvenal,
> These are worth attention, all.
> But if you will be advised,
> You will get them Bowdlerized![17]

Ahl argues that Gilbert faced greater levels of censorship than many Classics authors, because of the social standards and delicate sensibilities of his Victorian audiences. This censorship influenced Gilbert's use of double-entendre in his librettos and contributes to the difficulty many scholars and critics face when decoding Gilbert's works. He states that Gilbert's innuendo and social criticism is subverted by his ambiguity and satire which he employs to avoid offense. He pushed against social boundaries in his works while creating ambiguous texts wherein his critical intentions could not be proven.

Gilbert and Sullivan and Social Class

Gilbert and Sullivan created works which served the industry of Victorian middle-class entertainment and helped shape the development of English comic opera and musical theatre. Their works centred on issues of social class in Victorian England and both criticised social norms and propagated some aspects of the status quo. Alan Fischler's article and Regina B. Oost's book both examine social class and the development of the Savoy Operas.[18] Fischler examines how Gilbert and Sullivan were raised and how their differences in social class prior to their successful collaboration influenced their individual views of Victorian society and their goals for the Savoy Operas. Gilbert was raised in a middle-class household which instilled in him an inclination towards the "gentlemanly professions."[19] His success was due both to his talent with words and his savvy business sense. Gilbert lived comfortably throughout his life. Sullivan's his father was a working-class bandmaster, so Sullivan, while surrounded by music

[17] Gilbert, 271-272.
[18] Alan Fischler, "Dialectics of Social Class in the Gilbert and Sullivan Collaboration." *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 48, no. 4 (2008), 829-837. and Regina B. Oost, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Class and the Savoy Tradition, 1875-1896*. London: Routledge, 2016.
[19] Fischler, 830.

his whole life, had a humbler upbringing than Gilbert. As Sullivan began to be known as Britain's leading composer, his social standing was raised to that of Gilbert's, arguably even surpassing Gilbert as Sullivan received his knighthood in 1884 while his partner was knighted in 1907. These experiences of social class are mirrored frequently throughout the Savoy Operas, with characters of lower class being granted higher positions in society through marriage or legal loopholes. Fischler argues that the success of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas depended on the use of Sullivan's experiences of rising through social classes and Gilbert's respectable social values as a member of the upper middle-class.

Oost explores how Gilbert and Sullivan, along with their impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte, both catered to and created expectations for their Victorian middle-class audience. She accomplishes this through an examination of primary documents such as promotional materials, programs, and letters. Oost situates the Savoy Operas within the context of Victorian theatre and middle-class culture and demonstrates how Gilbert and Sullivan influenced the development of a new middle-class identity. Of particular importance are Oost's first and fifth chapters. Chapter one, "West End Theatres and Savoy Audiences," describes Gilbert and Sullivan's typical middle-class audience and how the collaborators gratified the values of the bourgeoisie. Chapter five, "'Encore' means 'Sing it Again,'" demonstrates the successful formula that Gilbert and Sullivan used in their operettas which respected middle-class values. Ida herself demonstrates a thorough knowledge of commercialism and fashion even as she rejects these worldly things, which reflects Gilbert and Sullivan's own knowledge of middle-class desires.[20]

[20] Oost, 113-114. Ida tells her students to "Let hair-pins lose their virtue; let the hook / Disdain the fascination of the eye." (Gilbert, *Princess Ida*, 275) Ida is familiar with ladies' fashion even as she encourages her students to leave behind consumer goods and forget about outward appearances.

Women in the Culture of Gilbert and Sullivan

Women have participated, and continue to participate, in most aspects of Gilbert and Sullivan's productions. From the beginning of the Gilbert and Sullivan collaboration, women have been employed as actors and singers, and have founded and joined amateur operatic societies. In each of the Savoy Operas, Victorian gender roles and marriage ideals have been displayed, both for purposes of upholding middle-class principles and satirizing the status quo. Jane Stedman discusses theatrical crossdressing in Victorian burlesque and Gilbert and Sullivan's rejection of crossdressing tropes in their collaborations.[21] Crossdressing of many types was a common sight on the Victorian stage in several genres including opera, operetta, burlesque, and plays. Stedman argues that Gilbert's middle-aged female characters in his works were created with more sympathy and respect than his critics realize. Gilbert's middle-aged characters satirize society's preoccupation with youthful beauty just as much as they satirize aging women. Stedman believes that Gilbert's rejection of crossdressing in his librettos represents his willingness to allow female actors a respectful place in his productions. She states that "A man playing a feminine role could safely go further than a woman beyond the undefined but recognized limits of good taste."[22] In other words, a man playing a woman onstage allowed for more comic freedom than a woman playing a woman, because the audience could laugh at her without concern about a lapse in chivalry. Gilbert's female characters in the Savoy operas generally conduct themselves within the realm of acceptable Victorian social standards.

Shani D'Cruze and Michael Goron both investigate the experience of women who participated in the Savoy Operas. D'Cruze examines the roles of women in amateur operatic

[21] Jane W. Stedman, "From Dame to Woman: W. S. Gilbert and Theatrical Transvestitism." *Victorian Studies* 14, no. 1 (1970): 27-46.
[22] Stedman, 32.

societies.[23] Amateur operatic societies allowed women to enjoy public performance while decreasing negative perceptions about women on stage. D'Cruze argues that women have enjoyed empowering experiences through amateur operatic societies, despite Gilbert's often unflattering characterizations of women in his works. Goron studies the experience of professional female singers and actors working at the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company in the late nineteenth century.[24] Goron examines how Gilbert worked to improve public perceptions of theatrical morality through strict rules imposed on his actors, especially his female actors, at the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company.[25] Gilbert both restricted and protected his female employees to create a respectable public image and ensure that middle-class women could remain "proper" even as they worked in the theatre. The enforced decorum at the Savoy Theatre was unusual in comparison to other theatrical companies at the time and Gilbert ensured that his employees upheld Victorian standards of morality and behaviour.

Gilbert and Sullivan's works highlight important issues of the Victorian era and attempt to shed light on matters such as women's rights and class. Contextualizing the Savoy operas within Victorian society allows for greater understanding of the creators' intentions. Gilbert took a surprisingly progressive stance on many issues in his librettos and his intentions frequently leaned towards encouraging societal progress rather than a continuation of the status quo. Understanding Gilbert and Sullivan's individual backgrounds enhances my examination of *Princess Ida* because their biographies show evidence of the two creators supporting women, even though the ways in which they demonstrate that support may seem antiquated according to today's standards. Gilbert and Sullivan's works are notable for the inclusion of women's issues in their plots and their wide-ranging types of female characters. Women in the Savoy

[23] Shani D'Cruze, "Dainty Little Fairies: women, gender, and the Savoy Operas." *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000): 345-367

[24] Michael Goron, "The D'Oyly Carte Boarding School: Female Respectability in the Theatrical Workplace, 1877-1903" *New Theatre Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2010), 217-231.

[25] The D'Oyly Carte Opera Company was the main theatre which produced Gilbert and Sullivan works.

operas are generally expected to concede to Victorian standards of feminine behaviour and ultimately settle down and get married. Despite this expectation, Gilbert and Sullivan heroines often explore alternative arrangements, however briefly, and are usually valued by their male counterparts and earn both admiration and respect from the audience. In addition, Gilbert and Sullivan treated their female employees fairly, providing them with wages and respectability during a time of great social change and a shift in thinking regarding women's place in the home and workforce.

Princess Ida

Princess Ida (1884), based on Alfred Tennyson's poem *The Princess* (1847), is one of Gilbert and Sullivan's lesser-known works. It received less success upon its premiere than Gilbert and Sullivan's more popular earlier operettas such as *H.M.S. Pinafore* (1878) and *Pirates of Penzance* (1879). *Princess Ida* is generally understood as a satire of women's rights and women's education, though the actual intent of the work is contested among scholars, as this section of the literature review demonstrates. Gayden Wren's book examines the fourteen Savoy Operas and argues that their longevity is due to the accessibility of the central themes of the works.[26] Wren's tenth chapter focuses on *Princess Ida* and argues that the work ultimately defends social progress and that the operetta "is about a generation—any generation—coming of age and rejecting the ways of the past."[27] The younger characters of *Princess Ida,* notably Hilarion, Ida, and Melissa, break from their parents' influence to forge a future more in line with their progressive ideals, rather than the forceful methods which Hildebrand, Blanche, and occasionally Gama advocate for. Laura Fasick's article examines the feminist aspects of *The Princess* and Gilbert's satirization of a new brand of Victorian

[26] Gayden Wren, *A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert and Sullivan*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
[27] Wren, 157.

masculinity in *Princess Ida*.[28] Fasick demonstrates Tennyson's respect for female agency in his poem. She argues that Tennyson's women can "develop intellectually without threatening men's stature, but men cannot develop emotionally and spiritually without losing worldly power."[29] Fasick argues that the operetta endorses male aggression and female timidity, particularly in Cyril's aria "Would you know the kind of maid."[30] She believes *Princess Ida* ridicules women's goals through Gilbert's depiction of all the women in his operetta as only motivated by sexual desire. Carolyn Williams' book examines each of the Savoy Operas in detail and organizes the operettas according to their overarching themes: gender, genre, or culture.[31] Her eighth chapter, "War Between the Sexes," examines *Princess Ida* and argues that the operetta is conservative in nature and encourages gender separatism. She states that "*Princess Ida* confirms conventional gender as the expression of natural instinct" and that the operetta "justifies the reproduction of the status quo."[32] These three sources are valuable in their intensive examinations of *Princess Ida* and the different aspects of the work that they discuss. Wren, Fasick, and Williams each hold different views on the feminism and/or misogyny of *Princess Ida*, but the enduring theme throughout each authors' work is the contentious nature of navigating the role of gender in the operetta. A close reading of these authors' perspectives of *Princess Ida* proved helpful for developing my own stance on the work, and for determining possible arguments not yet explored.

[28] Laura Fasick, "Angels and Ingenues in Tennyson's *The Princess* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*." *Romanticism on the Net* 34-35 (2004), 1-25.
[29] Fasick, 1.
[30] In this lively drinking song, Cyril sings, "Would you know the kind of maid / Sets my heart aflame-a? / Eyes must be downcast and staid, / Cheeks must flush for shame-a!" (Gilbert, *Princess Ida*, 292.)
[31] Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
[32] Williams, 222.

Tennyson's *The Princess*

Ambiguity in *The Princess*

Lord Alfred Tennyson's epic poem *The Princess* remains a topic of discussion among scholars of Victorian literature on account of its ambiguity and sensitive subject matter. *The Princess* is a lengthy work which is written as a "frame narrative": the main action occurs during seven Cantos which are bookended by a prologue and a conclusion. Throughout the Cantos, lyric interludes comment on the story through the perspective of the poem's women. Much of the discourse around Tennyson's poem centres on the lyric interludes which add complex layers of meaning to the work. Tennyson's deliberate addition of lyric interludes to the third edition of his poem after many critics misunderstood his intentions behind the work offers valuable insight to his ultimate political stance on Victorian gender issues. Understanding *The Princess* is crucial to understanding Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*, especially considering Gilbert's penchant for satire. Gilbert's satire is a topic of contention among scholars and enthusiasts alike, as his many-layered critiques of society are often hidden beneath complex plots and absurd situations. This leads to confusion as to his ultimate intentions behind his comedy and debate arising regarding his political leanings. Understanding Tennyson's intentions in *The Princess* provides insight into Gilbert's intentions, whether Gilbert meant to uphold Tennyson's ideals or parody them.

Alisa Clapp-Intyre examines the lyric interludes that Tennyson added to *The Princess* in the third edition (1850).[33] These lyric interludes are sung by the frame narrative's women as interjections to the main telling of Ida's story. Clapp-Intyre argues that these interludes reinforce Tennyson's feminist sympathies by creating a commentary which addresses Victorian women's issues, such as marriage, and motherhood. These interludes contrast the

[33] Alisa Clapp-Intyre, "Marginalized Musical Interludes: Tennyson's Critique of Conventionality in 'The Princess'." *Victorian Poetry* 38, No. 2 (2000): 227-248.

male-centred downfall of Ida's project by elevating the women's 'feminine' songs to a level of artistry which demonstrates the women's capabilities and intelligence. Daniel Denecke demonstrates that the lyric interludes in *The Princess* allow the reader a glimpse into Ida's innermost thoughts.[34] Denecke argues that the character Lilia from the frame narrative acts as a manifestation of the self-aware reader who recognizes Tennyson's deliberate literary uncertainty and avoids public discourse by keeping her opinions to herself. Lindal Buchanan argues that the ambiguities in *The Princess* lead to a destabilizing of Victorian patriarchy.[35] At the end of the poem, women's voices are silenced through the disruption of the university and Ida's submission to marriage. However, Buchanan argues, Ida's proto-feminist project continues after the poem ends, because "the seeds of absorbed discourses are not destroyed but instead sprout, grow, and ultimately rend the engulfing discursive structures."[36] Buchanan states that the college men of the frame narrative leave Sir Walter Vivian's summer fête questioning the patriarchal system they belong to. These three authors navigate the complexity of Tennyson's poem and its lyric interludes, which supplies the poem's women with a platform from which to speak. They demonstrate the destabilizing effect that women's voices have in the poem, and this destabilization is mirrored in women's work in Victorian society during the time of the poem's publication. Tennyson's lyric verses were some of his most-loved works, so his decision to use these lyric interludes to provide perspective on women's issues remains significant because he used the most memorable sections of *The Princess* to support women.

The Princess and Masculinity

Though many readers of *The Princess* understand the poem to be an examination of women's education, some scholars have instead argued that Tennyson's work criticises

[34] Daniel Denecke, "The Motivation of Tennyson's Reader: Privacy and the Politics of Literary Ambiguity in 'The Princess'" *Victorian Studies* 43, no. 2 (2001), 201-227.
[35] Lindal Buchanan, "'Doing Battle with Forgotten Ghosts': Carnival, Discourse and Degradation in Tennyson's *The Princess*." *Victorian Poetry* 39, no. 4 (2001), 573-596.
[36] Buchanan, 592.

Victorian ideas of masculinity. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that masculinity and femininity must be examined within the broader context of gender relations and that to examine one is to consider the other.[37] She states that politics, sociality and sexuality are interconnected. In chapter seven of her book, Sedgwick examines male homosocial desire in *The Princess* and examines the fate of women who are caught up in male-based Victorian literature. Sedgwick sees the ideals of feminism and antihomophobia as connected, though not synonymic, since both advocate for an uprooting of gender relations. Sedgwick reads *The Princess* as supportive of male homosocial experiences. This cements the argument that the poem may also be taken as proto-feminist, because of the shared goal of antihomophobia and feminism of changing the status quo. Sedgwick believes the homosocial relations between the men of the frame narrative help the reader to understand the discourse within the story proper. William Weaver argues that Tennyson's poem examines same-sex identification instead of same-sex desire.[38] Weaver states that *The Princess* challenges Victorian gender stereotypes and demonstrates that gender is a developmental process, rather than inherently biological. Weaver states that Tennyson, through reshaping his anxieties about masculinity and Victorian education into a poem about women's rights and education, is ultimately criticizing the educational practices of "elite" Victorian men. Weaver and Sedgwick disagree as to what aspect of masculinity *The Princess* is examining, but both agree that the poem is problematizing Victorian masculinity rather than mocking women's education. When examining gender relations in the Victorian era, it is beneficial to understand both masculinity and femininity, because neither construct exists without the other.

[37] Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
[38] William Weaver, "Identifying Men at Ida's University: Education, Gender, and Male/Male Identification in Tennyson's 'The Princess'." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23, No. 1 (2001): 121-148.

The Princess and Femininity

Tennyson's exploration of gender in *The Princess* can be examined from many angles. Veronica Alfano's research is unique in its focus on the feminine aspects of Tennyson's poem. Her 2009 article discusses Tennyson's experiences as a poet who was praised for his beautiful texts while criticized for works which were too feminine.[39] These criticisms centred on Victorian attitudes which understood narrative as masculine and lyric as feminine. This binary understanding of literature is particularly relevant to an examination of *The Princess*, as Tennyson' narrative is interspersed with lyric interjections. Alfano argues that *The Princess*, although written by a man, is an appropriate work to examine regarding issues of femininity. Although women's voices are showcased through the lyric verses in *The Princess*, female agency is minimized through reducing individual female voices to a group chorus. Contrastingly, Alfano also demonstrates that the lyric verses disrupt the main narrative and that the lyric verses of *The Princess* prove more memorable and lasting than the narrative's story. Princess Ida herself, Alfano states, remains the most memorable character in *The Princess*. Alfano's 2017 article expands upon the argument in her 2009 article and focuses on the intersections of genre in *The Princess* and further explores the gendered connotations of narrative and lyric.[40] Alfano believes that the memorability of Tennyson's lyric verses contributes to the verses' subjugation of the narrative. *The Princess* was written in response to Victorian critics who called for more masculine and less childish work from Tennyson. Alfano argues that the lyric verses within *The Princess* are relevant to the narrative but offer a different point of view. She states that the verses are commentary to the story, which may be read as potentially misogynist, but that the lyrics themselves are not misogynist. Alfano sees

[39] Veronica Alfano, "Generic Collaboration and Lyric Betrayal: A Reading of Tennyson's '*The Princess*.'" *Critical Matrix* 18, no. 3. (2009), 34-57.
[40] Veronica Alfano, "Tennyson's Lyric Betrayals: Feminine Re-formation in *The Princess* and *In Memoriam*." In *The Lyric in Victorian Memory* by Veronica Alfano, 59-162. Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2017.

Tennyson's poem as carefully treading the divide between mockery and respect for Ida's project, mirrored by the careful interplay of narrative and lyric. This interplay encourages a view of *The Princess* which considers all sides, since Tennyson himself appeared to have difficulty navigating dichotomies of gender and genre. Diminishing the complexities of Tennyson's poem and of Victorian gender relations does a great disservice to our understanding of women's issues in the Victorian era, and we cannot consider one side of the equation without the other. Alfano's perspective is invaluable because she establishes a middle-ground for readers to consider.

Tennyson's poem remains a relevant source of inquiry as to Victorian standards of gendered behaviour, masculinity and femininity in the nineteenth-century, and the role of marriage in Victorian society. Though the consensus as to Tennyson's intentions varies, gender indisputably plays an important role in the poem. Consequently, Tennyson's focus on gender in *The Princess* means that Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* also incorporates gender as a key theme. Clapp-Intyre and Denecke provide insight to Tennyson's attention to a women's point of view in his poem; though the work is authored by a man, a considerable measure of respect and agency is still granted to women throughout the poem. Buchanan and Sedgwick address the destabilizing effects of Tennyson's work. Buchanan argues that the patriarchy is called into question by *The Princess* while Sedgwick examines the potential of both feminism and antihomophobia to subvert societal norms. Weaver discusses how Tennyson explores the possibility that gender is developmental instead of biological, which could lead to a radical reformation of Victorian ideas of gender. Lastly, Alfano examined femininity in *The Princess* and how women's perspectives shift the message of Tennyson's poem. These sources inhabit the same universe of questions that I am examining in my thesis and, therefore, prove invaluable for informing my argument that *Princess Ida* may be read as proto-feminist.

Victorian Women

The New Woman

The late-nineteenth century saw the rise of the New Woman, a middle-class woman who was independent and well-educated.[41] The New Woman still mostly lived in the domestic sphere, but she was beginning to branch out to the public sphere through new employment and education opportunities. Of Gilbert and Sullivan's works, the New Woman is most explicitly investigated in *Princess Ida*, hence the inclusion of this section in the literature review. Understanding the New Woman enhances awareness of Victorian women's issues and the feminist goals which were beginning to gain ground on account of the Suffragette movement. Sally Ledger examines the destabilizing effect that new understandings of gender had on Victorian society.[42] Ledger positions the New Woman in relation to other Victorian phenomena, particularly decadence, empire, and class politics. Understandings of the New Woman were in constant flux, but the New Woman indisputably held much influence on ideas of gender in the late Victorian era. Matthew Beaumont discusses the shared goal of socialists and suffragettes in the Victorian fin de siècle to emancipate women.[43] Both groups saw equality between the genders as inevitable because of the progression of modern civilization. Middle class socialists and suffragettes, Beaumont states, frequently felt isolated because the achievement of their ideals was so far away from becoming reality. This led to activists questioning their political potential. Advancements in education and employment for women helped to boost confidence and hope, which helped to bolster activists even though their efforts frequently came with little immediate reward. The fin de siècle was wrought with both

[41] See Carolyn Christensen Nelson's Introduction in *A New Woman Reader: fiction, articles, and drama of the 1890s*. (Peterborough: Broadview Press), 2001, ix-xiv.
[42] Sally Ledger, "The New Woman and the crisis of Victorianism." In *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle*, edited by Sally Ledger and Scott McCracken, 22-44. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)
[43] Matthew Beaumont, "The New Woman in Nowhere: Feminism and Utopianism at the Fin-de-Siècle." In *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: fin-de-siècle feminisms*, edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, 212-223. New York: Palgrave, 2001.

optimism and cynicism; Beaumont argues that feminist ideals at the time attempted "both to adduce and induce evidence of an as-yet non-existent new world."[44] This is particularly relevant to the Prince's argument at the end of Tennyson's poem that "This fine old world of ours is but a child / Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time / To learn its limbs."[45] The Victorian fin de siècle was a time of change and transition, and the New Woman was both a threat to traditional femininity and a promise of greater agency for women.

Victorian Family Life

Ida's story centres on family tensions and issues of marriage. Therefore, the historical context of Victorian middle-class family life important for understanding both Ida's story and Gilbert and Sullivan's background. Family dynamics experienced a drastic shift during the nineteenth century, and the resulting changes in gender roles in the home resulted in new methods for raising children and new expectations for marriage. John Tosh is an expert in Victorian fatherhood and the roles that men played in the development of feminism. Tosh provides insight to how Victorian fathers raised their children according to accepted standards of gender, and how fathers were expected to be stern and authoritative while mothers provided nurturing and emotional support, especially towards male children.[46] This led to the perpetuation of gender roles in the public sphere as well as in the home. Fatherhood was a marker of a man's virility and social standing and providing men with possibilities to exercise their authority and provide protection to their families. Children were less subordinate during the Victorian era than previously, where they experienced a similar role to that of servants, but daughters still experienced this subordination more than sons. The main goals of raising

[44] Beaumont, Matthew. "The New Woman in Nowhere: Feminism and Utopianism at the Fin-de-siècle." In *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: fin-de-siècle feminisms*, edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, 214. (New York: Palgrave, 2001).
[45] Tennyson, Alfred. "The Princess." In *The Poems of Alfred Tennyson*, 433. (New York: A. L. Burt Company Publishers, 1851).
[46] John Tosh, "Authority and Nurture in Middle-Class Fatherhood: The Case of Early and Mid-Victorian England," *Gender and History* 8, no. 1 (1996), 48-64.

children consisted of fostering respectable masculinity and moral autonomy in sons, to ensure the continued legacy of the family, and producing daughters which could make advantageous marriages and raise respectable families. Motherhood experienced a higher status this time and was beginning to be respected as an occupation in and of itself. Despite this recognition of women's labour, women were still expected to aspire to marriage and motherhood, even though this occupation was beginning to gain respect.

The fight for women's rights was supported by many male allies who sought to help women achieve a more equal place in the private and public spheres. Victorian suffragists and proto-feminists were confronting vastly different issues than today's activists, focusing more on legal issues such as the right to vote rather than today's focus on intersectionality, the wage gap, and other issues. Marriage was a defining factor in the lives of most Victorians, even though families had begun to decrease as of the 1860s, and this preoccupation with marriage, particularly for young women, remained an important part of their lives even as they fought for suffrage.[47] Angela V. John and Claire Eustance's book contains important perspectives from several scholars on male allies in late Victorian England. Their co-authored introduction to the book outlines some of the male-run organizations created to support women's rights, discusses the Victorian constructions of masculinity that informed male allies' support of women, and notes the potential difficulties arising when focusing on men in regards to women's issues.[48] John Tosh's chapter focuses on middle-class male feminist allies and their perspectives in Victorian England and provides an important context wherein to situate Ida's male family members who support her independence. His focus on the middle-class is especially pertinent to a discussion of women's rights in Gilbert and Sullivan works because of their targeted

[47] John Tosh, "The Making of Masculinities: the middle class in late nineteenth-century Britain." In *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, Edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 38-61.

[48] Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, "Shared Histories – Differing Identities: Introducing masculinities, male support, and women's suffrage," in *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, Edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 1-37.

middle-class respectable audience. It is important to contextualize the gender dynamics of Gilbert and Sullivan's time, and to recognize male allies who, to our current understanding of gender, had an antiquated view of marriage and gender.

Victorian Women and Theatre

Understanding Victorian women's experiences in theatre is important for knowing women's place in the culture of Gilbert and Sullivan performances. One of the key goals of the Savoy Operas was to improve middle-class perceptions of the theatre; Gilbert and Sullivan wanted their works to appeal to Victorian ideals of respectability, and they ensured that their employees embodied that goal.[49] Kerry Powell's book is a valuable resource which examines the agency and new employment opportunities that theatre offered to women in the nineteenth century.[50] Powell argues that Victorian theatre both offered women unique opportunities and contributed to the continued suppression of women. Theatre offered women a voice and a level of financial independence rarely seen in Victorian England. Victorian female actresses were also subject to a great deal of scrutinization and mistrust by both men and women of respectable middle-class society. Powell states that the stage held particular appeal for poor or working-class women, because of the promise of a career and wages, however meager. Despite the slight financial rewards, most women who performed onstage chose to do so for independence and stimulation. Middle-class women tended to participate in theatre as amateurs or spectators, since the demands of family overshadowed any aspirations of independence. Women on stage possessed such power that traditional femininity no longer applied to them, and this threatened Victorian masculinity and the traditional Victorian family. Powell states that the theatre was so far removed from domesticity that women were usually required to leave their acting careers behind once they were betrothed or married. Victorian domesticity was placed at risk by

[49] Goron, 217.
[50] Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

women's performances on stage, creating a certain irony when Gilbert and Sullivan employed women to perform in their works which usually upheld Victorian ideals of marriage. Knowing the multiplicity of women in theatre contributes to a greater understanding of Gilbert's particular interest in ensuring the respectability of his female performers.

While women performed in front of an audience and men watched in silence, Victorian women's voices were prioritized over the voices of Victorian men, at least for short periods of time. Victorian men reacted to actresses with both admiration and anxiety. Powell's examination of women in theatre proves useful for examining some of the male characters in *The Princess* and *Princess Ida*. Powell believes that "performance by its very nature endangered the Victorian belief in a stable identity…. Actors as well as actresses, with their multiplication of personalities, suggest that character is unreadable, volatile, and subject to transformations."[51] All versions of Ida's story are wrought with characters who experience drastic changes in their worldview and undergo significant evolutions to their sense of self throughout the narrative. Powell's research provides Victorian context in which to situate *Princess Ida* and its characters which are inseparable from Victorian gendered ideas of theatricality.

Female performers were beginning to be considered separate from the "fallen woman" in the late Victorian period, which Deborah Pye examines in her article.[52] This newfound respectability was due in part to the popularity of literature which focused on Victorian actresses who, after a brief stint on the stage, ultimately chose to settle down with a husband and raise a family. This shift in experiences was also owing to memoirs which were published by popular leading ladies which strove to represent actresses as "excessively ordinary."[53] These memoirs strategically identified with middle-class respectability, centred on family values, and

[51] Powell, 23.
[52] Deborah Pye, "'Irreproachable Women and Patient Workers': The Memoirs of Victorian Leading Ladies." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 45, no. 1 (2003), 73-91.
[53] Pye, 74.

argued that self-sufficiency was acceptable, even for a middle-class lady. This change in public opinion of female performers is also seen in Gilbert and Sullivan's respectable Savoy Theatre, which is likely both owing to, and contributing to, the trend of increased respectability for the Victorian actress.

Ida is undoubtedly an example of the New Woman in Victorian literature, evidenced by her strong personality and self-driven project, even though she ultimately leaves her ambitious project in favour of marriage. She has a destabilizing effect on the gender expectations of those around her, most particularly her new spouse. Tosh states that, ""Some suffragists saw their own marriages as opportunities to implement – at least publicly – their conception of equality…. For some men and women, marriage appears to have been a catalyst for, rather than response to, change and suffrage commitment."[54] Ida, while still confined to her society's expectations for her, still has opportunities to "mould" her partner into an ally for her feminist project.[55] Outside of the fantastical world of the operetta's plot, New Women were also beginning to claim their own form of independence through participating in theatre, both as professionals and amateurs. Women gained a platform upon which they could express themselves and let their voices be heard, which can compound the proto-feminist effects of Ida's message. The new respectability of the theatre, encouraged by Gilbert and Sullivan, allowed women to gain independence through employment in a newly reputable industry.

Conclusion

This literature review focused on recent scholarship that attempts to situate Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* within its Victorian context. The studies mentioned in this literature review point to the predominance of issues of social class and gender that arise in Gilbert and Sullivan works and highlight the importance that Victorian social ideals played in the creation

[54] Tosh, *The Men's Share*, 24-25.
[55] Gilbert, 310.

of their works, especially regarding the satirical vein of Gilbert's libretti. The experience of Victorian women who performed in the Savoy operas and who were employed by the Savoy Theatre informs my discussion of Gilbert and Sullivan's intentions in their works and enhances understanding of the collaborators' views of women. An examination of the overarching themes of Tennyson's *The Princess*, Gilbert's burlesque, and Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta demonstrates which aspects of Ida's story have already been examined and allows this thesis to be grounded in the work of established scholars. This allows for new areas of inquiry to become known, particularly my question of whether the operetta may be considered proto-feminist and my examination of male feminist allies in *Princess Ida*. Studies which examine Victorian masculinity and the role of men in women's suffrage demonstrate the pertinence of considering Ida's male family members, and even Gilbert and Sullivan, to be potential allies in the fight for women's rights. This literature review indicates research which considers the experience of women in nineteenth-century Britain to inform my consideration of *Princess Ida*'s overarching theme of Victorian gender ideologies.

Chapter 2: Exploring Proto-feminism in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*

Introduction

This chapter argues that Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta *Princess Ida* (1884) adopts a proto-feminist stance on key women's issues of the Victorian era.[1] This chapter explores the Victorian middle-class context of *Princess Ida* to allow for a better understanding of the society which formed the operetta. Determining Gilbert and Sullivan's intentions in their works depends on understanding their culture and contemporary discourse surrounding women's issues, which are vastly different than current understandings of feminism. Firstly, this chapter discusses the chronology of *Princess Ida* through its roots in Tennyson's 1847 poem, Gilbert's first adaptation of Tennyson's work in his 1870 burlesque, and Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta. Since Ida's story exists in three drastically different forms, created in three different societal contexts, from three different decades from the Victorian era, any discussion of the operetta must include its artistic transformation from poem to operetta. Secondly, this chapter examines masculinity in the operetta which demonstrates how gender is not to be taken seriously in Gilbert and Sullivan's works. Since *Princess Ida* mocks masculinity just as much as it appears to mock femininity, we may assume that women are not the key target of its satire. Navigating the complexities of satire in Gilbert and Sullivan's works is challenging and open to interpretation, but in the end, *Princess Ida* may be read as supporting Victorian women's rights.

Princess Ida is one of Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas that deals the most explicitly with Victorian women's issues, such as separate spheres, education, marriage, and independence.[2] *Princess Ida* explores separate spheres quite literally, as men and women live in entirely different worlds under vastly different rules. Ida's idealistic university is shattered

[1] "Proto-feminism" is used here to describe ideas of women's equality that developed before the true advent of women's suffrage and first-wave feminism.

[2] *Iolanthe* (1882) is also a key work that centres on women's issues in Victorian England and could be explored similarly. However, since *Princess Ida* has historically been more contested as to its commentary on women's issues, the focus here will be on *Princess Ida* and the surrounding discourse.

by the introduction of men to her utopian island. The operetta highlights issues of women's education as Ida's university is run by women, for women, with Ida herself as the head of the school. *Princess Ida* investigates the idea of a woman in power, since Princess Ida rules her university with a fair bit of success before the university's disruption by men and Ida's subsequent marriage to a prince. This operetta's heroine is an independent and powerful woman who is eventually convinced of the benefits of marriage, so her story fits neatly into Victorian ideals of women belonging in the domestic sphere, despite her earlier independence and remarkable self-agency.

Tennyson's *The Princess*

Lord Alfred Tennyson's *The Princess,* first published in 1847, provides a reflection on an all-women's university founded by a princess named Ida, who left her family and renounced all men, and invited other women to her island school to learn and follow her example.

> [Ida] there,
> All wild to found a university
> For maidens, on the spur she fled. And more
> We know not, only this: they see no men,
> Not even her brother Arac, nor the twins
> Her brethren.[3]

Ida's project is criticized by various patriarchal figures in her life, including her father and her betrothed's family. The Prince's father blames Ida's father, King Gama, for the Princess's rebellion and has strong reservations about his son's betrothed: "You have spoilt this child; she laughs at you and man. / She wrongs herself, her sex, and me, and him."[4] Gama seems marginally more sympathetic toward his daughter's aspirations and seems to consider The Prince a good match for his daughter: "We remember love ourself / In our sweet youth…. You

[3] Tennyson, 382.
[4] Ibid., 411.

talk almost like Ida. She can talk; / And there is something in it as you say (*sic*)."[5] Ida's school nonetheless encounters a fair measure of success:

> And whatsoever can be taught and known;
> Till like three horses that have broken fence,
> And glutted all night long breast-deep in corn,
> We issued gorged with knowledge, and I spoke:
> 'Why, Sirs, they do all this as well as we.'[6]

Despite her achievements, Ida leaves her university to marry the Prince, arguably renouncing the feminist motivation that led to the creation of the university in the first place.[7]

The Princess is a lengthy poem presented as a "frame narrative," which tells the story of Princess Ida told through the perspective of guests at a summer gathering at Sir Walter Vivian's estate. The guests tell the story as social entertainment; this is a common Victorian leisure activity. A frame narrative is a literary device which encompasses a 'story within a story.' Tennyson's poem consists of a Prologue, wherein the characters of the frame narrative discuss their storytelling game and set the stage for the actual tale, seven Cantos which tell Princess Ida's story, and a Conclusion which gives the frame narrative characters an opportunity to comment on the story they just told. The characters of the frame narrative appear in the Prologue and the Conclusion, with few interjections throughout the Cantos, usually accompanied by a lyric verse sung by the women. The characters of Ida's story only appear in the seven Cantos, though they are discussed by the frame narrative characters in the Prologue and the Conclusion. Key characters of the frame narrative include: the Narrator, Sir Walter Vivian, and Lilia. The chart below aims to demonstrate the name changes that Gilbert made to

[5] Ibid., 412.
[6] Ibid., 390.
[7] Clapp-Intyre, 227.

Tennyson's original characters, and to demonstrate how the frame narrative's characters exist separately to the characters of Ida's story.

Fig. 1 **Character Chart**

	Tennyson's *The Princess*	**Gilbert and Sullivan's Princess Ida**	**Role**
	Princess Ida	Princess Ida	Betrothed to the Prince Runs her own all-female university
	The Prince	Hilarion	Betrothed to Princess Ida
	The King	King Hildebrand	The Prince/Hilarion's father
	King Gama	King Gama	Princess Ida's father
	Cyril and Florian	Cyril and Florian	Good friends of The Prince
	Arac and The Twins	Arac, Guron and Scynthius	Princess Ida's brothers
	Lady Blanche	Lady Blanche	A teacher at Ida's school Wants to become head of Ida's university
	Lady Psyche	Lady Psyche	A teacher at Ida's school, Florian's sister
	Melissa	Melissa	Lady Blanche's daughter
	Frame Narrative		
	The Narrator		A college student/graduate Visiting Sir Walter Vivian's son
	Sir Walter Vivian		A wealthy patron, hosting a summer fête
	Walter		Sir Walter Vivian's son, a friend of The Narrator
	Lilia		Sir Walter Vivian's young sister
	Aunt Elizabeth		Sir Walter Vivian's aunt

The Prologue and the Conclusion are told in first-person narration through the perspective of the nameless Narrator, while Princess Ida's story is told by the Prince, who also remains nameless and speaks in first-person. The Narrator and the Prince are omnipresent characters and act as one character taking on two roles. This frame narrative structure gives Tennyson an opportunity to comment on his own work through the perspective of the Narrator and the other frame narrative characters.

In the Prologue, the frame narrative characters discuss how their story will unfold. Princess Ida's story is told by several male characters, as they take turns telling a "sevenfold story."[8] Sir Walter designates Lilia as the Princess, "six feet high, / Grand, epic, homicidal" and the Narrator as "The Prince to win her!"[9] The Narrator begins the story:

> Seven and yet one, like shadows in a dream.
> Heroic seems our Princess as required--
> But something made to suit with Time and place,
> A Gothic ruin and a Grecian house,
> A talk of college and of ladies' rights.[10]

While the men in this storytelling group tell the story, several women, mostly unnamed, sing ballads to add colour to the narrative. Differing perspectives between genders is apparent throughout the frame narrative, but support for women's agency is frequently seen from both male and female characters. Lilia states that "convention beats [women] down: / It is but bringing up; no more than that: / You men have done it: how I hate you all!"[11] Sir Walter Vivian treats her teasingly, but with affection, as he calls her a "petty Ogress" but states that he "missed the mignonette of Vivian-place, / The little hearth-flower Lilia." Gender is certainly an area of division amongst the frame narrative's characters, but generally these characters show a measure of sympathy and respect for the future of women's education and independence.

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[8] Tennyson, 378.
[9] Ibid., 379.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid., 377.

The Princess was a provocative work that garnered both positive and negative reactions from Victorian readers. Much of the discourse surrounding the poem dealt with Tennyson's investigation of gender relations in the Victorian education system.[12] Reactions to Princess Ida's project and her subsequent decision to leave her university and marry the Prince are divided even amongst the characters of the frame narrative. Sir Walter Vivian states that "I wish she had not yielded!" while, surprisingly, the women who supplied the singing during the story "wished for something real, / A gallant fight, a noble princess—why / Not make her true-heroic – true-sublime (*sic*)?"[13] The Narrator sought to please both sides of the debate as "Then rose a little feud betwixt the two, / Betwixt the mockers and the realists."[14] Lilia's reaction pleased the Narrator the most, as she uncharacteristically became quiet and introspective following the completion of Princess Ida's tale, quite moved by Ida's agency. Mirroring the reactions of the frame narrative's characters at the end of Ida's story, Victorian readers were likewise divided. Many of Tennyson's contemporary audience felt the poem was tasteless and too comical for such a serious topic.[15]

Current scholars are divided between two main schools of thought: the poem is anti-feminist, or the poem is progressive for its time and sympathetic to proto-feminist thought.[16] Victorians who advocated for women's education, including female activists at the time such as Emily Davis and Josephine Butler, held differing views on what this would encompass. Opinions varied between those who advocated for women receiving equal education to men, or those who believed that women needed to receive an education that would preserve their

[12] See William Weaver, "Identifying Men at Ida's University: Education, Gender, and Male/Male Identification in Tennyson's 'The Princess'." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23, No. 1 (2001): 121-148, and Alisa Clapp-Intyre, "Marginalized Musical Interludes: Tennyson's Critique of Conventionality in 'The Princess'." *Victorian Poetry* 38, No. 2 (2000): 227-248.
[13] Tennyson, 432.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Clapp-Intyre, 231.
[16] Ibid., 227.

femininity.[17] This discourse mirrors the polarized views of both the frame narrative characters and the cantos characters.

The Narrator possesses quite a progressive political stance that arguably mirrors Tennyson's political leanings, since the Narrator is effectively the author's voice in the frame narrative. Cynthia Giudici states that "the nature of Tennyson's poem, the story told by many speakers and sorted out finally by the frame's narrator, is akin to a drama in which young Walter's party becomes a drama company, with the narrator acting as the director and producer of the play, determining which parts take prominence."[18] Here the connection between Tennyson and the Narrator is made explicit: Tennyson is the creator of the Narrator, who regulates the progression of Ida's story. Both Tennyson and the Narrator direct the reader to their desired conclusions, which ultimately are proto-feminist and socially-progressive in nature:

> Have patience,' I replied, 'ourselves are full
> Of social wrong; and maybe wildest dreams
> Are but the needful preludes of the truth:
> For me, the genial day, the happy crowd,
> The sport half-science, fill me with a faith.
> This fine old world of ours is but a child
> Yet in the go-cart. Patience! Give it time
> To learn its limbs: there is a hand that guides.'[19]

The Narrator believes that while the progressive elements of Princess Ida's story may have seemed jarring to some of the participants of the storytelling, the future holds potential for development that they cannot yet imagine. Giudici believes that the Narrator and Ida share similar views as well. She states that Ida has "too headstrong a desire for the imagined perfect world's immediate creation…. She plays the prophet, her foretellings reiterated by the Narrator

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[17] Sos Eltis, "Women's Suffrage and Theatricality," In *Politics, performance and popular culture: theatre and society in nineteenth-century Britain*, edited by Peter Yeandle, Katharine Newey, and Jeffrey Richards, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016), 114.

[18] Cynthia Giudici, "Iconic Ida: Tennyson's Princess and her uses." Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Texas, 1997, 73.

[19] Tennyson, 433.

when he advises Walter and his guests (and readers) to be patient."[20] The Narrator considers that current social norms held in regard by his peers are wrong, and that Princess Ida's story speaks to greater gender equality and educational advances in the future. Ida's feminist project is supported strongly by the Narrator, and therefore, I surmise, also supported by Tennyson.

The Princess received so much criticism from its contemporary audience that Tennyson yielded to pressure from his readers and revised the poem several times. Though the first edition was reasonably successful, *The Princess* became Tennyson's most-revised work. Most of the revisions were added in response to Tennyson's reviewers and critics, who found the poem's blank-verse form unlyrical.[21] Since his lyric poems were one of his most-loved literary forms, he added lyric verses interspersed throughout *The Princess* to help improve the poem's reception.[22] Tennyson added these lyric verses to the 3rd edition of the poem in 1850 to help to explain the poem to its readers, since readers tended to misunderstand his intentions. Tennyson "seems to have been trying in his revised edition to make it clear from the first that he was not belittling his heroine."[23] This creates an interesting dichotomy of masculinity and femininity inherent to the very structure of the poem; lyrical poetry was considered by Victorians to be a feminine form of literature, while narrative was seen as strong and masculine. Sedgwick states that "it is among the ironies of this passionate and confused myth of the sexes, that it has come to be valued and anthologized almost exclusively on the basis of its lyrics, its self-proclaimed 'women's work.'"[24] The lyrical interludes allow for a self-contained interpretation of the story, which is overall a display of sympathy for women's struggles in Victorian England.[25] Buchanan states that "the poem's structure and narrative method actually indicate a tottering

[20] Giudici, 21.
[21] Marion Shaw, *Alfred Lord Tennyson*, (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), 50.
[22] Clapp-Intyre, 229.
[23] Edgar Finley Jr. Shannon, *Tennyson and the Reviewers: A Study of His Literary Reputation and of the Influence of the Critics Upon His Poetry, 1827-1851*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), 134.
[24] Sedgwick, 133.
[25] Clapp-Intyre, 230.

male hegemony…. The poem is primarily told by college boys, which means that all of its discourses, the patriarchal as well as the feminist, are uttered by men. This is significant, for even though Ida and Lilia fall silent at the poem's end, the fact remains that men have expressed feminist discourse and ideology to a greater extent than women."[26] Tennyson gives his female characters their own medium through which to discuss their feelings about the topics he was writing about. More importantly, however, he creates a scenario wherein men discuss women's rights seriously and consider the consequences of a world where women have equal rights to men.

During the 1830s and 1840s, Victorians were beginning to rethink processes of education and identification.[27] The anxieties associated with this rethinking, in part, helped influence the creation of *The Princess.* The poem examines two educational models: one through which students identify with role models of the same sex, and learn to emulate these role models, and the second model which formulates these same-sex relationships as immature and seeks to correct the problems of these identifications, particularly in male colleges, by advocating for collective learning by groups of mature students. William Weaver discusses how *The Princess* was written to examine "the functions of same-sex identification and the role of literary study within male development."[28] He argues that Tennyson "implicitly recasts gender as a developmental category: this latter idea, in turn, challenged the gender stereotypes with which Victorians tried to organize society."[29] Daniel Denecke examines the processes of private and public identifications in *The Princess*, stating that Tennyson "celebrates the sanctity

[26] Buchanan, 591.
[27] See William Weaver, "Identifying Men at Ida's University: Education, Gender, and Male/Male Identification in Tennyson's 'The Princess'." *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 23, No. 1 (2001), 121-148. and Jane Wright, "The Princess and the Bee." *The Cambridge Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2015), 251-273. and Daniel Denecke, "The Motivation of Tennyson's Reader: Privacy and the Politics of Literary Ambiguity in 'The Princess'" *Victorian Studies* 43, no. 2 (2001), 201-227.
[28] Weaver, 121.
[29] Ibid.

of the private individual and defends his or her right to be free from government interference."[30] Denecke also states that Tennyson's rejection of convention in *The Princess* demonstrates his interest "in women's emancipation and higher education" and "gender politics and exclusive state educational structures."[31] We can relate Weaver's ideas of same-sex identification to Denecke's ideas of private identifications, and Weaver's ideas of collective learning to Denecke's ideas of public identifications. Both scholars determine that Tennyson's stance on Victorian social issues was ultimately progressive in nature. Women's rights have always been connected to the interplay between the public sphere and the private sphere. Male allies who have supported women's rights have usually held strong beliefs in societal progression.[32] Therefore, Tennyson's consideration of societal reforms through education and the private and public spheres also points to his beliefs that unequal Victorian gender roles should be addressed.

Tennyson's poem privileges elite male college practices of mature collective learning over education practices of early same-sex identification by placing the action of Ida's university and the Prince's struggle to claim her love within a framed narrative where educated men tell the story of a women's university, and this distances the men from the potentially harmful same-sex identifications at Ida's school.[33] Isaac Asimov and Ian Bradley represent the majority of critics who read Tennyson's poem as a criticism of women's education. [34] Contrastingly, Sedgwick and Weaver claim that the work instead focuses on male subjectivity.[35] Sedgwick and Weaver agree that the poem is structured by Victorian politics of

[30] Denecke, 203.
[31] Ibid., 204.
[32] Michael S. Kimmel, "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century." *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (1987), 272.
[33] Weaver., 123.
[34] Isaac Asimov, *Asimov's Annotated Gilbert & Sullivan* (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 428. and Ian Bradley, *The Complete Annotated Gilbert and Sullivan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 404 and 451.
[35] Weaver, 123. and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 119.

male homosocial desire, homophobia, and the meaning of femininity in both male and female characters. Gayden Wren argues that Gilbert's changes to Tennyson's story work to make Ida's tale more serious and that the operetta ultimately defends female equality more than the original poem.[36] As illustrated by these scholars, opinions vary greatly on whether Princess Ida's story promotes female equality or condemns it. Depending on the source consulted, the poem, the burlesque, or the operetta, critics often debate the extent to which a proto-feminist goal is presented. I argue that Ida's story remains a potent discussion of women's rights in the Victorian era, whether or not an individual reader determines that the poem is proto-feminist. The fact remains that an examination of gender equality is brought to the forefront of Victorian literature through Tennyson's work, and this means that women's rights remained a salient topic of consideration in any Victorian household which read *The Princess*.

Gilbert's Burlesque

Before his collaborations with Sullivan, Gilbert was well-known as an author and a playwright. Gilbert's absurdist style began to develop through his early burlesques, and his penchant for the ridiculous carries through to the Savoy operas. Victorian opera burlesque parodied well-known mythology, Shakespearian plays, and other subject matter while using music and arias from popular opera composers such as Verdi and Rossini. The burlesque genre held a special appeal to Gilbert because of its satirical nature and opportunities for humour and social critique. Gilbert's burlesque *The Princess* (1870) was based on Tennyson's text and used music from well-known operas such as Offenbach's *La Périchole* (1868) and Rossini's *The Barber of Seville* (1816). This burlesque premiered just a year before Gilbert's collaboration with Sullivan began. Gilbert kept much of the same plot as Tennyson's *The Princess* in his burlesque, but notable changes exist. Gilbert critically evaluated Tennyson's poem, and this

[36] Gayden Wren, *A Most Ingenious Paradox: The Art of Gilbert and Sullivan,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 140.

critique is evident through examining the changes he made in his libretto from the original text.[37] Some scenes are entirely excluded in the burlesque, such as the Prince's fall in battle and subsequent nursing back to health by Ida in the poem. Gilbert also made significant changes to the poem's text to allow for greater comedy, since he was well-known for his humour and satire and Tennyson's poem is mostly a serious work.

Gilbert exaggerates some characters, such as Ida's father, King Gama, who demonstrates sympathy for Ida's project at the beginning of the poem, while he acts as a grouchy comic character throughout the burlesque while grumbling about his daughter's aspirations.[38] The King Gama of the poem and of the burlesque share similar thoughts after the battle for Ida's castle. Tennyson's Gama states, "Not one to spare her [Ida's mother]: out upon you, flint! / You love nor her, nor me, nor any; nay, / You shame your mother's judgment too."[39] Gilbert's Gama confronts his daughter as well, implying that he wished Ida had not been born when he says, "if your mamma / Had looked on matters from your point of view / (I wish she had), why, where would you have been?"[40] However, despite Gama's disapproval of Ida's project, he is ultimately a comic character in the burlesque, and his role is one of humour and shock value, rather than serious social critique, so the audience is led to disagree with his opinion. Ida is a sympathetic figure in the burlesque, while Gama represents those who stand against her, whom the audience is made to laugh at.

Gilbert altered some characters in the burlesque to be less exaggerated than in the poem. The Prince is given the name Hilarion in Gilbert's burlesque. In Tennyson's poem, The Prince

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[37] Carolyn Williams, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Gender, Genre, Parody,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 233.

[38] Gilbert's Gama is described in the first scene of the burlesque as "a twisted monster---all awry, / As though Dame Nature, angry with her work, / Had crumbled it in fitful petulance!" and his personality as "adder-like, his sting lay in his tongue! / His bitter insolence still rankles here, / Although a score of years have come and gone!" Gilbert, W. S. "The Princess." In *Original Plays by W. S. Gilbert*, (New York: Scribner, Armstrong & Co., 1876.), 135.

[39] Tennyson, 423.

[40] Gilbert, *The Princess,* 168.

suffers from seizures and has a feminine appearance and personality: "A prince I was, blue-eyed, and fair in face, / Of temper amorous, as the first of May, / With lengths of yellow ringlet, like a girl."[41] He is frequently sympathetic to Ida's project, and comes to her defence when his father or his friends mock her ambition. In contrast, Gilbert's Hilarion is characterized as a stronger, less sensitive character than Tennyson's Prince. While Gilbert's Hilarion occasionally praises her ambitions ("She's far before the age in which she lives!") he ultimately disagrees with her "senseless resolution."[42] Both Gama and Hilarion are characterized as more masculine in Gilbert's burlesque than in Tennyson's poem. This may be seen as Gilbert 'correcting' the femininity of Tennyson's Prince and giving voice to a more masculine point of view through the outrageous King Gama. However, since Gilbert is well-known for his satire, these changes to Tennyson's characters, particularly the extreme characterization of Gama, may instead point to a criticism of excessive masculinity. In Tennyson's poem and Gilbert's burlesque, Ida emerges as the central sympathetic character compared to the ridiculous men she shares the stage with. The changes made to Hilarion and Gama point to Gilbert intending a critique of these patriarchal figures, while Ida remains a solemn figure, and therefore taken seriously by the audience.

Gilbert drastically changed some elements of Tennyson's plot when he created his burlesque, though the general progression of the story remains accurate to the original poem. These changes represent Gilbert's critiques of Tennyson's poem, but opinions about Gilbert's intention behind these critiques remains dependent on individual interpretation. Williams believes that Gilbert's Hilarion is less respectful of Ida's goals than The Prince from Tennyson's poem.[43] In the final Cantos of Tennyson's poem, The Prince says to Ida, "Henceforth thou hast a helper, me, that know / The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink

[41] Tennyson, 379.
[42] Gilbert, *The Princess*, 138 and 151.
[43] Williams, 234.

/ Together, dwarfed or godlike, bond or free."[44] The Prince is clearly interested in a union of equality with Ida. Contrastingly, Gilbert's Hilarion says to Ida, "Madam, you placed your trust in woman – well, / Woman has failed you utterly – try man, / Give him one chance, it's only fair."[45] Tennyson's Prince focuses on becoming an ally for Ida where Gilbert's Hilarion focuses on women's supposed failure in Ida's feminist project. However, Hilarion may also be referring to his willingness to support Ida in ways which her allies at the university were not able to. This passage, like many of Gilbert and Sullivan's passages, remains open to interpretation.

The Prince and Hilarion share similar views on the diversity of gender that allows for love to flourish. The Prince states, "For woman is not undevelopt man, / But diverse: could we make her as the man, / Sweet Love were slain" which suggests that he cherishes diversity between genders because it allows for romance, but he sees men and women as equals.[46] Hilarion says to Ida that "Women are far too precious, too divine / To try unproven theories upon," which appeals to Ida's scientific interests.[47] He says to her, "Experiments, the proverb says, are made / On humble subjects – try our grosser clay, / And mould it as you will!"[48] He does not state explicitly that men and women could enter into a relationship as equals, but he does demonstrate that he appreciates Ida's academic mind and encourages her to try her "experiment" on men, since her project failed with women. Both The Prince and Hilarion are written as sincere in their desire to enter into a partnership of equals with Ida, allowing her to recognize that her betrothed is more supportive of her feminist project than she originally realized. Ida's approval of Hilarion is highlighted by Gilbert's choice to give the final words of the burlesque to Ida rather than the Prince as in Tennyson's poem. Tennyson's Prince declares to Ida:

My bride,

[44] Tennyson, 430.
[45] Gilbert, *The Princess,* 168.
[46] Tennyson, 430.
[47] Gilbert, *The Princess,* 168.
[48] Ibid.

> My wife, my life. O we will walk this world,
> Yoked in all exercise of noble end,
> And so through those dark gates across the wild
> That no man knows. Indeed I love thee: come,
> Yield thyself up: my hopes and thine are one:
> Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself;
> Lay thy sweet hands in mine and trust to me.[49]

In the burlesque, these words are altered and given to Ida as she implores Hilarion to join her: "Take me, Hilarion – We will walk the world / Yoked in all exercise of noble end! / And so through those dark gates across the wild / That no man knows! Indeed, I love thee – Come!"[50] Ida declares her agency by vowing that her noble project will continue, and that she will move forward as an equal with her betrothed.[51] She shuts down any ideas that she will be the lesser partner, and Gilbert grants her this power by giving her the final say in the burlesque.

Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*

Gilbert and Sullivan's works can often be read as proto-feminist *or* misogynist. This discourse extends to *Princess Ida* as well. Scenes within Gilbert and Sullivan's works are often ambivalent and may be seen as demonstrating an agenda of supporting women's rights or discouraging women's rights, depending on the interpreter's point of view and ideas of satire. Laura Fasick argues that Tennyson's poem is more feminist than most readers realize, but the operetta is less supportive of gender equality due to Gilbert's "noticeable endorsement of male aggression" and Ida's own "scornful denunciations of women."[52] Gayden Wren's opinion of the poem and the operetta directly conflict with Fasick's argument: "Tennyson's Ida, an intelligent, kind, and warm young woman led astray by good intentions, is a better argument against feminism than Gilbert's Ida, warped by family and societal pressures into a dictator.

[49] Tennyson, 431.
[50] Gilbert, *The Princess*, 168.
[51] In contrast, Gayden Wren argues in *A Most Ingenious Paradox* (page 153) that Ida's "come!" at the end of Gilbert's libretto is a call to action, but The Prince's "come!" at the end of the poem is a "cajoling inducement to surrender." This demonstrates the complexity of determining Gilbert's intentions with his satire.
[52] Laura Fasick, "Angels and Ingenues in Tennyson's *The Princess* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida*." In *Romanticism on the Net* 34-35 (2004), 15 and 18.

An antifeminist would also surely prefer Tennyson's intelligent, kind, and warm men to Gilbert's harsh, implacable, brainless warriors."[53] Interpreting Gilbert's intentions is notoriously difficult, as demonstrated by the scholars above, because nearly everything he wrote is intended parodically. Considering the social pressures of Victorian England and reflecting upon the chronology of *Princess Ida* from Tennyson's poem, to Gilbert's burlesque, to the operetta itself proves beneficial. However, it remains difficult to determine the actual intentions of Gilbert's satire.

In the context of Gilbert and Sullivan works, I consider proto-feminism to be ideas of women's education, women's right to vote or own property, and women's participation in the workforce due to the Industrial Revolution.[54] During Gilbert and Sullivan's collaborations between 1871 and 1896, women's suffrage was gaining momentum, but women were still largely confined to the domestic sphere, living under the rule of men, usually their fathers or husbands. Marriage was a central concern for the middle-class in Victorian England, so proto-feminist ideas of the time centred around women's place in the home, as well as their right to vote.[55] As products of their society, Gilbert and Sullivan's works focused largely on marriage. Each of their fourteen collaborations features marriage or the prospect of marriage as a central plot point in the operetta. Comments on gender found in their operettas must be considered within the context of Victorian women's suffrage movements rather than current ideas of feminism. In other words, the most accurate way to explore proto-feminism within the Savoy operas is to consider proto-feminism within the context of Victorian heterosexual marriage

[53] Wren, 145.

[54] Proto-feminism is a more accurate term than feminism here, since the word feminism was not used in the English language until the 1890s and became more widely-used after Gilbert and Sullivan's time. Raymond Knapp uses "proto-camp" to describe Gilbert and Sullivan's works they exist between designations of "spoof" and "high camp." Likewise, I use "proto-feminism" to describe Gilbert and Sullivan's interest in gender issues. These collaborations were well ahead of their time and could be described as "proto" in many ways.

[55] See Sos Eltis, "Women's Suffrage and Theatricality" and Michael Goron, ""The D'Oyly Carte Boarding School: Female Respectability in the Theatrical Workplace, 1877-1903" In *New Theatre Quarterly* 26, no. 3 (2010), 217-231.

ideals. This is not an oxymoron, but rather part of the foundation from which our modern intersectional feminism developed.

I consider misogyny in the context of these operettas as contempt towards women showcasing independence and self-agency, or ideas that women should remain strictly confined to the domestic sphere, or ideas that women must live strictly under the control of men.[56] Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas frequently make fun of many ideas of women's suffrage, including women's educational rights and women who exist outside of Victorian domestic ideals.[57] However, since their works make light of many issues, including men's issues such as hyper-masculine ideals, we need to consider this apparent misogyny within the context of Gilbert and Sullivan's typical use of satire to determine their stance on gender issues. Joanne Cormac considers satire within the context of opera burlesque "as challenging and critical…. However, a significant school of literary theorists see satire as a conservative genre that upholds existing dominant norms."[58] Gilbert and Sullivan works can be read differently because of the complexity of the satire that is prevalent in their works. The same scene or aria could be read as both proto-feminist or misogynist, and progressive or conservative.

Prior to Tennyson's poem, several women's colleges were starting to open in Britain, but many men were against this development and did not support the idea of women's further education. Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* premiered in 1884, fourteen years after Gilbert's burlesque first premiered, and nearly forty years after Tennyson's poem first appeared. Jane Stedman argues, "it was Gilbert's habit to show the fallaciousness or absurd bases of what his contemporaries took seriously. Yet the subject of a female college offered no real fallacy in

[56] Due to the difficulties of interpreting Gilbert's satire, the mockery of women in these operetta does not always translate to misogyny. Determining the intention of the satire is crucial to avoid mis-labelling certain scenes as either feminist or misogynist.
[57] This occurs throughout most of Gilbert and Sullivan's collaborations, with *Princess Ida* existing as one of the most compelling examples of the duo's examination of gender issues.
[58] Joanne Cormac, "From Satirical Piece to Commercial Product: The Mid-Victorian Opera Burlesque and its Bourgeois Audience." *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 142, no. 1 (2017), 74.

itself, while a great many Victorian males took it anything but seriously."[59] Williams argues that this means that Gilbert's supposed ridicule of women's colleges in *Princess Ida* was outdated and misogynistic.[60] However, I consider the possibility that Gilbert was instead criticizing men's *reaction* to new advances in women's education, which can be evidenced by his characterizations of men in *Princess Ida* as ridiculous, and by giving Ida agency and power in the final words of both his burlesque and the operetta.

Gilbert and Sullivan's works primarily mock English culture; they accomplish this through creating imagined realities based on popular trends, real places, or recognizable tropes and stereotypes of Victorian England wherein Victorian politics and social norms are satirized in thinly-veiled comic scenarios.[61] For example, *Utopia, Limited* (1893) satirizes British imperialism through the presentation of an 'uncultured' nation (the fictional Utopia) that becomes adopted by the 'civilized' Britain. Gilbert was famous for minimizing potential insult to British institutions by placing his critiques within absurd situations.[62] We can consider how Gilbert typically satirizes topics in ways that are open to interpretation, and how his parodies can lead many scholars to taking the topics too seriously. Williams states that Gilbert and Sullivan's brand of parody is often mistaken for 'straight' representations that can easily be misinterpreted.[63] One example is how *The Mikado* appears at first glance to be mocking Japanese culture[64] and Japanese people, but upon a deeper look into its history and context,

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[59] Jane W. Stedman, *W. S. Gilbert: A Classic Victorian and his Theatre*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 203.

[60] Williams, 244.

[61] Shani D'Cruze, "Dainty Little Fairies: women, gender, and the Savoy Operas." *Women's History Review* 9, no. 2 (2000), 352.

[62] Raymond Knapp, "The Straight Bookends to Camp's Gay Golden Age: From Gilbert and Sullivan to Roger Vadim and Mel Brooks." In *Music and Camp*, ed. Christopher Moore and Philip Purvis. (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2018), 5-6.

[63] Williams, 14.

[64] In current society, *The Mikado* is at the very least insensitive to Japanese culture and people, and many feel that the operetta is racist and inappropriate for modern performance. Reactions to *The Mikado* frequently depend on the staging and costuming of a certain production, where steps may be taken to lessen the offensive nature of the show. I am not arguing that *The Mikado* or other such problematic representations of non-Western societies should be accepted for modern performance. I am instead arguing that Western

Gilbert and Sullivan are actually mocking late Victorian obsessions with exoticism and Japonisme.[65] It is safe to assume that Gilbert and Sullivan would not alter their successful formula for English Comic Opera to any great extent. *Princess Ida* can indeed be read as supporting an early feminist agenda, if we consider the fact that nothing in Gilbert and Sullivan's operettas can be taken truly seriously.

During the time that *Princess Ida* was premiered, women's suffrage movements were gaining momentum and many proto-feminist goals centred around giving women the right to vote.[66] All of Gilbert and Sullivan's works (most notably *Patience*, 1881, *Iolanthe*, 1882 and *Princess Ida*, 1884) contain compelling representations of gender that may be seen both as supportive of women's rights and against women's rights. Critics and fans of Gilbert and Sullivan often argue over whether their works are progressive in nature, or supportive of the Victorian status quo. This discrepancy arises because of how Gilbert and Sullivan's works can be interpreted in so many ways: Gilbert and Sullivan turn practically every topic, character type, and genre completely upside down, so we must take care not to take any of their discussions on a given topic at face-value. Gilbert and Sullivan were dealing with a certain amount of censorship, so it is often difficult to tell what exactly they are parodying in each of their works, because they needed to be careful about how they criticized Victorian social issues to avoid offending the general public and important political figures.

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understanding of exoticism and cultural appropriation is more advanced than in the Victorian period, and it is crucial to understand the context in which these works were created.

[65] Exoticism is the use of thinly-veiled references to foreign countries and cultures. In Victorian England, exoticism was often seen in the contexts of opera and musical theatre, literature, home décor, and fashion. Exoticism usually involves an over-simplification of the culture it represents. Japonisme is a form of exoticism specific to Japanese culture which had great popularity in Victorian England, particularly within the Aestheticism movement of the middle class which upheld ideas of decadence. Oscar Wilde was a well-known figure of Aestheticism.

[66] The term "féminisme" is credited to Charles Fourier, a French philosopher in 1837 and this is the first known use of the word. Depending on the source, "feminist" occurred in 1852 (Oxford dictionary) and "feminism" in 1895. Some scholars use the term "proto-feminist" to refer to earlier movements focusing on women's rights. See Eileen Hunt Botting, and Houser, Sarah L., "'Drawing the Line of Equality': Hannah Mather Crocker on Women's Rights". *The American Political Science Review* 100, no. 2 (2006), 265–78.

Princess Ida centres around "the battle of the sexes." Men and women are pitted against each other in humorous ways, and moments throughout the operetta can offer clues to which sex is supposed to be taken more seriously. *Princess Ida* is also one of Gilbert and Sullivan's most relevant examples of a strong female society. The operetta accomplishes this through imagining a society where independent women live entirely isolated from men, but whose society is inexorably altered by the introduction of men to their separate sphere.[67] This separation of men and women in Gilbert and Sullivan works mimics Victorian gender ideals, as men and women occupied different roles in society.

Gilbert and Sullivan employ voice tropes to accentuate the gender divide in their collaborations. Catherine Clément describes common voice type tropes in opera: the soprano heroine plays the "persecuted victim," the tenor is characterized as the courageous rebel "against the social order," the mezzo-soprano is articulate but often masculine or treasonous, and the baritone is calculating and philosophical.[68] Gilbert and Sullivan's leading romantic ladies are sung by light, agile soprano voices, while the heroic men are sung by tenors. Older, troublesome, or bitter women are played by mezzo-sopranos while bass-baritones characterize Gilbert and Sullivan's most bumbling comic male roles. This fits well with Clément's tropes. However, I believe Ida exists outside the trope of "persecuted victim" as she is independent and strong and refuses to concede to her persecution: rather she uses her trials throughout the operetta to add new levels of nuance to her feminist project.

Gilbert and Sullivan frequently pair the chorus men and women up at the end of their productions along with the happy marriages of the main characters. Shani D'Cruze states that "all the women on stage…. are ostensibly in a process of courtship throughout the show."[69] The audience assumes all of the characters, including the background characters, pair off and

[67] Williams, 188.
[68] Clément, 22-23.
[69] D'Cruze, 360.

live happily ever after.[70] These romantic pairs frequently end up as the tenor with the soprano, and the baritone with the mezzo-soprano, which aligns with audience expectations. This matching up of voice types supports the belief that Victorian married couples should have similar morals and social standing. *Princess Ida* holds true to this trope as Ida, a soprano, and Hilarion, a tenor, presumably get married at the end of the operetta. Their matching voice types offers further evidence as to Ida and Hilarion's matching wishes for the society in which they live.

Although Ida does marry Hilarion and leaves her school, the final scene of the operetta supports the possibility she retains her independence to a certain extent. Ida understands that she can return to her university if marriage does not work in her favour, as Cyril tells her, "if at any time you feel / A-weary of the Prince, you can return / To Castle Adamant and rule your girls / As heretofore." Lady Psyche also plans on returning to the university if her union with Cyril is not satisfactory. Ida asks, "And shall I find / The Lady Psyche here?" to which Psyche replies, "If Cyril, ma'am, / Does not behave himself, I think you will."[71] These two women understand that they only need to attempt entering into a union with their respective partners and that the university still remains an option should marriage not be to their liking. Ida and Psyche refuse to submit to men, even upon their defeat during the battle for Castle Adamant and their subsequent affection for Hilarion and Cyril. The university continues under Lady Blanche's rule, giving a happy ending to the Dame Figure of *Princess Ida*. Ida says to Lady Blanche, "How say you, Lady Blanche, / Can I with dignity my post resign? / And if I do, will you then take my place?"[72] This happy ending for an old woman further enhances an argument that *Princess Ida* can potentially be read as proto-feminist. Though the operetta may seem to argue for a return to the status quo with its finale which advocates for marriage as a happy

[70] Ibid.
[71] Arthur Sullivan and W. S. Gilbert, *Princess Ida, or Castle Adamant* (Score). (London: Chappell & Co. Limited, 1911), 48.
[72] Sullivan and Gilbert, 47.

ending for Victorian women, if we consider proto-feminism within the realm of Victorian marriage, the operetta can still be considered proto-feminist because the main female characters retain a considerable measure of independence.

Examining representations of gender in the operetta proves beneficial for determining Gilbert and Sullivan's intentions in *Princess Ida*: to support women's education and rights, or to support the continuation of traditional gender roles. It may be difficult to see the "feminism" in *Princess Ida*, but the operetta should be examined closely for its representations of gender and women's rights. We must avoid looking at the work from a current understanding of feminism: our understanding of how gender affects individuals and societal constructs of oppression is much more advanced than the ideals of women's suffrage movements in Victorian England. Therefore, it is counterproductive to examine Gilbert and Sullivan's works from a 21st century lens. From a Victorian England perspective, the operetta can certainly be read as proto-feminist. At the very least, *Princess Ida* explores expanding ideas of femininity and masculinity and women's independence.

Satirizing Masculinity

Various representations of masculinity are portrayed in *Princess Ida*. Hilarion, though characterized as less sensitive than Tennyson's Prince, is one of the least "masculine" characters in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta. He insists on winning Ida's heart through courtship, rather than war as his father recommends. King Hildebrand is willing to offer Ida and her father a peaceful alliance, but Ida does not marry Hilarion, he threatens, "Upon our oath, we'll trounce them both!.... We'll shut him up in a dungeon cell, / And toll his knell on a funeral bell."[73] In contrast to his father, Hilarion plans to woo the princess into the marriage. He sings, "Tomorrow morn fair Ida we'll engage; / But we will use no force her love to gain, /

[73] Sullivan and Gilbert, 5.

Nature has armed us for the war we wage!"[74] Florian and Cyril are supportive of Hilarion's methods, and hope to find love at Ida's university as well:

> Expressive glances
> Shall be our lances,
> And pops of Sillery
> Our light artillery.
> We'll storm their bowers
> With scented showers
> Of fairest flowers
> That we can buy![75]

Hilarion and his friends don women's clothes as a disguise to enter Ida's university undetected. The friends have a fair bit of fun with their disguise as they wear the robes and pretend to be maidens during a light-hearted trio before they enter the university: "Haughty, humble, coy, or free, / Little care I what maid may be. / So that a maid is fair to see, / Every maid is the maid for me!"[76] The three men are mocking women in this trio but are also acting foolish and inviting a mockery of themselves. Sullivan's orchestration here is dance-like and dainty and invites the singers to frolic about on stage, which is rather unbecoming of the masculine hero of the operetta. Ida's brothers or Hilarion's father certainly would not be seen skipping around the stage in women's clothes. This trio, and the subsequent adventures of Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian in their maidenly dresses, are representative of the friends' willingness to let go of their masculinity, even in jest. King Gama, when he discovers Hilarion dressed as a woman says, "Why, you look handsome in your women's clothes! / Stick to 'em! Men's attire becomes you not!"[77] His suggestion that Hilarion looks better in feminine attire hearkens to Tennyson's Prince who is described as girlish in appearance.[78] Hilarion responds to Gama's mockery, "You dog, you'll find, though I wear woman's garb, / My sword is long

[74] Ibid., 12.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid., 21.
[77] Ibid.,44.
[78] "A prince I was, blue-eyed, and fair in face, / Of temper amorous, as the first of May, / With lengths of yellow ringlet, like a girl." Tennyson, 379.

and sharp!"[79] This double entendre is not taken seriously however, and Hilarion's attempt to defend his masculinity is shut down as Gama replies, "Hush, pretty one!"[80] Shortly after this exchange, Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian battle against Ida's three brothers, and despite their more feminine characterizations, they triumph over the brawny, hyper-masculine warrior brothers. The dichotomy of Ida's three brothers versus Hilarion and his friends represents a willingness on Gilbert's part to imagine less-masculine men emerging victorious in battle and exploring the performativity of their gender expression.

Ida's brothers, Arac, Guron, and Scynthius are portrayed as comic characters in Gilbert's burlesque and in Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta. This contrasts with their characterization in Tennyson's poem, where the brothers are serious and portrayed as true warriors. Guron and Scynthius are not given names in Tennyson's poem and are simply called "the twins," while Arac has the same name in all versions of Ida's story. Tennyson's brothers think well of Ida, though they are puzzled by her project: "Her brethren, though they love her, look upon her / As on a kind of paragon."[81] Ida demonstrates affection for her brothers in Tennyson's poem, even though she has renounced men, and her father states that, "Arac's word is thrice / As ours with Ida."[82] She considers her brothers to be "The sole men to be mingled with our cause, / The sole men we shall prize in the after-time."[83] Tennyson's Arac possesses remarkable loyalty towards his sister, as he tells the Prince, "she can be sweet to those she loves, / And, right or wrong, I care not: this is all, / I stand upon her side."[84] Tennyson's male characters tend to possess one of two major opinions of Ida's university; Ida's brothers and the Prince believe she is misguided but also believe that her philosophies have some merit, while King Hildebrand believes that her ideas need to be stopped immediately, with war and violence.

[79] Sullivan and Gilbert, 45.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Tennyson, 382.
[82] Ibid., 413.
[83] Ibid., 416.
[84] Ibid., 414.

Ida's brothers are remarkably sympathetic towards Ida's project and, presumably, women's rights in Tennyson's poem.

Ida's brothers Arac, Guron and Scynthius are portrayed as ultra-masculine and rather stupid in the operetta. The brothers are over-confident, but also blundering and incompetent; they are self-admittedly, "On the whole…. not intelligent."[85] These characters are a satire of the masculine hero and a critique of traditional masculinity. Gilbert and Sullivan's depiction of the brothers is potentially proto-feminist because they distort the type of warrior's masculinity typically admired by society into something to be mocked. The brothers' masculinity is not only ridiculed but may be considered the very thing which makes them incompetent. Arac makes fun of his own inability to fully encompass the armour of a warrior in his aria, "This helmet, I suppose:"

> This tight-fitting cuirass
> Is but a useless mass,
> It's made of steel,
> And weighs a deal,
> A man is but an ass
> Who fights in a cuirass,
> So off, so off goes that cuirass.[86]

As the song progresses, the brothers gradually remove every piece of their protective armour. The aria hearkens to Handelian oratorio, which creates a connection between Arac and biblical heroes, further emphasizing his hyper-masculinity. Sullivan's orchestration for this aria makes use of a distinctly baroque flavour to, as Williams states, "emphasize the mock-heroic lyrics."[87] Considering this aria in conjunction with Hilarion and his friends' feminine disguise which they used to infiltrate the university in their Act I trio, it seems that Gilbert and Sullivan are implying that masculinity is as much a performance as femininity. This aria implies that the brothers' masculinity is tied to their attire, and therefore easily removed. Their hyper-

[85] Sullivan and Gilbert, 8.
[86] Ibid., 46.
[87] Williams, 246.

masculinity is uncomfortable and leads to the brothers' decision to remove it, if only metaphorically, through the removal of their armour.

In their second trio,[88] Arac, Guron, and Scynthius sing in baby-language: "Who is longing for the rattle / Of a complicated battle – / For the rum-tum-tum / Of the military drum / And the guns that go boom! boom!"[89] This childish language recalls the Prince's aria from Act 1 "Today we meet" when he sings about his "baby bride."[90] This use of gibberish implies that the brothers' masculinity, even the military and war in general, is childish. Arac, Guron, and Scynthius satirize masculinity just as much as other moments in the operetta satirize women's education. This is accomplished in part by equating masculinity to immaturity and stupidity. Gilbert's decision to change Tennyson's brothers from serious and sympathetic to failed, inane warriors demonstrates an intention to display the ridiculousness of hyper-masculinity. Since the operetta mocks masculinity just as much as it mocks femininity, we must consider the possibility that Gilbert and Sullivan are mocking men's reaction to women's education and not women's education itself. Gilbert's satire is multifaceted and encompasses critiques of both men and women throughout *Princess Ida*, with men frequently emerging as the less serious gender. Sullivan's music highlights the ridiculousness of the operetta's men while supplying the women with a certain amount of gravitas which helps them to earn the audience's regard and sympathy.

Conclusion

The ultimate message of the poem, the burlesque, or the opera may differ due to changes to the plot and the societal developments which inevitably occurred between 1847 and 1884.

[88] Arac, Guron, and Scynthius offer several critiques of masculinity throughout the operetta. The three brothers sing in their first trio, "Like most sons are we, / masculine in sex" which implies a greater range of possibilities for gender identities as only "most sons" are masculine, not all sons. (Sullivan, 8.)
[89] Sullivan and Gilbert, 13.
[90] Hilarion sings about his "baby bride,": "Twenty years ago! / Husband twice as old as wife / Argues ill for married life / Baleful prophecies were rife, / Twenty years ago!" He sings that his bride was "all bib and tucker, frill and furbelow!" (Sullivan, 6 and 7.)

Though Tennyson's poem remains a subject of contention among scholars and critics, opinions of Gilbert and Sullivan's operetta are even more highly-charged. Alisa Clapp-Intyre believes that Tennyson's intention of the poem was to present many angles of interpretation, but to ultimately highlight an agenda of gender equality.[91] Caroline Williams states that *Princess Ida* is in fact not satirical in nature, but rather advocates against women's rights.[92] Gayden Wren argues that Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* does not focus on gender equality at all, but rather focuses on encouraging societal progress in a general sense.[93] In this chapter, I demonstrated how Princess Ida's story can be construed in many ways but viewing the story as proto-feminist is undoubtedly a valid interpretation. I based this argument on the fact that masculinity is satirized to an equal or greater extent than femininity in *Princess Ida*, and the fact that women maintain their independence and agency throughout the operetta, despite the overarching dominance of Victorian marriage ideals. Regardless of political views and critical perception, Princess Ida's story advocates for change regarding Victorian ideals of gender roles and the place of women in the home.

[91] Clapp-Intyre, 230
[92] Williams, 226-227.
[93] Wren, 141.

Chapter 3: Masculinity and Male Allyship in *Princess Ida*

Introduction

Male allies of women's rights have fought alongside women since the beginning of women's suffrage. Including a discussion of male allyship can prove problematic, as it runs the risk of relegating women's struggles to the background and, once again, making history all about men. However, since the Victorian era was tremendously impacted by its gender ideals, a discussion of both men's experiences and women's experiences with suffrage is important. In this chapter, I argue that several fine examples of male allyship are portrayed in *Princess Ida*, particularly her father, her brothers, and Hilarion. It is their demonstration of support, rather than Ida's defeat and subsequent marriage to Hilarion, which allows Ida to leave her university in good faith. Although she leaves her university, her feminist project continues, in part thanks to the efforts of her allies. Gayden Wren states that Ida agrees to marry Hilarion at the end of *Princess Ida* because "of concern for her father, her hostage brothers, and surely her students…. Ida's concession is actually a triumph of humanity over ideology."[1] I take this argument further and explore the possibility that Ida's decision is ultimately one of family loyalty rather than a choice brought upon her by Victorian marriage ideals as she chooses to save her family from Hildebrand's tyranny at the expense of her university. Ida's family is her first experience with male feminism, and their support allows Ida to accept men as allies in her feminist project. Ida sees potential in Hilarion for another ally, which leads to her willingness to give him an opportunity to prove himself, while still retaining her independence and continuing her work towards gender equality.

[1] Wren, 148.

Victorian Family Dynamics

The ideals of the Victorian family greatly inform the dynamics between the characters in *Princess Ida.* In the late nineteenth-century, motherhood was seen as the woman's calling while the importance of fatherhood experienced a decline.[2] Since neither Hilarion's mother nor Ida's mother participate in the action of the operetta, the dynamic between King Gama and King Hildebrand and their children is an important familial relationship to examine. The main conflict of the operetta is between and around the two kings and their children. Wren argues that *Princess Ida* is essentially "about the conflicts between and within three dynastic, highly dysfunctional families: Gama, his daughter, and his three sons; the tyrannical Hildebrand and his heir, Hilarion; and Blanche, oppressor…. of her daughter Melissa."[3] Since Ida and Hilarion were raised solely under the influence of their fathers, it is important to understand Victorian fatherhood. During the nineteenth century, fathers were expected to teach their sons how to be masculine, and this process was taken very seriously by Victorian families.[4] A sharp divide existed between the roles of mothers and fathers. John Tosh states that the role of fathers was clear and that "guidance and discipline must be clearly laid down, and emotional closeness avoided in the interests of instilling manly independence."[5] Mothers were available to their sons for emotional indulgence and tenderness while fathers remained undemonstrative, to cultivate a strong masculine self-image.[6] Separate spheres for men and women extended beyond public or private spaces and included a dichotomy of character traits developed through socialization which began in the home and extended to an individual's entire life.[7] While sons

[2] Michael Kimmel, *The Gendered Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 115.
[3] Wren, 145.
[4] John Tosh, "Authority and Nurture in Middle-class fatherhood: The Case of Early and Mid-Victorian England," *Gender and History* 8, no. 1 (1996), 54.
[5] John Tosh, "The making of masculinities: the middle class in late nineteenth-century Britain," in *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 45.
[6] Tosh, "Authority and Nurture," 46.
[7] Tosh, "The making of masculinities," 45.

were expected to follow their fathers and become masculine, respectable citizens, daughters still occupied a more servile place in the home, and were expected to submit to their fathers' authority.[8] Despite female children occupying a less privileged place in the home than their brothers, fathers were usually more emotionally demonstrative towards their daughters than to their sons.[9] These dynamics inform my argument that the operetta is protofeminist because Ida has male family members who act as her allies despite the Victorian family ideals which could have easily caused her family to subvert her independence entirely.

Victorian British families were facing society-wide changes in gender relations. These changes consequently impacted family dynamics. This shift was due to greater educational opportunities for women, a resulting increase in the societal value of motherhood, and changing divisions of responsibilities between mothers and fathers. John Tosh discusses Victorian fatherhood at length, especially regarding how men raised their sons to uphold standards of masculinity. He states:

> The tension in the position of many Victorian fathers arose, in part at least, from the contradiction between the greater priority attached to manliness for boys and the greater role of mothers in teaching it…. The argument there is that the unprecedented role of women in moulding boys both at home and at school led to a generation of men alert to the dangers of the feminine within and anxious to compensate by identifying with unequivocally masculine symbols and life-styles…. [Public boarding schools] offered the advantage of removing teenage boys from their mother's influence while submitting them to a crash-course in manliness.[10]

These increasing anxieties regarding "the feminine within" arose around the period of women's suffrage in Victorian England. These multifaceted tensions are apparent in Ida's story. Importantly, neither Ida's mother nor Hilarion's mother appears in the operetta, so both Ida and Hilarion are subject only to their fathers' parenting during the main action, as well as during

[8] Tosh, "Authority and Nurture," 51.
[9] Ibid.,57-58
[10] Ibid., 55.

childhood.[11] The anxieties related to changing Victorian parenting dynamics are apparent in how each father deals with his child. Hildebrand, concerned about his son's feminine tendencies, holds high expectations of his son and doles out punishment and criticisms easily, while Gama treats Ida with much greater affection and vulnerability.

Victorian Feminism and Male Allies

Gilbert and Sullivan collaborated during a period of great political and social change regarding women's rights. Women's suffrage debates had been common in Victorian British parliament since the 1870s. [12] The first suffrage bill was introduced to the Commons in 1870, with new bills being considered almost annually throughout the decade.[13] Though women's rights remained a prevalent topic of discussion in British politics, any action taken on these discussions was much slower to occur. In 1884, the year that Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* premiered, 104 Liberals who had previously pledged support for women's suffrage actually voted against the suffrage bill. [14] Carolyn Spring states that "The Reform Act of 1884, increasing the male electorate to around two thirds of adult men, heightened [women's] sense of injustice, yet the period 1885 to 1892 was conspicuous by the dearth of women's suffrage debate in Parliament."[15] Women were outsiders to Parliament, so to gain the government's attention to their requests, activists needed to enlist the help of men, even though men could not truly understand their plight.[16] The fate of women's suffrage was largely in the hands of men during the Victorian era. However, Angela V. John and Claire Eustance advocate for

[11] Several moments in the poem and libretto combined lead to the presumption that both Hilarion and Ida did not have their mothers in their lives for long.
[12] Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, "Shared histories – differing identities: introducing masculinities, male support, and women's suffrage," in *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920,* edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 21.
[13] Carolyn Spring, "The political platform and the language of support for women's suffrage, 1890-1920," in *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920,* edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 159.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., 160-161.
[16] Ibid, 159.

caution when studying men and masculinity because of the risk of "subsuming women within a dominant male frame of reference" because "history has been about men for so long." They point out the benefits of studying "men qua men." In other words, "masculinity is everywhere but nowhere."[17] This is relevant regarding Gilbert and Sullivan because they were writing in a time when misogyny was the norm, despite any good intentions on the part of male allies to advance the feminist movement. Those who argue that Gilbert and Sullivan's works are misogynist are indeed accurate, but this designation of misogyny becomes much more complex when their operettas are contextualized within Victorian society, which was inherently misogynist. Even within the antiquated views of gender which predominated the nineteenth-century, Gilbert and Sullivan's works may still be considered progressive regarding women's rights.

Ida's real-life counterparts in the fight for women's rights have faced both support and opposition from men. The men in Ida's life demonstrate either remarkable defence of her project or stand firmly against her which mirrors women's struggles in Victorian England. Men played an important part in achieving women's suffrage through "the moral support of sympathetic fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons."[18] Some men joined all-male suffrage societies while some worked for societies such as the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), although they could not be official members of these societies. Like Hilarion is mocked by some of the patriarchal figures in his life, male allies of the Victorian women's suffrage movement were often attacked for speaking out and portrayed as lesser beings, much like the women they were supporting.[19] Hunt states that "those who supported women's advance, or progressive reformism generally, were considered unpatriotic and thus their

[17] John and Eustance, 2.
[18] Ibid., 1.
[19] Ibid., 20.

masculinity itself was suspect."[20] Despite the negative reactions that male feminist allies faced, these allies continued to support the women's suffrage movement, as they believed that suffrage would benefit both men and women.

Karen Hunt describes three major reactions to women's suffrage in the nineteenth-century: antifeminist responses, masculinist responses, and profeminist responses. She states:

> **Antifeminist** texts relied on traditional arguments, as well as Social Darwinist and natural law notions, to reassert the patriarchal family and to oppose women's suffrage and participation in the public sphere. **Masculinist** texts sought to combat the purported feminization of manhood by proposing islands of masculinity, untainted by feminizing forces; proscribed homosociality was also cast as an effective antidote to homosexuality. **Profeminist** texts openly embraced women's claims for changes in public participation and private and family life, both out of a sense of justice and the conviction that such changes would benefit men and challenge the emerging industrial capitalist order.[21]

We can see examples of all three responses throughout Ida's story. As discussed in Chapter 1, both William Weaver and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick agreed that Tennyson wrote *The Princess* as a response to Victorian politics of homosocial desire.[22] This places Tennyson's response to women's rights, at least in the context of *The Princess*, in Hunt's masculinist classification. In addition, Tennyson's response to women's rights through *The Princess* could also be classified as profeminist because he created a powerful woman with remarkable self-agency through which to discuss an ultimately progressive stance on Victorian society. Especially relevant in Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* is the contrast between the male characters' antifeminist and profeminist responses. King Hildebrand is an obvious example of an antifeminist response to Ida's project, with his violent threats toward the women's university and his disdain for Ida's intelligence and ambition. Ida's brothers, in all three versions of her story, are representative of Hunt's profeminist classification, with their unquestioning loyalty toward their sister and

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[20] Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question, 1884-1911,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19960, 267.
[21] Hunt, 261.
[22] Weaver, 123. and Sedgwick, 119.

their steadfast defence of her against Hildebrand. Hilarion/The Prince also acts as a profeminist ally for Ida as he frequently demonstrates respect for her determination and agency. This directly contrasts with his father's mockery of women's rights. Hilarion's support of Ida is important because he is frequently ridiculed as unmanly and his identity is questioned by many of the men in his life, much like the real-life male feminist allies of the Victorian era.

In Tennyson's poem, Ida's first experience with a man acting as her ally in her feminist project is her father, King Gama. Ida's entire goal of founding her own university for women became possible through the support of her father, who supplied her with a summer palace wherein to teach her girls. Gama tells the Prince:

> At last she begged a boon,
> A certain summer-palace which I have
> Hard by your father's frontier: I said no,
> Yet being an easy man, gave it: and there,
> All wild to found an University
> For maidens, on the spur she fled.[23]

Although he was initially reluctant, Gama enabled Ida's university to flourish and seemed to view his daughter as visionary, if rather misguided.[24] King Gama contrasts with the Prince's father Hildebrand because of his reluctance to battle against his daughter while Hildebrand is all too eager to start a war. Hildebrand calls, "But red-faced war has rods of steel and fire. / She yields, or war," while Gama asks the Prince for his opinion: "you spent a stormy time / With our strange girl. And yet they say that still / You love her. Give us, then, your mind at large. / How say you, war or not?"[25] The Prince emphatically replies, "Not war, if possible, O king…. I would the old God of war himself were dead."[26] Gama's willingness to seek the Prince's opinion is a testament to his growing respect of him. Gama's relationship with the Prince has

[23] Tennyson, 382. Ida's father was reluctant to support this project but did so because he was "loth to breed dispute."
[24] Gama says "Her brethren, tho' they love her, look upon her / As on a kind of paragon. And I / (Pardon me saying it) were much loth to breed / Dispute betwixt myself and mine. But since / (And I confess with right) you think me bound /In some sort, I can give you letters to her." (Tennyson, 380)
[25] Tennyson, 411.
[26] Ibid., 411.

its roots at the beginning of the first cantos when Gama says, "I would you had her, prince, with all my heart."[27] Since he respects his daughter, he is able to see that the Prince may very well prove a good match for Ida, even when other men in the story disrespect the Prince due to his effeminacy and sympathies for Ida's cause. He proves himself to be an ally for Ida, even when frustrated with her extreme methods. Gama supports other feminist allies, in manners keeping with his position as comic relief in the operetta, when he encourages Hilarion in his pursuit of Ida and when he allows his sons to fight on Ida's behalf.

Hildebrand and Gama demonstrate vastly different approaches to solving the issue of Ida's self-imposed ostracization. Where Hildebrand is prone to violence, Gama is more patient, despite his self-admitted characterization in the operetta as "disagreeable."[28] Though Gama possesses a sour disposition and enjoys goading the other characters, he ultimately supports his daughter. Gilbert's Gama praises Ida and her university when he brags about his daughter to Hildebrand, Hilarion, Cyril and Florian:

> The girl has beauty, virtue, wit
> Grace, humour, wisdom, charity, and pluck….
> She rules a woman's University
> With full a hundred girls, who learn of her….
> But, no mere girls, my good young gentlemen;
> With all the college learning that you boast,
> The youngest there will prove a match for you.[29]

After informing the other men of his daughter's many virtues, Gama informs them that Ida and her students have no interest in men, except perhaps those who may be their intellectual equals: "He who desires to gain their favour must / Be qualified to strike their teeming brains, / And not their hearts."[30] Following this exchange, Gama encourages Hilarion to "address the lady / Most politely," while Hildebrand threatens to "storm the lady" and tells Gama that "We will

[27] Ibid., 381.
[28] Gilbert and Sullivan, 264.
[29] Gilbert and Sullivan, 266. Gilbert plays with the word "match" for some time here, as Cyril responds, "Fancy, a hundred matches – all alight! / That's if I strike them as I hope to do!"
[30] Ibid., 266.

hang you, never fear."[31] Gama's support of Ida, especially in contrast with Hildebrand's violence, is significant because he is pressured by his peers to destroy Ida's university but chooses not to. Michael Kimmel states that "The rise of feminism in [the] late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century…. prompted what we might call a crisis of masculinity, because the meanings that had constituted traditional gender definitions were challenged. Men's responses included a frightened retreat to traditional configurations, the demarcation of new institutional spheres for the vigorous assertion of a renewed masculinity, and men's support for feminist claims."[32] While Hildebrand yearns to force Ida to conform to tradition, Gama is the catalyst from which Ida's university materialized, and therefore a compelling example of a male feminist ally. He represents the Victorian men who, despite a widespread crisis of masculinity, chose to support women's rights.

Ida's Brothers as Feminist Allies

Ida's brother Arac, even more than her father, demonstrates remarkable support and respect for his sister in each version of her story. He is a relevant example of a nineteenth-century feminist ally. This allyship is apparent in Tennyson's poem when Arac tells Ida, "I am your warrior," which is a sincere declaration of loyalty, even though he disagrees with some of her methods.[33] Arac's wording here likens to male feminist allies of the late nineteenth-century. Sandra Holton discusses how male allies were prepared to position themselves on the front lines of the fight for suffrage, both through "passive resistance and…. window breaking."[34] Some male suffragists even referred to themselves as "soldiers" for the women's cause.[35] Arac stands strong in his support of his sister as he tells the Prince that:

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[31] Ibid., 267.
[32] Michael Kimmel, "Men's Responses to Feminism at the Turn of the Century," In *Gender and Society* 1, no. 3 (1987), 262.
[33] Tennyson, 422.
[34] Sandra Holton, "Manliness and Militancy: the political protest of male suffragists and the gendering of the 'suffragette' identity," in *The Men's Share: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920,* edited by Angela V. John and Claire Eustance, (New York: Routledge, 2013), 115.
[35] Holton, 111.

> I take her for the flower of womankind,
> And so I often told her, right or wrong.
> And, Prince, she can be sweet to those she loves,
> And, right or wrong, I care not. This is all:
> I stand upon her side.[36]

Throughout the poem, Arac frequently reasserts his constancy to Ida through his words and his actions. His support and his designation as a warrior which he uses for the benefit of his sister's cause connects him to late nineteenth-century feminist allies.

Arac encourages the Prince to "waive [his] claim" to Ida to avoid an all-out war.[37] The preference that The Prince and Arac demonstrate for peace rather than war points to their progressive view of society, despite Hildebrand's aggressive response to Ida's university. The Prince considers Arac's request until one of Ida's twin brothers[38] insults the Prince's masculinity saying, "The woman's garment hid the woman's heart," which Cyril responds to with violence.[39] The Prince and his two friends agree to battle Ida's three brothers to determine the result of the war. The Prince recognizes that this is an unfavourable line of action. The Prince states, "if we win, we fail: she would not keep / Her compact."[40] Despite this, he resists any ideas of war against Ida directly: "not war; / Lest I lose all."[41] While the brothers fight the battle on Ida's behalf, The Prince resists the battle on her behalf. Ida's brothers and The Prince advocate for Ida in their own way and can therefore be considered allies, despite the flawed demonstration of their support, much like feminist allies of the Victorian era.

The men send a missive to Ida telling her of the battle, and she sends a response to Arac that, somewhat surprisingly, asks him to win the battle but to let the Prince live because he

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[36] Tennyson, 414.
[37] Ibid., 414.
[38] Tennyson does not name the "twin brothers" in his poem. In the operetta, these brothers are given the names Guron and Scynthius, though there is no mention of the men being twins.
[39] Tennyson, 414.
[40] Ibid., 415.
[41] Ibid., 412.

saved her life.[42] In her letter, she explains her reasons for her rejection of men. Ida praises her brothers in the letter, stating that her brothers are "the woman's Angel guards… the sole men to be mingled with our cause, / The sole men we shall prize in the aftertime."[43] The strong bond between Ida and her brothers is apparent from the standpoint of both Ida and her male family members. The brothers' support of Ida is the most compelling example of male feminism that Ida experiences. Arac's steadfast allegiance leads Ida to consider his opinion over that of any other man, including her father. Tennyson's Gama says to the Prince, "Arac's word is thrice / As ours with Ida."[44] In Tennyson's poem, Psyche flees the castle with Cyril after the men's disguise is discovered by Ida but leaves her child behind at the castle. Ida, in her desperation and rage at Psyche's betrayal, keeps the child for herself, even after Psyche and Arac beg her to return the child to her mother. Arac says to Ida, "I and mine have fought / Your battle" and encourages Ida to mend her relationship with Lady Psyche.[45] After a period of self-reflection, Ida extends both forgiveness and apology to Psyche. Arac is unique in his ability to speak sense to Ida while still respecting her project and recognizing her intelligence and innovation. Arac presents himself to both Ida and his peers as a staunch feminist ally, and Ida recognizes this through her words and her actions, depending on him to help her achieve her feminist goals.

Gilbert and Sullivan's Arac, Guron, and Scynthius may also be categorized as allies to Ida's cause. In the operetta, the brothers support and respect their sister, despite their overall characterization as bumbling warriors, contrasting with Tennyson's more sensitive men. During their introductory trio, the brothers sing that:

> Politics we bar,
> They are not our bent.
> On the whole we are

[42] Ibid., 415-416. Immediately following the reveal of the men's disguise thanks to Cyril singing a bawdy tavern song, the Prince rescues Ida when she falls in a river in her flight away from the men. This event is consistent in the operetta as well.
[43] Ibid., 416.
[44] Ibid., 413.
[45] Ibid., 422.

Not intelligent.[46]

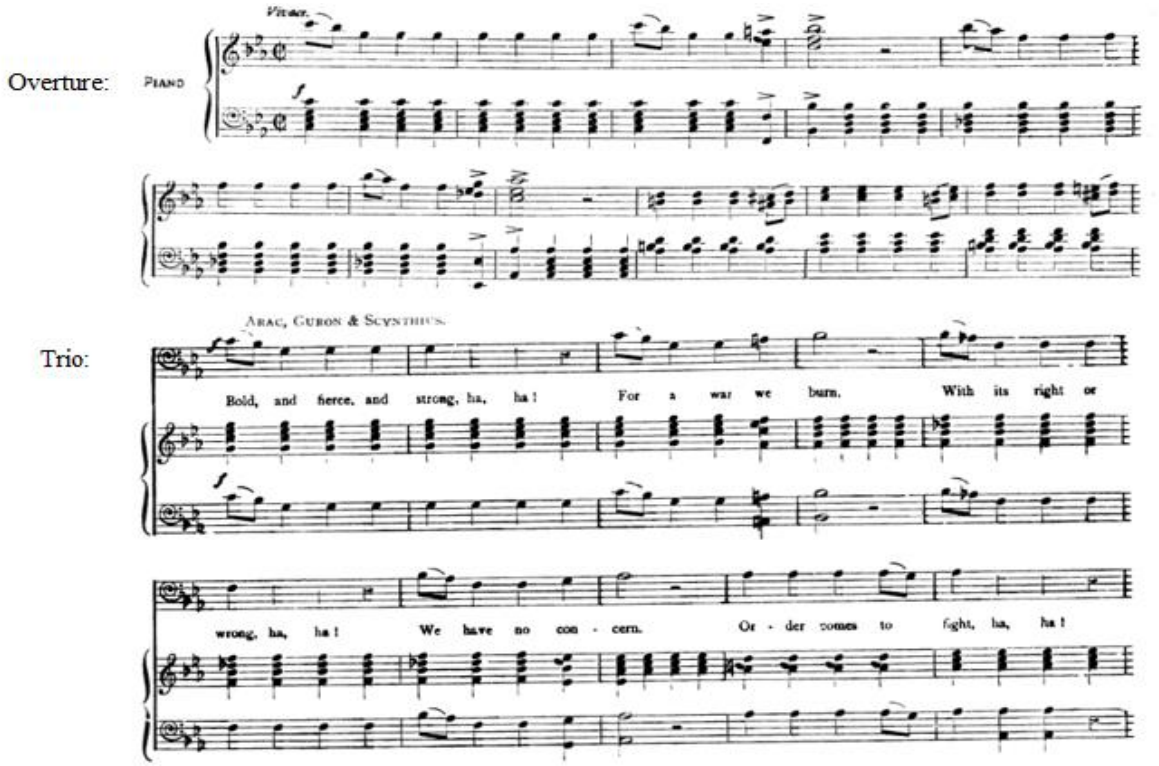
However, they also recognize that they have skills which may be useful:

But with doughty heart,
And with trusty blade
We can play our part –
Fighting is our trade.[47]

Arac, Guron, and Scynthius have no interest in politics because they cannot understand them. However, if the three brothers understand one thing, it is familial loyalty, especially towards their sister, as they are willing to die in battle for her sake. They 'play their part' by defending their sister in the only way they know. The brothers offer to fight on Ida's behalf against King Hildebrand, who aims to "storm [the] walls" if Ida does not marry Hilarion.[48]

Sullivan seems to have created a musical connection between Ida and her brothers. The overture to the operetta includes a militaristic excerpt from the brothers' first trio (Fig. 2).

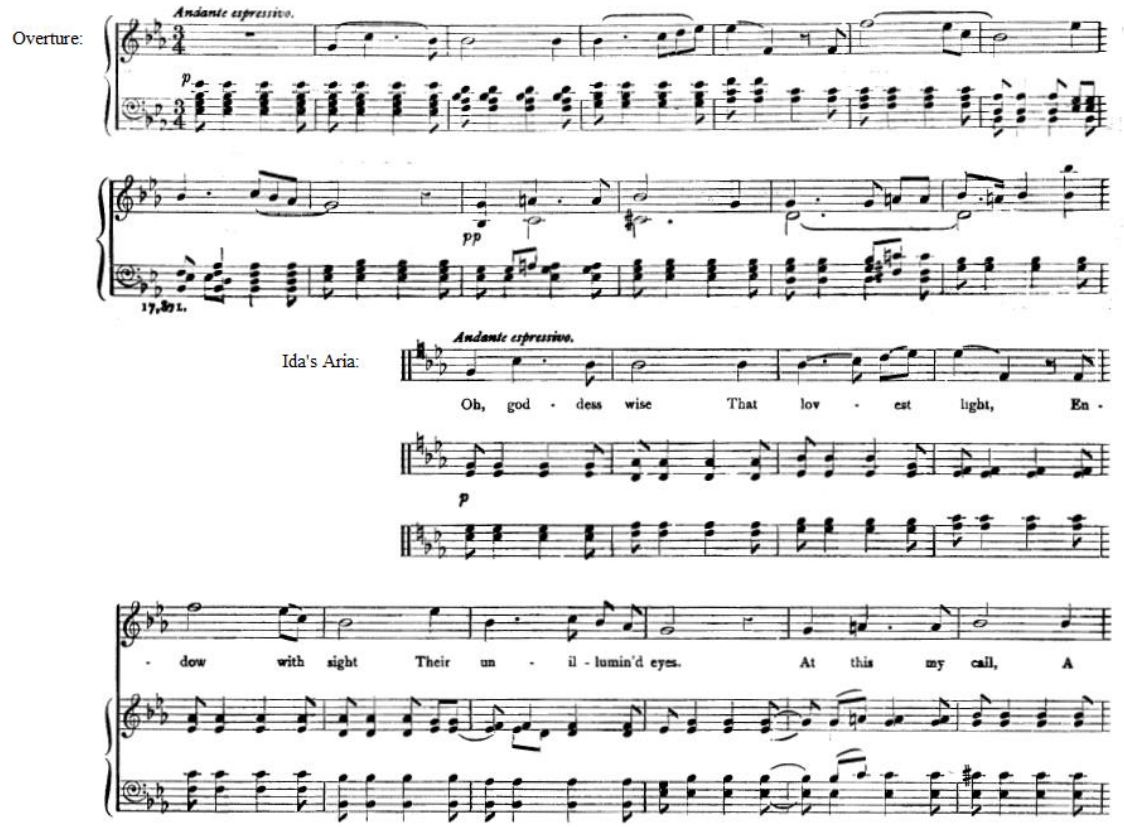
Fig. 2 *Princess Ida* overture compared to the brothers' first song "We are warriors three."



[46] Sullivan and Gilbert, 21.
[47] Ibid., 22.
[48] Gilbert, 296.

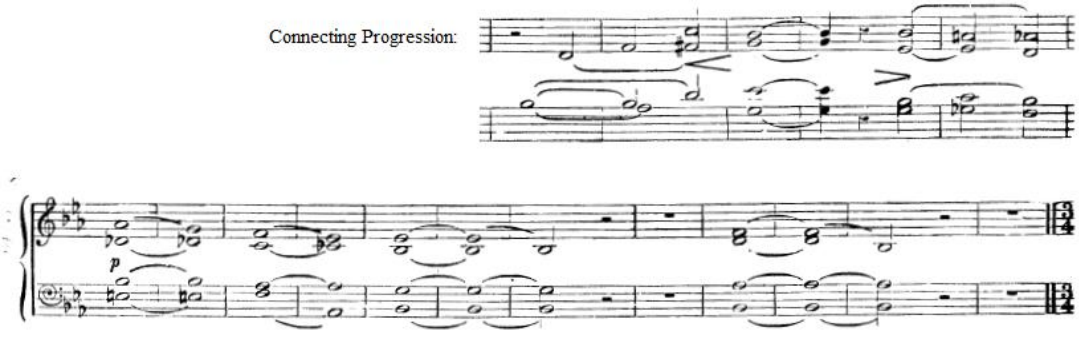
This excerpt leads directly into the theme from Ida's first aria, "Oh goddess wise" (Fig. 3).[49]

Fig. 3 *Princess Ida* overture compared to Ida's aria "Oh, goddess wise."



These are the only two excerpts from the operetta in the overture. Sullivan seamlessly connected the two themes with a harmonic progression not found elsewhere in the operetta (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Sullivan's connecting progression between Ida's brothers and Ida.



[49] Sullivan and Gilbert, 48.

This sophisticated progression hearkens to Wagnerian chromaticism. Sullivan's use of Wagnerian chromaticism in relation to Ida's theme connects her to the great romantic sopranos of Wagner's operas. I surmise that Sullivan may have purposely used the overture to clarify the link between Ida and her brothers at the very opening of the operetta, demonstrating their close family connection and the brothers' position as allies. He also granted Ida power and sophistication through his reference to Wagnerian chromaticism in his overture.

Despite their drastically different characterizations, Ida's brothers hold similar places in the plot, no matter which version is examined. In the operetta, Ida's brothers sing in their first trio: "For a war we burn, / With its *right or wrong*…. We have no concern."[50] This mirrors Arac's dialogue from Tennyson's poem when he says, "I take her for the flower of womankind, / And so I often told her, right or wrong…. And, *right or wrong*, I care not. This is all: / I stand at her side."[51] The brothers, in both the poem and the operetta, place Ida above their individual thoughts of morality. Even more compelling, Gilbert's brothers, since they do not understand politics and are characterized as unintelligent, depend on their sister to be their moral compass. Arac, Guron, and Scynthius believe that any war Ida would ask them to fight must be for a just cause. Ida's brothers remain a source of strength and dependability for her throughout the operetta. This is especially evidenced by Act III, when Ida feels betrayed by her women and is forced to accept the help of her brothers to fight her battle. When her students are fearful and reluctant to battle against the men, Gilbert and Sullivan's Ida, despairing at the lack of support, cries: "I'll meet these men alone / Since all my women have deserted me!"[52] This is followed by her aria, "I built upon a rock," wherein she laments the downfall of her dreams.[53] Following this, Ida is informed that her brothers have come to fight for her, and she agrees to admit them. In response to Ida's disregard of her own rules, Lady Blanche exclaims, "Infamous! / One's

[50] Sullivan and Gilbert, 23. Emphasis mine.
[51] Tennyson, 414. Emphasis mine.
[52] Gilbert, 302.
[53] Sullivan and Gilbert, 122.

brothers, ma'am, are men!" to which Ida replies, "So I have heard…. In this emergency, / Even one's brothers may be turned to use." [54] She recognizes familial support when it is offered to her and grows to depend on it. Though she accepts help with great reluctance, she acknowledges her brothers' loyalty and trusts them to fight on her behalf. During Ida's lowest moment in the opera, she accepts the help of her brothers to fight for her cause. They rise to the challenge of acting as male allies for their sister's ambitious project.

Victorian family dynamics began to undergo a significant shift in the mid nineteenth-century which led to a change in the roles of mothers and fathers and a resulting widespread crisis of masculinity. During the decade immediately preceding the premiere of *Princess Ida*, women's suffrage was gaining both visibility and momentum, but misogyny was still the norm for Victorian society. These are important concepts to consider when contextualizing Ida's story and the place of men in her project within its historical setting. Keeping in mind the fact that misogyny was the status quo, we can read certain actions and words from men of the nineteenth-century as supportive of women's rights, even if their methods and language appear outdated and backwards to current society. The men of the nineteenth-century both supported and rejected women's suffrage, and Ida's story includes characters which epitomize both ends of the spectrum. Hildebrand is a clear representation of an antifeminist response to women's suffrage while Arac and Hilarion can be read as allies to the fight for women's rights and supportive of Ida as she creates opportunities for revolution.

Ida's Love of Family

Victorian family dynamics were a crucial shaping factor to the gender ideals of the period, and family was one of the most important concepts of the time. Ida demonstrates love toward her father and her brothers throughout the operetta despite her vow to "abjure Tyrannic

[54] Gilbert and Sullivan, 303.

man!"[55] During the course of both the poem and the operetta, she gradually becomes less hostile towards men and more willing to allow respectful men into her life as allies. This concession is greatly influenced by her family's loyalty toward her. In the operetta, the first sign of Ida's love for her family is during the Act II finale when she attempts to reassure her brothers that Hildebrand dares not kill them. The brothers sing, "If you thwart this gentleman, / He'll slay us."[56] Ida responds, "Be reassured, nor fear his anger blind, / His menaces are idle as the wind. / He dares not kill you – vengeance lurks behind!"[57] This is the first instance of Ida knowingly showing kindness towards any man in the operetta, which is testament to her high opinion of her brothers and her strong sense of family.[58] With this speech, she is not only bolstering her brothers, but she is also threatening quick retribution upon Hildebrand if he kills them. However, Hildebrand does not take her vengeance seriously and states that he will indeed kill her brothers if Ida does not "release Hilarion…. And be his bride."[59] Despite his threats, she remains defiant to Hildebrand's demands, while also seeking to ensure her brothers' safety.

Ida's second demonstration of familial love occurs when she shows compassion for her father. In Tennyson's poem, King Hildebrand keeps Ida's father as a hostage in return for the safe return of the Prince, while Ida's brothers remain free. However, in the operetta, Ida's entire family is taken hostage shortly after Gama and Hildebrand meet each other at Hildebrand's castle in Act I. In Act III, Hildebrand sends Gama to Ida's university with the message that Hildebrand will allow Ida's brothers to fight against Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian on her behalf, with the winner determining whether Ida marries Hilarion or not. Gama tells Ida that

[55] Gilbert, 310.
[56] Sullivan and Gilbert, 104.
[57] Ibid., 105-106.
[58] She earlier speaks to Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian with kindness, but this is when they are dressed as students of her university and she assumes she speaks with young women.
[59] Sullivan and Gilbert, 107.

Hildebrand plans to "Pit my sons, / My three brave sons, against these popinjays."[60] Ida is angered by this arrangement:

> Insult on insult's head! Are we a stake
> For fighting men? What fiend possesses thee,
> That thou hast come with offers such as these
> From such as he to such an one as I?[61]

Gama admits that it was "the pale devil of a shaking heart" that drove him to speak to Ida, knowingly breaking her rules. He weeps of his misfortunes to his daughter, singing that he had "nothing whatever to grumble at!"[62] Gama's song is a comic interlude to the sincerity and mourning of Ida's "I built upon a rock." Gama sings:

> I offered gold
> In sums untold
> To all who'd contradict me –
> I said I'd pay
> A pound a day
> To anyone who kicked me.[63]

Hildebrand, well-acquainted with his adversary and his love of complaining, knew that the worst punishment to thrust upon Gama would be to treat him with utmost politeness. Ida responds to her father by saying, "My poor old father! How he must have suffered! / Well, well, I yield!" and Gama exclaims, "She yields! I'm saved!"[64] Here, we see Ida's extreme stance on gender separatism beginning to shift. Her change of heart is not influenced by Hildebrand's threats or Hilarion's romantic love, but rather due to strong familial bonds. Her first concession to Hildebrand's demands is because of her father's suffering. At this point she does not give up her university, she only accepts the help of her male family members to win

[60] Gilbert and Sullivan, 304.
[61] Ibid., 304.
[62] Sullivan and Gilbert, 119.
[63] Gilbert and Sullivan, 305.
[64] Ibid., 306. It is worth noting that Ida also expresses concern for her students here. She tells them, "get you all within the castle walls." She has recognized their inability to fight, and knowing that her warrior brothers are fighting on her behalf, her priority is to keep her loved ones safe – this includes her father, her brothers, and her students.

the battle on her behalf. She accepts her family's help for her own sake, but she also agrees to the three-on-three battle for the sake of her father and brothers.

Gilbert and Sullivan's Ida demonstrates the most compelling moment of familial love with her compassion towards her brothers when they lie injured after the battle. This scene is the largest discrepancy between Gilbert's libretto for *Princess Ida* and Tennyson's poem. Tennyson's three brothers are victorious over the Prince, Cyril, and Florian during the final battle, while Arac, Guron, and Scynthius suffer sound defeat at the hands of Hilarion and his friends in the operetta. Gilbert and Sullivan's Ida has been moving further away from her extreme ideals since the finale of Act II, but finally resigns her position at the university when her brothers are injured:

> Hold! Stay your hands! We yield ourselves to you!
> Ladies, my brothers all lie bleeding there!
> Bind up their wounds – but look the other way.
> Is this the end?[65]

Ida's concern for her brothers and her father leads to her surrender, not love for Hilarion or fear of Hildebrand. Ultimately, the love of her family is the catalyst for her submission. Therefore, she does not yield because of an antifeminist desire for marriage, but rather to save her family, and because she recognizes the potential for men to act as allies in her mission for equality.

Hilarion as an Ally

Tennyson's Prince is portrayed as sympathetic to Ida's cause and in awe of his betrothed throughout the poem.[66] Gilbert and Sullivan's Hilarion, in contrast, undergoes a drastic paradigm shift throughout the operetta as he changes from mocking and doubtful to

[65] Gilbert and Sullivan, 309.

[66] Tennyson's poem seems to imply that the Prince and Ida were betrothed as children, not married. However, the operetta seems to imply that the couple may have been married as infants. The operetta goes back on forth on the use of "betrothed" and "wife." The first mention is near the very beginning of Act I when Hildebrand states that "our son Hilarion was betrothed [to Ida] / At the early age of one." However, shortly thereafter, in Hilarion's first aria, he sings, "I was twice her age, I'm told, / Twenty years ago! / Husband twice as old as wife / Argues ill for married life," implying that the marriage ceremony took place when the couple were infants. "Betrothed" and "married" or "wife" are used interchangeably in the operetta, so I use these terms interchangeably as well, since there is some confusion as to their official relationship status.

supportive and open-minded. Though he expresses admiration towards Ida early in the opera, he also mocks the women's university up until the moment when he finally meets Ida in person in Act II. After he sees the university in person and meets Ida, his doubt regarding her project dissipates and he becomes willing to move forward as her equal in their relationship. This is evidenced by the sincerity of his dialogue to Ida, and the fact that he no longer mocks her goals once he meets her in person. Ida likewise shifts from rejecting all men without exception, to gradually admitting that men can become allies for her feminist project. By the end of the operetta, Hilarion and Ida face their future as equals.

Hilarion's individual journey from mocking Ida's university to a staunch ally has several stages. Despite this, he never shows any hesitation about his relationship with Ida, even at the beginning of the operetta. In Act I, he anxiously awaits the arrival of his betrothed, but is doubtful that she will come:

> I've heard
> That Princess Ida has forsworn the world,
> And, with a band of women, shut herself
> Within a lonely country house, and there
> Devotes herself to stern philosophies![67]

Despite his awareness that Ida is highly strange according to the society in which he lives, Hilarion is adamant that he does not want to lose his fascinating wife. His father says to him, "I would say the loss of such a wife / Is one to which a reasonable man / Would easily be reconciled."[68] Hilarion responds, "Oh, no! Or I am not a reasonable man."[69] He recognizes Ida's singularity and still wants to pursue her; Ida's 'stern philosophies' do not discourage Hilarion in the slightest. Despite Hildebrand's desire to "storm the lady" and hang her father, Hilarion insists on winning Ida's hand without force, assured in his ability to woo her with "expressive glances" and "scented showers / Of fairest flowers."[70] Hilarion is portrayed in Act

[67] Gilbert and Sullivan, 261.
[68] Ibid., 262.
[69] Ibid., 262.
[70] Sullivan and Gilbert, 32.

I as a gentleman with firmly rooted ideas of chivalry, but his ideas on how to win Ida's heart are simplistic and stereotypical.

Hilarion's early approval of Ida is tested during the men's first appearance in the women-centred Act II when he gives in to pressure from Cyril and Florian and enthusiastically participates with them in mocking the women's university. In a cheerful trio, the three men list fantastical goals that they imagine the women of Castle Adamant aspiring to. Florian sings, "A Woman's college! maddest folly going! / What can girls learn within its walls worth knowing."[71] Hilarion replies, "Hush, scoffer; ere you sound your puny thunder," which may be understood as a defence of the women, if it was not followed by a lengthy joke at the expense of Ida and her students.[72] Hilarion's verse states, in part, that the women will "send a wire / To the moon," and "get sunbeams from cucumbers."[73] Following this trio, the men don the women's academic robes and sing another trio in which they flounce around like "lovely lady undergraduates" and sing of what kind of maidens they would be.[74] This trio mocks and stereotypes women. Significantly, this is the last time we see Hilarion mocking women, because he meets Ida immediately afterward and completely changes his views.

The Act II quartet "The world is but a broken toy" sung by Ida, Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian, is an important turning point for Hilarion.[75] Wren notes that "while Cyril and Florian continue to deride the women's college, after "Broken Toy" Hilarion never has another negative word about it."[76] Act II of *Princess Ida* has long been described as having a musical

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[71] Ibid., 55.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Gilbert and Sullivan, 55-56. This trio contains some of Gilbert's most horrifying and offensive lyrics. Cyril sings: "Then the little pigs they're teaching / For to fly; / And the n----rs they'll be bleaching, / By and by." This lyric obviously does not contribute positively to a modern feminist reading of *Princess Ida*, but understanding the Victorian era's penchant for racism, it does not necessarily negate a proto-feminist reading of the operetta within its Victorian context. The use of this word is no longer common performance practice in *Princess Ida* and the offensive lyrics were replaced with "And they'll practice what they're preaching" in the 1954 D'Oyly Carte revival.
[74] Gilbert and Sullivan, 280.
[75] Sullivan and Gilbert, 66.
[76] Wren, 147-148.

"string of pearls," and this quartet is an example of what many consider to be among Sullivan's best compositions.[77] Ida sings to the three men:

> The world is but a broken toy,
> Its pleasure hollow, false its joy,
> Unreal its loveliest hue,
> Alas!
> It's pains alone are true,
> Alas![78]

Sullivan's music here is complex, melancholy and lends the text a sincerity that may have otherwise been overshadowed by Gilbert's penchant for melodrama. Hilarion is obviously quite taken by Ida's authenticity and responds to her:

> The world is everything you say,
> The world we think has had its day.
> Its merriment is slow,
> Alas!
> We've tried it and we know,
> Alas![79]

After meeting Ida in person, Hilarion agrees with many of her ideas and begins to fall in love with Ida as a whole person, instead of a figure in his mind. Hilarion's attraction to Ida's ideals leads him to become a feminist ally rather than someone who mocks the very idea of women's independence and education.

The final scene in Act II which demonstrates Hilarion's dedication to Ida is the aria that he sings to Ida after he rescues her from the river and she sentences him to die for breaching her university. Faced directly with Ida's harsh rules and the seriousness with which she takes her oath, Hilarion still refuses to give up his love for her. Faced with Ida's wrath, he nonetheless sings to her:

> No word of thine – no stern command
> Can teach my heart to rove.

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[77] The "string of pearls" was first named by Henry Mackinnon Walbrook in *Gilbert and Sullivan Opera: A History and a Comment* (London: F.V. White & Co., 1922), 75. Many critics have called the music of *Princess Ida* some of Sullivan's most beautiful and successful. See Guidici, Cynthia. "Iconic Ida: Tennyson's Princess and her uses." Doctoral Dissertation, University of North Texas, 1997, 106.

[78] Sullivan and Gilbert, 66.

[79] Ibid.

Then rather perish by thy hand
Than live without thy love![80]

Hilarion's music, Benedict Taylor states, is composed with "restrained romanticism and lyrical ethos" and Sullivan's style in this aria lends credibility to Hilarion's sincere affection for Ida.[81] This is the last time Hilarion is seen during Act II, and he hardly has any dialogue or song at all in Act III, so this is his final chance to say what he needs to. His participation in the rest of the opera is overwhelmingly passive. Even when he spars for Ida's hand against her three brothers near the Act III finale his voice is not clearly heard as he is drowned out by Ida, the women of Castle Adamant, the chorus, and his own father. The remainder of the operetta, from Hilarion's final aria onward, belongs to Ida. It seems that Hilarion is not only willing to face death on behalf of his betrothed, he is also willing to be silenced.

Ida changes her stance regarding Hilarion and men in general by the end of the operetta. She admits her attraction to the prince during the finale of Act II. She sings, "So quick! away with him although / He saved my life! / That he is fair, and strong, and tall, / Is very evident to all.[82] When she first discovered the men in disguise, she knows no mercy, even though Hilarion had just saved her life. She tells Hilarion and his friends, "The man whose sacrilegious eye / Invade our strict seclusion dies."[83] Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian are then quickly arrested by the university's women. However, in response to Hildebrand's threat on her brothers' lives and his demands that she release Hilarion and become his bride, she sings, "To yield at once to such a foe / With shame were rife."[84] At this point, she recognizes that her true foe is Hildebrand. Ida refuses to yield to the rival king but softens her response to Hilarion. She tells her women to take Hilarion "away," rather than to kill him outright, and has now begun to see his positive

[80] Sullivan and Gilbert, 95.
[81] Benedict Taylor, *Arthur Sullivan: A Musical Reappraisal*. Abdingdon: Routledge, 2018, 121. Taylor contrasts the romanticism of Ida and Hilarion's music to that of Gama and Hildebrand, who are usually given comic patter arias, and that of Ida's brothers, whose songs are "archaic Handelian parodies."
[82] Sullivan and Gilbert, 107-108.
[83] Ibid., 93-94.
[84] Ibid., 107.

attributes, whereas earlier in Act II, she saw Hilarion and his friends as "Man-monsters."[85] Instead of threatening Hilarion with death, she states that she will die herself as she sings, "Yet I will die before I call / Myself his wife!"[86] This contrasts with Hilarion's aria 'Whom thou hast chained' when he sings, "If dead to me my heart's desire, / Why should I wish to live?"[87] Hilarion was willing to die by Ida's hand rather than continue to live without her love, while Ida is now no longer willing to kill Hilarion but therefore sees the only way to get out of the marriage is to die herself. Act II is the apex of Ida's and Hilarion's conflict and an important turning point for Ida's extreme ideologies.

Hilarion's final dialogue in *Princess Ida* demonstrates his allyship as he now acknowledges Ida's agency and her position as an educator who is well ahead of her time. Wren states that Hilarion "appeals to [Ida]…. as her best and sole remaining student."[88] Hilarion says to Ida:

> Try Man,
> Give him one chance, it's only fair – besides
> Women are far too precious, too divine,
> To try unproven theories upon.
> Experiments, the proverb says, are made
> On humble subjects – try our grosser clay,
> And mould it as you will![89]

Hilarion knows now that "expressive glances" and "scented showers" are not the way to Ida's heart, so he appeals to her intelligences and yields himself to her as her newest initiate. Wren states that Hilarion sang his earlier aria, 'Whom thou hast chained' in a state of helplessness, but even at the end of the operetta when Hilarion has earned "the right to command Ida as her conqueror," he remains "indifferent to power."[90] He recognizes Ida as an equal, and perhaps

[85] Gilbert and Sullivan., 293.
[86] Sullivan and Gilbert, 108.
[87] Ibid., 94-95.
[88] Wren, 152.
[89] Gilbert and Sullivan, 310.
[90] Wren, 151.

even his superior. Hilarion's potential as a supporter of women's rights existed from the beginning of the operetta, and meeting Ida in person set him firmly along the path to allyship.

Despite her decision to marry Hilarion, Ida retains her independence, her agency, and her goals of working towards gender equality at the end of the operetta. Ida's right to steer her own future is made obvious by Cyril's final lines of the opera:

> Remember too,
> Dear Madam, if at any time you feel
> A-weary of the Prince, you can return
> To Castle Adamant, and rule your girls
> As heretofore, you know.[91]

Psyche agrees that she will return to the university if she chooses, while Melissa firmly states that "however Florian turns out," she will under no circumstances return to Castle Adamant. This response seems to spark something in Ida and she finally sees her error. Ida gives the last spoken dialogue of the operetta:

> Hilarion,
> I have been wrong – I see my error now.
> Take me, Hilarion – "We will walk this world
> Yoked in all exercise of noble end!
> And so through those dark gates across the wild
> That no one knows!" Indeed, I love thee – Come![92]

Her mistake lies not in her drive for equality between the sexes, but rather in taking her ideology to extreme levels which isolated both herself and her beloved students. Even after the battle ends, Ida still believes in her "cherished scheme," but she has now tempered her extremism and is willing to allow more leniency in her search for equality.[93] Ida's transformation is complete as she recognizes her error and accepts Hilarion as a student, ally, and romantic partner.

[91] Gilbert and Sullivan, 311.
[92] Gilbert and Sullivan, 311.
[93] Gilbert and Sullivan, 310

Hilarion has one more moment to sing before the operetta closes, his final verse sung in response to Ida. Even now, he is beginning to let her take the lead. In the operetta's finale, Ida sings her pleasure at the new path her life is taking:

> With joy abiding,
> Together gliding
> Through life's variety,
> In sweet society,
> And thus enthroning
> The love I'm owning,
> On this atoning
> I will rely![94]

Hilarion answers her with his own verse:

> When day is fading,
> With serenading
> And such frivolity
> Of tender quality –
> With scented showers
> Of fairest flowers,
> The happy hours
> Will gaily fly![95]

The prince remains the hopeless romantic that we first met in Act I, but he now bestows his "scented showers" upon a willing partner, whom he admires and chooses to follow willingly. Throughout the operetta, Hilarion's potential as a feminist ally for Ida was growing just beneath the surface of his teasing exterior. He changes his thinking as he meets Ida and sees her passion and sincerity, and Ida accepts his willingness to learn and agrees to move forward in their life together as equals. Of course, Ida will always remember her contingency plan: she can always leave Hilarion whenever she grows "a-weary of the Prince."

The structure of the operetta itself reflects Ida's and Hilarion's positions in their relationship as it develops. No women have any solo lines, sung or spoken, in Act I.[96] In Act

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[94] Sullivan and Gilbert, 135.
[95] Ibid., 136.
[96] The women of the chorus sing in a few numbers in Act I but essentially women's voices are not present. Some modern productions have even removed the women's chorus from Act I entirely, such as the Ocean State Lyric Opera Company's 1997 production of *Princess Ida* in Rhode Island.

II, the action is centred around the women's university and women have the majority of the sung or spoken words – approximately 56%.[97] In Act III, the majority voice again belongs to the women, as they sing or speak approximately 54% of the words. Of all the solo characters, Hilarion and Ida are the most central to the narrative action, so I have counted how many words they each speak or sing. Ida has significantly more solo lines than Hilarion in the entire operetta, both sung and spoken. I surmise that Gilbert and Sullivan intended for Ida's voice to be the most prominent. Regardless of intention, however, Ida's voice emerges as the most noticeable, and this allows the audience to be confronted with her ideology, whether they agree with her or disagree with her. In Act II, Hilarion speaks or sings 722 words while Ida speaks or sings 809 words. When they first meet, and Ida is not aware that Hilarion is in fact her betrothed, Ida establishes herself as Hilarion's equal (or arguably, his intellectual superior), and her voice emerges as the most prominent of the two. In Act III, even as she eventually concedes to Hildebrand's demands and allows men into her life, she speaks or sings 730 words while Hilarion only speaks or sings 113 words during the entire final act. In total, Hilarion is granted 1165 words in the operetta while Ida is given 1539. Ida gradually fazes out Prince's voice and replaces it with her own. Ida does not speak for all women in the operetta, but the other ladies of Castle Adamant still have plenty to say. The women of *Princess Ida* ensure that once the audience's gaze is on them, their voices are heard in equal (or greater) proportion to the men's voices.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated that *Princess Ida* contains several representations of male feminist allies. Allyship has developed significantly from the nineteenth-century and looking back at men's actions on behalf of feminism in the Victorian era may seem backwards to current feminism. However, if Victorian men's actions are contextualized within the

[97] I calculated this based on how many words men sang in Act II versus how many words women sang in Act II.

misogynist period in which they lived, they can still be considered feminist allies. Ida's family is her first experience with male feminism and their support is the catalyst through which she decides to enter into a partnership of equals with Hilarion. Sullivan's music makes this familial support even more explicit by using Ida's theme and her brothers' theme in the overture. Although she leaves her university, Ida's insistence that her marriage will be "Yoked in all exercise of noble end" demonstrates that she has not given up her feminist project, but rather intends on pursuing it in a different manner.[98] Hilarion accepts his new role as her enthusiastic student in equality and social progression. The very structure of the operetta demonstrates Hilarion's willingness to support Ida's feminist project. The appearance of these compelling examples of male feminist allies in *Princess Ida* strengthens my argument that the operetta may be read as a proto-feminist work, which supports societal progress and gender equality.

[98] Gilbert and Sullivan, 311.

Conclusion

Princess Ida has long been labelled as an anti-feminist parody of the women's rights movement of nineteenth-century Britain. Through a consideration of the complexities of gender relations in Victorian England, I determined that the true intention behind *Princess Ida* and its predecessors was actually more nuanced than what many critics argue. The Victorian era was fraught with misogyny and the literature and theatre of the time reflects this. Therefore, we cannot consider *Princess Ida* from a twenty-first century lens because our current perceptions of gender ideologies and gender equality have evolved significantly over the past century and a half. While *Princess Ida* is indeed inherently misogynist because it was shaped by a misogynist society, its ultimate message may be interpreted as one of societal progress and the advancement of women's independence and women's rights. In this thesis I argued that, due to its compelling representations of gender, especially of women in power, the operetta may in fact be interpreted as presenting a proto-feminist perspective. This was accomplished first in the literature review through an exploration of important research regarding this topic which illuminated the complexity of the gender relations of Victorian England which are represented in the operetta. In Chapter 1, I discussed Tennyson's *The Princess*, Gilbert's burlesque *The Princess* and Gilbert and Sullivan's *Princess Ida* as a chronology of the operetta to better understand the operetta's history and to clarify what the operetta may be satirizing. Bearing in mind the myriad possible interpretations of *Princess Ida*, I argued that the operetta satirizes masculinity equally as much as it satirizes femininity, if not more so. Chapter 2 explored the place of male allyship in *Princess Ida* and its predecessors and argued that Ida's feminist male family members allowed her to temper her extreme ideals somewhat and seek a future with Hilarion at her side as a new ally. Through a consideration of Victorian family dynamics and men's historical reactions to feminism, I argued that *Princess Ida* includes examples of two responses to feminism: pro-feminist and anti-feminist.

Importantly, the male characters who embody a pro-feminist response emerge triumphant alongside Ida in the operetta. The very structure of the operetta reflects a shift from a masculine perspective to a feminine perspective which cements my argument that the operetta may be interpreted as proto-feminist. This thesis explored a Victorian operetta within Victorian contexts rather than through a modern-day perspective. This allows for a more moderate reading of Gilbert and Sullivan's objectives which acknowledges their positive intentions while also respecting the fact that their views of gender were a product of their time and not reflective of current gender scholarship.

This thesis is limited in scope because of the simplistic perspective of gender equality that existed in the Victorian era upon which I based my argument for proto-feminism in *Princess Ida*. Additionally, Gilbert and Sullivan's works, including *Princess Ida,* contain some troubling, at times horrific, language and representations of race and gender which are not at all conducive to a feminist reading. Studying a problematic work for evidence of feminism is difficult and may seem counterproductive, but understanding the literature, theatre, and music of the past, no matter how simplistic or disquieting, allows for a greater understanding of current streams of thought regarding equality and the history which has brought us to where we are today. Several of the well-respected scholars whose work I have cited advocate for readings of Ida's story which contrast directly with my interpretation. However, I hope that this demonstrates the complexity of the satire of *Princess Ida* rather than a disregard for well-established scholarship.

I advocate for further research which focuses on *Princess Ida* as it is one of Gilbert and Sullivan's lesser-known works and is therefore a less common topic of research compared to their more popular collaborations such as *The Mikado* or *Pirates of Penzance*. Additionally, I would like to see more exploration into the lives of Gilbert and Sullivan's female employees to gain more perspective on how they were treated as they worked both backstage and as

performers. Much of the scholarship which centres on Gilbert and Sullivan focuses on Gilbert's librettos with Sullivan emerging as a secondary creator. I encourage further research on Sullivan's compositions, particularly his compositions for the Savoy Operas, because I believe his music deserves more recognition from both admirers of the Savoy Operas and from researchers. In the future, I would love to see an industry-wide shift which seeks to undo the problematic representations of women, and people of colour, queer people, and other minorities in opera. This may be accomplished through newly-written operas which contain compelling and diverse representations of minorities both as characters and creators, or in vivid reformations of historical works which seek to undo the harm caused by the ignorant stereotyping of the past.

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