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ICONIC IDA: TENNYSON'S *THE PRINCESS* AND HER USES

DISSERTATION

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By

Cynthia Guidici, B.A., M.Ed.

Denton, Texas

May, 1997

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Alfred Lord Tennyson's *The Princess: A Medley* has posed interpretative difficulties for readers since its 1847 debut. Critics, editors, and artists contemporary with Tennyson as well as in this century have puzzled over the poem's stance on the issue of the so-called Woman Question. Treating Tennyson as the first reader of the poem yields an understanding of the title character, Princess Ida, as an ambassador of Tennyson's optimistic and evolutionary views of human development and links his work to that of visionary educators of nineteenth-century England.

Later artists, however, produced adaptations of the poem that twisted its hopefulness into satirical commentary, reduced its complexities to ease the task of reading, and put it to work in various causes, many ranged against the improvement of women's condition. In particular, a series of editions carried *The Princess* into various nations, classrooms, and homes, promoting interpretations that often obscure Tennyson's cautious optimism.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	v
Chapter	
INTRODUCTION: IDA AMONG THE CRITICS	2
I: IDA AND HER CREATOR	19
II: IDA TAKES THE STAGE	72
III: IDA AND HER EDITORS	144
AFTERWORD	183
BIBLIOGRAPHY	188

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
“Oh, there above the little grave”	1
“Ask me no more”	18
“A moment, while the trumpets blow”	71
“And sweet girl-graduates”	143
“Blow, bugle, blow”	182
“. . . Happy he”	187



"Oh, there above the little grave,
We kiss'd again with tears."

INTRODUCTION: IDA AMONG THE CRITICS

“For do we ever *utilize* [womanly] heroism? . . . We do not know what to do with it. We had rather it would not be there. Often we laugh at it. Always we find it troublesome. . . . Why can we not *make use* of the noble heroisms of our own day, instead of leaving them to rust?”—
Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*

“This chimera, this obscure laminated thing so pitifully squeezed, wheezing”—Daniel Albright used these words, extreme and uncommon words in scholarly writing, to describe Alfred Tennyson’s *The Princess: A Medley* (217) in his 1984 critical work, *Tennyson: The Muses’ Tug-of-War*. Since its publication in December 1847, critics and readers have described *The Princess* more graciously and even less kindly; for almost 150 years, the consensus on the poem reports a sense of dissatisfaction among readers, who come away from the poem unable to decide what to think about Tennyson’s heroine and her quest. The author himself only confounds the problem further: despite his own claim that he considered Ida “one of the noblest among his women” (Gordon 193), Tennyson himself provides us in the poem with a remarkably mixed response to his creation and her goals—at times it is hard to tell what the Princess

Ida herself believes. This ambiguity, more than any other problem with the text of the poem, has led to ungenerous assessments of Tennyson's medley since its appearance on 25 December 1847. In fact, readers who care to take the time will discover that they can find, in the contemporary and recent criticism of *The Princess*, almost any opinion and its opposite. The diversity of pronouncements on Ida's story does not clarify Tennyson's stance or dictate a central and traditional reading; rather, it demonstrates the rich medley, to use Tennyson's own designation, of responses to the poem that have found their way into the public's hands. As this study begins, I attempt to give readers an idea of the bulk of work available on the poem, touching on those critics whose work most closely relates to this study, mentioning the work of others whose work is more distantly related to this study's emphases, and doing justice, of course, to neither group of critics and their thorough and interesting assessments of Tennyson's medley. I begin with the critics whose work is outside this study's emphasis (but who have nevertheless shaped my reading of the poem), then move to those critics whose work is more directly relevant; and for brevity's sake, I omit here critical works that function in later chapters of this study.

Many critics have inquired into the nature and function of the Prince's seizures, examining their possible biographical source and studying their aesthetic additions to the text. Of these, Kay Jamison, Catherine Barnes Stevenson, Barbara Wright, and Anita Draper have produced essays focused solely on the seizures; other critics such as Clyde Ryals and James Sait deal with the seizures in the context of larger works on *The Princess*.

Another intriguing category of criticism involves a critical conversation among critics who read the poem from Freudian and Jungian points of view; the most important participants in the conversation are James Sait and Joseph Gerhard, who has produced several single works discussing the Prince's desired unity with Ida in terms of the search for the anima. Though these readings of *The Princess* are well established in the poem's critical history, only scant work has been done using Lacanian theory.

A very important area of study concerns the sources of Tennyson's internal plot; and among these, one critic emerges as the expert on Ida's literary ancestors. John Killham's *Tennyson and The Princess: Reflections of an Age*, published in 1958, explores exhaustively the various possible sources of his plot. His book reads much like a mystery as he searches

through the people of Tennyson's time, the books he read, the fairy tales which lightened his childhood days, and other sources, looking for influences on Tennyson's plot and characters. The work is fascinating, covering such subjects as diverse as the tales of the eastern legendary princess Turandot, the plays of Shakespeare, and the notorious Caroline Norton.

But for the purposes of setting up my study of *The Princess*, the most important criticism is that which demonstrates how decidedly the critics have divided themselves into camps, almost from the day of the poem's initial publication.

George Brimley, a critic contemporary with Tennyson, chronicled what he took to be the critical consensus on the poem "by tracing Mr. Tennyson's gradual degradation through *The Princess*, lower still in *In Memoriam*, to its climax of weakness in 'Maud,'" though he had to admit that the first two poems did well with the reading public and were in sixth editions at the time of his comments (Jump 191). Alfred Austin reported in 1870, seventeen years after publication of Tennyson's last revision in 1853, that the poem had made only a trivial impression on the public and predicted (correctly, as it turns out) that only the songs and a few notable passages would survive to be quoted and anthologized

(Jump 299); and Gerard Manly Hopkins deemed Tennyson's effort "an ungentlemanly row," full of opinions "not original, often not independent even" (Jump 334-5). Many recent critics, too, find great fault with the poem; F. B. Pinion's claim that it is "too ambivalent, complicated, and prolonged to sustain the interest of most readers" (119) typifies critical comments about *The Princess* of late .

The primary source, apparently, of the poem's poor reception among the critics is its ambivalent stand on the topic that it raises, the question of higher education for women, within the context of the so-called woman question in general; and the seemingly discursive, even rambling nature of the medley intensifies that ambivalence. Herbert Tucker calls the poem "a textbook Victorian compromise" that "avoids taking a position on a hotly debated issue, by taking up any number of positions, letting reciprocally ventilated views cool each other off, and leaving affairs pretty much where they stood" in the opening stanzas. Tucker argues that the poem's ambivalence reflects Tennyson's own lack of commitment either to a feminist stance or to the "patriarchal status quo" (351-2). F. B. Pinion takes the same line of thought when he writes that the ambiguities of *The Princess* are intentional, not accidental, arguing that Tennyson composed the story carefully so that "readers

could take [the subject matter] as lightly or as seriously as they pleased” (115). June Hagan also thinks that “Tennyson himself struck a ‘strange diagonal’ between the warring factions by choosing a form and context *intentionally ambiguous* and complex” (76, emphasis mine).

However, for each of these arguments that Tennyson knew exactly what he was doing when he designed *The Princess*, we can find at least one counterargument (contemporary both with Tennyson and with us) that deprecates Tennyson, claiming that he botched the poem’s structure initially and then tried to repair it unsuccessfully over years of revision. One of the earliest reviews, published anonymously on 1 January 1848, a scant six days after the poem’s debut, was unequivocal about Tennyson’s failure. John Marston, a dramatic poet writing in the *Athenæum*, admitted that the poem had its moments but opined that “No wholesome severity has discarded the former puerilities” (Jump 166). We could perhaps account for his harsh review by assuming professional jealousy, were it not for the echoes of his criticism spanning more than a century.

In 1893 J. Cumming Walters wrote that “This gorgeous mosaic was deemed a splendid waste. The power was there, but it had been misdirected” (59). Had Tennyson been a truly great poet, Walters

argued, he could have salvaged the work; but he was not: "It is an exercise rather than a pleasure to read it, and though it dazzles with brilliance and is affluent in thought, it satisfies but little and leaves the heart untouched" (61). And more recently, Jerome Buckley has argued that Tennyson's compulsive revision of the poem attests to his dissatisfaction with it: "Over the years [after the initial publication] innumerable minor alterations bore witness to his sense of having in some sort failed rather than to his lasting interest in the rich elaboration of the text" (95).

The critics maintain utterly contradictory stances on the question of the poem's structure and Tennyson's satisfaction with the effect of the medley, but they do not become truly divisive and argumentative until they take up the question of the issues in the poem: the higher education of women and the nature of the marriage relationship. One critic, actually, avoids these issues altogether; Allan Danzig argued in 1966 that "*The Princess* is not a verse essay on female education, nor even on the position of women; it is not, in fact, a verse essay. It is a verse narrative of a prince winning his princess, a mock-heroic romance. Its serious subject, therefore, is the nature of love" and its thesis, quite simply, is that "the man brings strength, the woman sweetness to a

marriage" (83-4). But Danzig's refreshingly easy reading of the poem inhabits a category by itself; in the opinion of other critics, before and after his article, *The Princess* concerns matters more divisive and complex; it is no simple love story.

Most biographical criticism agrees that Tennyson did interest himself in the woman question actively and seriously, though within this basic agreement, naturally, critics disagree on Tennyson's opinion of the matter. Hagan, for example, sees Tennyson as committed to an "unusual feminist perspective" stemming from "Apostolic discussion, his mother's situation, his sisters' abilities, his association with spirited literary women, and his love for Emily Sellwood" (75). Philip Henderson acknowledges Tennyson's hesitancy on the issue, however, theorizing that "perhaps, fearing ridicule, the only way [Tennyson] could treat the subject was by adopting a defensive tone of burlesque and steering a diagonal course between two contradictory positions" (64). E. F. Shannon thinks that an 1831 review of *Poems* prompted Tennyson to write a long poem on the woman question; the reviewer asks whether Tennyson will take up a serious social issue in his next major poem and refers specifically to feminist problems: "How long will it be before we shall have read to better purpose the eloquent lesson, and the yet more

eloquent history, of that gifted and glorious being, Mary Wollstonecraft?” (93). No doubt the reviewer had in mind Wollstonecraft’s assertion that uneducated women hold back the progress of the entire species, an assertion that figures in the Prince’s triumphant speech in Canto VII of the poem.¹

However, neither critics in Tennyson’s day nor those in our own agree on what conclusions Tennyson reached as he considered in poetry women’s desires for higher education. The poem contains sufficient evidence to support at least two positions, positions that practically polarize the issue: one position argues that women will destroy the social order if they educate themselves as do men; the other maintains conversely that if humanity is to evolve fully, women must—perhaps not during Victoria’s reign, but eventually—take their places beside men in the universities and, when trained, in the professions, in business, in government. Most reviewers of Tennyson’s day were, not surprisingly, eager to find evidence for the first of these positions. W. E. Gladstone wrote in the *Quarterly Review* (1859) that the poem “exhibits an effort to amalgamate the place and function of woman with that of man, and the failure of that effort, which duly winds up with the surrender and marriage of the fairest and chief enthusiast” (Jump 242). A critic writing

anonymously in January 1848 for the *Sun* declared absent any satirical intent in Tennyson's writing, calling the poem "a nobler eulogium upon the sex than any yet written even by Alfred Tennyson himself"; but he made it clear that this "eulogium" proves that "as each of them [the genders] has its particular duties and capacities, so should these duties be fulfilled, and those capacities cultivated by each exclusively" (qtd. in Shannon 99).

As *The Princess* progressed through revised editions, reviewers continued almost unanimously to read it as a burlesque exposing the folly of women who wanted access to the universities. In 1878 Edward Dowden wrote that Ida incorrectly wanted to "transcend, through the temptation of a false ideal, her true sphere of womanhood; even this noblest form of disobedience to *law* entails loss and sorrow; she is happy only when she resumes her worthier place through the wisdom of love" (Jump 332-3, emphasis mine). Even after Tennyson's death, when he could no longer be consulted or defend himself, critics held that they and Tennyson agreed unequivocally on the theme of *The Princess*: that Ida, as W. C. Gordon put it in 1906, for instance, "comes to a sane and sensible conclusion, and recognizes the relation she holds to her Creator and to society" (193). Gordon goes so far as to remind readers of Hallam

Tennyson's recollection from the *Memoir* that Tennyson's "friends report [his] father to have said that the sooner woman finds out, before the great educational movement begins, that 'woman is not undeveloped man, but diverse,' the better it will be for the progress of the world" (249). While Hallam Tennyson recalls this quote second-hand, Gordon takes it on himself to strengthen Tennyson's position by claiming, "*He* [Tennyson] *is sure* that 'the sooner woman finds out . . . the better it will be for the progress of the world'" [81, emphasis mine].

More recent criticism, however, has debated whether Tennyson's stand is truly anti-feminist—whether the poem directs women aspiring to an education to return to their homes and remain contentedly there or, rather, challenges readers to give women's demands for higher education a fair hearing. And as with other subjects of criticism, critics on this matter claim our attention for entirely opposing points of view.

William Brashear's biographical criticism of *The Princess* identifies "a good deal of contemporary social philosophy and some feminist notions" as "central" to the poem (120); and Pinion also contends that Tennyson purposefully introduced feminist considerations to his audience but adds that the author has "unfolded" the theme "gradually through a 'parable' intended to interest an age not yet ready in the main

to take it seriously” (114). Ann Colley agrees, adding that the poem is “a medley of various conflicting attitudes toward women’s demands for higher education. . . . a chronicle of the moral tensions of the age” (38). Colley reads Tennyson hopefully, seeing in the text a reassurance, manifested in characters like Ida, Psyche, and Melissa, that educated women will not be monsters. Tennyson also “plays down and ignores other anxieties about the moral effects of higher education” (40). James Kincaid, too, appreciates Tennyson’s poem, and especially Ida, who “is much closer to genuine heroism than to humorous Amazonian; her position demands a respect never given to the male argument. As her world begins to crumble from within and the external pressures mount against her, she begins to appear more a symbol of defiant and heroic will than a mere spoiled, petulant girl” (59). In fact, Kincaid takes the plot conflict very seriously, seeing the poem as an exemplification of “the price we pay for the easy pleasure of domestic comfort. Like Walter, we are haunted by Ida’s fall and by the poem’s refusal to evade the consequences of the fall: the sacrifice of heroic will” (79).

James Harrison, however, is not at all moved by the poem. He is repelled by “the high didacticism of an eminently Victorian conclusion” and notes that the *Prologue* and *Conclusion* “clearly absolve the reader

from having to take anything in the poem particularly to heart” (305); and Manfred Dietrich agrees that Tennyson merely reaffirms patriarchal expectations in the *Conclusion*. “Tennyson confronts the ‘revolutionary’ questions of sexual inequality and the imminent rise of the working class with a plea for patience and a faith in marriage and the family,” he alleges (197). Christopher Ricks discusses Tennyson’s evasions of the poem’s hard questions at length; and Henry van Dyke expresses his frustration with the poem’s ambiguities: “One hardly knows how to take the poet. At one moment he is very much in earnest; the next moment he seems to be making fun of the women’s college,” he puzzles. Ida, too, vacillates from a queenly and desirable woman to one “from whom a man with ordinary prudence and a proper regard for his own sense of humour would promptly and carefully run away” (90).

From this representative sampling of critical stances, the reader begins to comprehend the problem facing anyone who wants to study *The Princess*. The reader’s task of tracing a “strange diagonal” through the widely divergent criticism is scarcely less difficult than that of the narrator of the medley, attempting to please both the mockers and the realists. Into this melange of opinions, I venture my own. A poem that refuses so steadfastly to be resolved can bear more study, so I offer mine.

Like all critics, I have chosen a focus for my study, and that is Ida. I argue that Ida becomes an icon for Tennyson first, and later for other artists who use her in their own plots and to their own ends and for a series of editors who shape readers' responses to her story in an attempt to guide their readings and, ultimately, their beliefs about the position of women. That is indeed the central issue of the poem, and Ida is indeed its representative; when she is used in such a way that her success and happiness end the tale, she acts as a feminist icon; however, she often is put to anti-feminist use. It is not Ida herself who is feminist or anti-feminist in her hopes and demands and concerns; it is those who use her for their own purposes, sometimes feminist, sometimes not.

Notes

1. We find a representative statement of Wollstonecraft's idea in this excerpt from the section, "On National Education," in her *Vindication of the Rights of Women*:

Make [women] free, and they will quickly become wise and virtuous, as men become more so; for the improvement must be mutual, or the injustice which one half of the human race are obliged to submit to, retorting on their oppressors, the virtue of men will be worm-eaten by the insect whom he keeps under his feet. [109]



"Ask me no more: thy fate and mine are seal'd:
I strove against the stream and all in vain."

CHAPTER I: IDA AND HER CREATOR

“Passion, intellect, moral activity—these three have never been satisfied in women. In this cold and oppressive atmosphere, they cannot be satisfied.”—Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*

“The intercourse of man and woman—how frivolous, how unworthy it is! Can we call *that* the true vocation of woman—her high career? . . . The true marriage—that noble union, by which a man and woman become together one perfect being—probably does not exist at present on earth.”—Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*

If anyone can claim a right to direct the use of a fictional character, it is surely that character’s author and creator. And although Ida eventually escapes Tennyson’s purview, becoming at least temporarily the property of others who make of her and with her what they will, we cannot understand these later uses until we investigate her origin and function in *The Princess*. Tennyson’s medley is a long, complicated work; in it, Ida stands at the center of an ideological storm. She risks being overwhelmed and finally emerges, shaped by the harsh elements of the culture that she had intended to mold. To suggest that my study encompasses all of her uses at Tennyson’s hands would be, given the text’s complexity, naive at best, presumptuous at worst.

However, focusing on Ida's nobility of character and Promethean objectives, I conclude that Tennyson admires Ida, as much as a living author can admire his fictional offspring, and casts her as a pioneer, at times even as a prophet (I do not argue, however, that Tennyson is, in the current sense of the word, a feminist). In either case, Ida acts heroically, sacrificially, and adventurously.

Having praised Ida so highly, I (and, I think, Tennyson as well) acknowledge her very human weaknesses: her too great sense of place, her too impatient spirit in the face of a monolithic change, her too headstrong a desire for the imagined perfect world's immediate creation. Ida is perhaps akin to Matthew Arnold's poet-persona in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," bracing herself uneasily between two worlds, "one dead, / The other powerless to be born" (85-6); but Ida would hasten the death of the old, not cling to it, so that the new can come into being. Her eventual failure, which is perhaps only superficially a failure, comes about because she plays midwife to a premature birth, trying too hard to bring about an inevitable change before its time. Yet Ida maps the path that her Victorian readers and their descendants must and will eventually walk; in this way she plays the prophet, her foretellings reiterated by the narrator when he advises Walter and his guests (and readers) to be patient, since "maybe wildest dreams / Are but the needful preludes of the truth" (Conclusion 73-4).

According to the *Memoir* compiled by Hallam Tennyson, the poet “considered [Ida] one of the noblest among his women,” calling her “lioness-like” (248). Tennyson’s assessment of Ida resonates particularly when we consider his other poetic offspring, such as the kingly Arthur of the *Idylls* and especially the mourner of *In Memoriam*, rebelling against what must be, despairing, but ultimately repentant and redeemed. King Arthur and the narrator of *In Memoriam* are better known currently than Ida, yet the three form a significant triumvirate in Tennyson’s works. Arthur functions as Tennyson’s iconic leader; his poet-persona in *In Memoriam* represents the mid-century Victorian’s struggle with faith and presents a potential resolution. Arthur looks back to the past; the mourner endures the present; but Ida is the seer who looks optimistically to the future. Tennyson uses Ida as his ambassador from a world of his imagination to the world he inhabits. In the poetically rendered world, men and women, masters and workers, all have the right to educate themselves; and although he experiences ambivalence about all of the changes that may come (and surely will come to his grandchildren), Tennyson extends the hope that, in the world that the Prince and Princess go out to make, all people will experience fuller lives.

“Hand in Hand with Science”:

Ida and Educational Reform

Given *The Princess's* history of reception since its publication, we recognize two problems: first, the poem contains enough evidence to support either a pro- or anti-feminist reading, making it difficult to determine Tennyson's stance and thus to interpret the poem with much satisfaction. Second, no critic to date has taken into intense consideration the occasion that dominates the frame as a key to interpreting Ida's story, that is, the Mechanics' Institute festival. Certainly, various critics have used the frame to interpret the story: among them, for example, C. Glen Wickens argues that the prologue establishes an important theme of the poem, “the evolutionary destiny of the human race and the cultural role that science should play in defining that destiny”; Wickens argues that Tennyson strives in the poem's body to synthesize this understanding of evolution and his religious faith, a synthesis that he will not achieve until *In Memoriam* (371). And Hester Davenport has analyzed the architectural settings of the frame to demonstrate that the eclectic buildings on Sir Walter's grounds compare closely to the “medley” that is the story. The frame bears further examination, though: Tennyson wrote to Edward Moxon that “It may be remarked that there is scarcely anything in the story which is not prophetically glanced at in the Prologue” (*Memoir* 251); I

argue that the seemingly coincidental Mechanics' Institute festival provides a framework in which to assess Ida's university and its goals. The motivations and goals of the men who founded the Mechanics' Institutes do more than "glance prophetically" at the hopes, successes, and eventual failure of Ida's remarkable university. The history of the Mechanics' Institutes, in fact, parallels the career of Ida's college and invests with interpretative power the frame for Ida's story, allowing readers to discern Tennyson's understanding of the cantos' complex thesis in the context of his social awareness. Not only is Tennyson fully aware of the long-term ramifications of women's demands; he sees them also as they relate to more sweeping trends in nineteenth-century England as it approaches its midpoint. And Hallam Tennyson reports that his father linked together "two great social questions": in Tennyson's words, 'the housing and education of the poor man before making him our master, and the higher education of women' (249). The frame, once we know about the Mechanics' Institutes, assists us in understanding Tennyson's complicated position on the woman question.

Tennyson revised his medley through five editions, changing the framing *Prologue* and *Epilogue* extensively; he did not complete the Prologue until the fifth edition in 1853, which, according to Isolde Herbert, "indicates . . . [his] determination to create a frame which precisely express[ed] his purpose" (145). Herbert argues that the frame

functions as an “enclosure” that serves to “express, yet control, revolutionary ideas” (145-6), ideas such as educating women in the universities—or offering working-class men a haven, from a new and sometimes brutal capitalistic economic system, where they might study science and engineering, as the founders of the Mechanics’ Institutes purported to do. Both issues troubled Tennyson’s England, since the social implications of both projects threatened the power structures of Victorian England, in the workplace, in the home, in the university lecture hall, and even in Parliament. Tennyson considered the problem of who should receive education, at what level, and to what end, more seriously than his “burlesque” initially leads readers to believe.

Tennyson opens the Prologue with a description of Sir Walter Vivian’s home and grounds in which, initially, the Tory host’s wealth, cultural attainments, and of course carefully observed *noblesse oblige* figure largely. The Mechanics’ Institute at first gets little mention: we read that “tenants, wife and child, and . . . half the neighbouring borough” have come to the Vivian grounds for an exhibition held by an Institute which Sir Walter patronizes (Prologue 4-5). Then Tennyson interjects a catalogue of Sir Walter’s “museum of family history,” which serves to announce the subject of courageous women and sets up a sort of mock epic question (how “mock” this epic question truly is, however, is the critical puzzle of the poem): “Where . . . lives there such a woman

now?" (Prologue 124-6). As the narrator, a college friend of Sir Walter's son, makes his way to the Abbey ruins to join his party, he passes and comments on what Tucker terms "the imperial bread and circuses of the people's institute" (354), a multitude of "happy faces," watching and listening as "the patient leaders of their Institute taught them with facts" (Prologue 56-9). There follows another catalogue, this time of little inventions, such as a "petty railway" and "a little clock-work steamer," that delight the people, whom Tennyson depicts as easily charmed because of their ignorant state (Prologue 74, 71).

Twice the narrator remarks that "strange was the sight" as he observes the events (Prologue 89)—as strange, apparently, as the "fairy university" of the poem—but also "smacking of the time," he notes (Prologue 89). Tucker and Wickens both remind us that "the time" of this version of the Prologue is that of the Crystal Palace, and that the inventions scattered across Sir Walter's lawns resemble a miniature Great Exhibition (Wickens 379; Tucker 354); the inventions testify to Tennyson's understanding of the Mechanics' Institutes' goal to produce "improvers" from simple workers. But the inventions are mere toys; knowledge is scaled down for the people's ease of consumption at Vivian-place, trivialized as is the "half child half woman" Lilia, whom the narrator characterizes by her "tiny silken-sandaled foot" and the "little willful thorns" that make the "rosebud" of her person as "sweet as

English air” while also invalidating her complaints (Prologue 101, 149, 153-4) and, by association, her desire for and even curiosity about university education. Thus Tennyson establishes in the Prologue parallels between the two projects; and, throughout the poem, Ida’s hopes, temporary success, and final failure resemble closely those of the Mechanics’ Institutes.

Wickens argues that the unifying theme of *The Princess* is the question of “the cultural role that science should play in defining” the evolutionary ends of the human race (371). A detailed examination of the founders’ goals for the Mechanics’ Institutes bears out this idea and provides a pattern for understanding the intentions, successes, and failures of Ida’s university.

J. W. Hudson, compiling his 1851 work, *The History of Adult Education*, wrote that “the brightest minds in literature and science direct their talents to its [the education of the lower classes’] development: preparing the ignorant by addresses, by lectures, and by their writings, to receive and understand the great and interesting truths which the Creator unfolds before them” (v). He makes this optimistic assessment of the work of George Birkbeck and his associates at a time when the Mechanics’ Institutes had come under fire from both religious and political powers. Birkbeck, whose informal lectures to workers in Glasgow were formalized and became in 1823 the first Mechanics’

Institute, had seen his project expand by 1851 to over 700 institutes with more than 107,000 members in England and her colonies (Russell 159). He was inspired to his grand task by observing in men of the lower classes “such emanations from ‘the heaven lighted lamp in man,’ that the question was forced on me, why are these minds left without the means of obtaining that knowledge which they so ardently desire, and why are the avenues of science barred against them, because they are poor?” (Kelly 28). Princess Ida addresses the same question in her welcoming speech to the new graduates, declaring that “Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed” to women (II.76); and Lady Psyche assures her students that “Here might they learn whatever men were taught; / Let them not fear” (II.130). Both reformers challenge the social givens of Victorian England that determined who would have access to knowledge.

The founders held three-fold assumptions about the benefits of educating lower-class men. First, the more people educated in scientific methodology, the faster scientific knowledge could accumulate: “the labouring classes of society,” as Hudson interpreted this benefit, “would be rendered mutually useful, in uniting and concentrating the scattered rays of genius, which might otherwise be dissipated and lost to the scientific world” (55). Second, the founders advocated “an extensive diffusion of rational information among the general mass of society”

which, they argued, would combat “narrow conceptions, superstitious notions, and vain fears, which so generally prevail among the lower classes of society” (Hudson 55). Finally, the founders hoped to create access to “intellectual pleasures and refined amusements tending to the general elevation of character” and eventually to “vanquish those prejudices and jealousies, which almost universally exist, even in cultured minds” (55). To these ends the founders sought to instruct workers “in the arts they practice, and more especially in those branches of science which are applied in so many forms to the local manufactures” (55-6). (We should note, however, that Birkbeck’s personal goals for the Mechanics’ Institutes were not so thoroughly utilitarian—instead, he emphasized the improvement of the lives of workers as cultural knowledge expanded their daily existence beyond that of their repetitive, machine-dictated tasks (Kelly 30)).

Ida’s assumptions about the purpose of her university, though never listed explicitly, parallel those of the Mechanics’ Institutes. We hear, for instance, in the frequently anthologized words of Lady Psyche’s lecture, an echo of the founders’ desire to quicken the pace of scientific progress:

Everywhere, two heads in council, two beside the hearth,
Two in the tangled business of the world,

Two in the liberal offices of life,
Two plummet dropped for one to sound the abyss
Of science, and the secrets of the mind (II.156-60,
 emphasis mine)

Clearly, both the founders and Tennyson's triumvirate foresee rich gains for general humanity when the fountain of knowledge is unsealed. Ida also shares the founders' hopes that education will "tend to the general elevation of character," as is evident when she advises the graduates to "Drink deep" of the fountain of knowledge "until the habits of the slave, / The sins of emptiness, gossip, and spite / And slander, die. Better not be at all / Than not be noble" (II.74-9).

Birkbeck and Ida agree that the uneducated state in which workers and women find themselves reduces their capacity to be fully human by the standards of Victorian spirituality and intellectuality. Birkbeck dedicates his teaching to filling "the moral vacancy which follows a cessation of bodily toil" (qtd. in Russell 161); Ida also fills the void left in her students' lives by instructing them to "cast and fling / The tricks which make us toys of men" (II.48-9): the "study" of fashion and flirtation, and particularly the concern and competition for male admiration—"This barren verbiage, current among men, / Light coin, the tinsel clink of compliment" (II.40-1).¹ Finally, though not all of the men working with Birkbeck held this goal in common, Birkbeck himself clearly

hoped that his project would advance workers economically, enabling them, as a supporter of the Manchester Mechanics' Institute wrote, to “break the bond of poverty” (Russell 160) and to become less dependent on their employers. Likewise, Ida assures her students that, after they are educated, they “may with those self-styled lords ally / Your fortunes justlier balanced, scale with scale” (II.51-2); and certainly Canto VII ends with the best attempt at a marriage of true minds that Tennyson achieves in his poetry (though, as Marion Shaw remarks, Ida must nevertheless “dwindl[e] into wifehood” in order to accomplish this marriage of “justlier balanced” spouses (85)).

Clearly, then, important similarities exist between the historical Birkbeck's plans and goals for working-class men and the fictional Ida's intentions for women. Such similarities also mark the progress of the two attempts to extend the educational franchise beyond its traditional bounds. The criticism that Birkbeck and the other founders faced when they decided to “enlighten the masses” closely resembles the fears about the influence of educated women on Victorian society that Tennyson must deal with in *The Princess*.

The founders of the Mechanics' Institutes understood well the nature of the force that Marx and Engels would later identify as the proletariat—the source of labor, but potentially of revolution as well. John Foster, writing his *Essays on the Evils of Popular Interest* in 1820,

worried that although formerly “the great mass . . . combined such a quietude with their ignorance, that they had no other than submissive feelings towards [their] superiors . . . [and] no question would ever occur to them why there should be so vast a difference of condition between beings of the same race,” those times of “unquestioning un murmuring succumbency . . . have passed away” (qtd. in Shapin and Barnes 44). Part of the Mechanics’ Institutes’ work, then, was to prepare the working classes for the power of self-determination that they would inevitably seek and eventually gain. Thomas Hodgskin, of the London Mechanics’ Institute faculty, expressed the founders’ “manifesto” concerning this eventuality in the 1823 edition of the *Mechanics’ Magazine*:

The education of a free people . . . will always be directed most beneficially for them when it is in their hands. When government interferes, it directs its efforts more to make people obedient and docile, than wise and happy. It desires to control the thoughts, and fashion even the minds of its subjects. . . . [Such education is] *the mere breaking in of the steer to the yoke . . .*” (qtd. in Kelly 70-80, emphasis mine)

Similarly, Lady Psyche complains that the first task of women who aspire to higher education is to “*disyoke their necks* from custom,” the tradition of merely domestic education (if that), and to “learn whatever men were taught” (II.125, 130, emphasis mine). Even Tennyson’s word

choice echoes Hodgskin's as both writers express humanitarian concern for their subjects—workers and women remain kin to beasts of burden when their education is directed by the most privileged class.

By contrast, education gained in a Mechanics' Institute, in the words taken from one of Benjamin Heywood's lectures to the Manchester Mechanics' Institute, would allow the student to "advance himself in the world" and give him "an honourable and delightful employment for his [new-found] leisure"; it would transform his entire life, adding to his youth "continued delight," to his manhood "pure and rational enjoyment," and to his old age tranquility, wisdom, and blessing (qtd. in Kelly 214-5). Thus, while the founders were not content to leave workers in their unenlightened condition, neither did they refuse to recognize the revolutionary potential of their work (indeed, the motto of the *Mechanics' Magazine* was Francis Bacon's maxim, "Knowledge is power" (Kelly 96)). Hodgskin acknowledged that educated workers

will assuredly ascertain *why* they of all classes have been involved in poverty and distress. . . . [Then] the social edifices will be dug up from the deep beds into which they were laid in the past, and they will not be restored unless they were originally laid in justice, and unless justice commands their preservation. (qtd. in Kelly 99)

This educational outcome is precisely what critics of the Mechanics' Institutes feared and predicted; and it is the outcome that Tennyson foretells for Ida's work as well. Lady Psyche's lecture in Canto II contains just such an investigation into the systematic oppression of women as a group as she examines various historical eras in light of "the woman's state in each":

How far from just: till, warming with her theme,
 She fulminated out her scorn of laws Salique,
 And little-footed China; touched on Mahomet
 With much contempt, and came to chivalry,
 When some respect, however slight, was paid
 To women—. (II.115-120)

Tennyson gives Psyche words much like Hodgskin's when she praises Ida's break from this oppressive history: "She had founded; they must build" (II.129). The call to action that she and Ida deliver to the students leaves no question that Tennyson understood, and perhaps thought to fear, the revolutionary potential of Ida's university. Certainly, the Prince's father voices his fear of the waning of patriarchal customs when he sends word to Ida that her college espouses "A rampant heresy, such as if it spread / Would make all women kick against their Lords / Through all the world, and which might well deserve / That we this night should pluck your palace down" (IV.392-5).

Richard Altick reminds us, in his *English Common Reader*, that before and during the early nineteenth century, the Church of England had already taken a stand against “even the teaching of reading and writing to poor children” on the assumption that education would necessarily lead to discontent with their state among the lower classes; he also calls attention to the fact that Henry Brougham’s connection with the Institutes hindered their chances of receiving official support, given that “the name of Brougham was anathema to the Tory Party and its spiritual arm, the Church of England” (Altick 191). (Brougham’s Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge supported the Institutes, and he dedicated his *Practical Observations on the Education of the People* to George Birkbeck (Russell 156)) And indeed both groups reacted harshly to Birkbeck’s work. Kelly points out that, at the time of efforts to found an Institute in London, “the political complexion of the movement . . . was predominantly Whig,” while members of the Tory Party were either “aloof” from the project or “actively hostile” towards it. He cites a *moderate* Tory newspaper’s concerns that “these institutions may be so easily converted by artful men into engines with which to effect their wicked designs [the disruption of the class system], that they should at all times be regarded with caution” (216). Right-wing newspapers voiced “the fears of the privileged classes” about Mechanics’ Institutes: for instance, *Bell’s Weekly Messenger* in November 1823 insisted that “there

must always be two descriptions of workmen—the labouring hand and the deciding mind” and worried that educated workers would interfere with, rather than advance, productivity in the workplace (qtd. in Kelly 106). With rather more hysteria, the *St. James Chronicle* in May 1824 reported of Birkbeck’s project that “a scheme more completely adapted for the destruction of this empire could not have been invented by the author of evil himself”; and with equal exaggeration a Tory observer recorded his impression after attending several lectures that “liberty and independence were the themes of every harangue, and violent party spirit pervaded every meeting” (qtd. in Kelly 106-7).

The hierarchies of both the Anglican and the Roman Catholic churches objected to the Mechanics’ Institutes as well. “I had rather see my servants dead drunk than I would see them going to the Mechanics’ Institute,” complained one priest to Birkbeck and his associates; “you are all a set of radicals in disguise; you want to upset the King and the Constitution, and to overthrow our Holy Mother Church” (Kelly 217). The Reverend G. Holt expressed the same fears but with a less common willingness to do more than criticize the project, advising that

as . . . it cannot be doubted, that these Institutions are powerful agencies for affecting [*sic*] good or evil, it is now the imperative duty of all professors of Christianity to direct

their attention towards such establishments, and to unite for the prevention of their becoming perverted to schools for the diffusion of infidel, republican, and levelling principles.

(Royle 306)

To these objections (of which we may find other characteristic examples) the founders of the Mechanics' Institutes responded in various, and sometimes conflicting, ways, often denying all political motivations and attempting to persuade their critics that education would increase, not lessen, workers' rationality, morality, and—most important, perhaps—tractability.

Birkbeck and his colleagues maintained continually the basically apolitical nature of their work. Birkbeck himself opened the London Mechanics' Institute with an unambiguous declaration: "All intention of interference with political questions we do therefore disclaim" (qtd. in Kelly 92). And the *Westminster Review*, in setting forth a definition of an ideal Mechanics' Institute, included a political disclaimer, describing the organization as

a voluntary association of a portion of the humbler classes of a town or locality, assisted by a few of the leading and wealthy inhabitants, to raise, by means of small periodical contributions, a fund to be expended in the instruction of

the members in science, literature, and the arts, *to the exclusion of controversial divinity, party politics, and subjects of local dispute*, by means of a library of circulation, lectures, evening or day classes, and a reading room. (qtd. in Royle 308, emphasis mine)

Birkbeck and others involved in the growth of the project also claimed that education, particularly scientific education, would result in God-fearing, hard-working, cooperative workers. Brougham, for instance, insisted during an address to the Manchester Mechanics' Institutes that a knowledge of science "would strengthen [the worker's] religious belief, . . . make him a better and a happier, as well as a wiser man, if he soared into those regions of purer science where happily neither doubt can cloud, nor passion ruffle our serene path" (qtd. in Altick 189). We should note that, although scientific doubt and passion more than once "ruffled" the serenity of the Victorian mind while the Mechanics' Institutes were in operation, the instructors at the Institutes censored their materials carefully, teaching only "how things were in nature," as Shapin and Barnes put it, and avoiding or at least downplaying the "provisional nature of scientific knowledge"; workers were to hear no discussions and few allusions to things hypothetical or theoretical (50). Thus the workers learned, in theory, the duty of physical nature to God's universal laws and, by analogy, the duty of human nature to the laws of

a God-fearing nation (including, presumably, those concerning class structures). Science as taught to the lower classes was “a highly reified body of knowledge” that demonstrated the “natural consequences” of defying the law (Shapin and Barnes 50, 53).

Clergy who supported the Mechanics’ Institutes never failed to point out this alleged connection between morality and education, particularly scientific education.² The Reverend Thomas Chalmers, professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrews, wrote in his *Christian and Civic Economy* (1826) that the studies of theology and science both functioned as “refined abstractions from the grossness of the familiar and ordinary world” and rendered a person “a more reflective and less sensual being” (qtd. in Shapin and Barnes 37). He continued, “To make the multitude rational, we have only to treat them as though they were fit subjects for being discoursed with rationally. . . . We affirm, that *reason will make anything palatable to the lower orders*” (qtd. in Kelly, emphasis mine). Another clergyman, the Reverend E. Higginson, wrote in *Observations addressed to all Classes of the Community on the Establishment of Mechanics’ Institutes* (1825) that

Respect for the laws and a ready obedience to them; that due subordination of rank on which the well-being of every gradation of society depends; and the faithful discharge of

those duties which we owe to the whole community, are among the plainest results of that intelligence which shall teach to every man the obligations which he contracts as a member of a social state. (Qtd. in Kelly 214)

Not all workers attending the Mechanics' Institutes agreed, however, with the argument that scientific education for the lower classes would reinforce, not challenge, existing social structures. One particularly articulate student wrote hopefully, for example, of "the fair field of science, where all are brothers, and pursuing, it may be, the same glorious objects"; in science, he thought, "the wall of separation [between classes] is removed forever" (qtd. in Russell 170).

Ida, too, insists that matters of class, rank, and politics count for nothing in her college; and she too looks to education to improve women's moral nature. Ida is not concerned with the family histories of graduates because in her world, no one is born to precedence; in fact, Ida considers all women to have been in a common cultural servitude, regardless of their seeming rank. None is free, and each must earn freedom through learning "until the habits of the slave . . . die" (II.77-9). Ida welcomes all women who come to her university, from north and south (terms traditionally designating not only geographic regions but also differing political views), "from all the provinces"—their backgrounds are unimportant as they "press in . . . / And fill the hive"

(II.83-4). Ida and Psyche (but notably, not Blanche) encourage the graduates to grow spiritually, identifying delayed or deficient moral progress with “convention,” that is, the customs that assume women’s inability to handle matters of ethics and that “prove” themselves by failing to instill in daughters the same teachings that sons receive. Ida recommends the emulation of noble women of the past, represented by their statues in the college halls, “since to look on noble forms / Makes noble through the sensuous organism / That which is higher” (II.72-4).

Both Birkbeck’s project and Ida’s goals, then, met criticism because they troubled societal norms. The discussion of what changes an educated (relatively speaking) population of workers and women would bring about became particularly heated when applied to microcosmic relationships. After all, it is one thing for a man to support the right of women to higher education, but quite another thing to ensure that his wife and daughters availed themselves of that right. And it was well to speak of the advancement of the working classes as long as a factory did not suffer when the workers in it began to estimate themselves more highly. In both cases, real-world application of what sounded alarming enough in theory led to claims that educated women would become too independent and refuse to marry, and that educated workers would become too full of themselves and refuse to work—at least, under the conditions and for the wages that they had once accepted.

Tennyson anticipates and attempts to disarm this objection in the poem. Although *Ida* does require a three-year period of abstinence from concourse with men, she assumes that graduates will eventually complete their studies and leave their protected home with her; many will marry. John Ruskin's 1865 lecture "Of Queen's Gardens" summarizes neatly the education many Victorians thought necessary to fit a woman for wifely duties: "All such knowledge should be given her as may enable her to understand, and even aid, the work of men: and yet it should be given not as knowledge,—not as if it were, or could be, for her an object to know; but only to feel, and to judge" (79). Ruskin and others feared that the educated woman would separate herself, her needs, her desires, her life in total from men; the educated woman thus is undesirable, since she will assume the direction of her own life.³ "The woman," he argues, "is not to guide, nor even to think for herself. The man is always to be the wiser; he is to be the thinker, the ruler, the superior in knowledge and discretion, as in power" (71). And an 1831 issue of *Westminster Review* identified similar views as "the creed of the great and overwhelming majority of society": "Her duties are confined to her home To perform these duties well, she must have a docile, patient, and submissive spirit; she must possess no elevated description of knowledge; she must be inferior to her attainments." This optimal woman, guided by her lord, submissive and patient, may remind readers

of Ida's description of women as "vassals to be beat" rather than "living wills, and sphered whole within ourselves, and owed to none" (IV.128-30). Yet Ida does not assume, nor does Tennyson, that marriage must follow the model promoted by the general creed.

Ida certainly disagrees with Ruskin's division of roles,⁴ yet she is not opposed to marriage or to children; she tells the Prince plainly that she knows (or thinks she knows) what she has given up. "Have we not made ourself the sacrifice?" she argues, and adds that "for children, would they grew / Like field-flowers everywhere! we like them well" (III.232, 234-5). Engaged readers sense at many points in the medley, in fact, that Ida wishes that her great scheme and marriage (especially children) could coexist; that the Prince convinces her of the possibility demonstrates Tennyson's effort to ally the Princess's desires and the Prince's. Educated women do marry, and women will not cease to conceive and bear children if they also get degrees.

Birkbeck also takes pains to convince critics of the Mechanics' Institutes that educating workers will improve productivity, not cause disorder on the mill floor. He and his co-founders had first to deal with the practical implications of workers attending lectures after ten, twelve, and even fourteen-hour days in the mills. The ideal Mechanics' Institute (never realized at any of the over one hundred branches) thought to offer a full curriculum for workers, including English grammar, writing,

arithmetic, mathematics, practical geometry, drawing, French, Latin, literary composition, chemistry, experimental philosophy, geography, and natural history; for an extra charge, workers could also take music lessons, and attendance at these was large and steady (Kelly 132). Any curriculum even approaching this list would have taken much energy and concentration that employers considered rightfully theirs to direct, bought and paid for; and many considered the encroachment of studying in the lives of their employees an unnecessary and almost criminal demand on their assets, the “hands.” But Birkbeck, as we have seen, countered these fears by insisting that workers who did not attend lectures would find less profitable ways to engage themselves in their free time—at taverns, namely—resulting in workers with hangovers rather than, I suppose, workers with homework.

The greatest concern, however, was the matter of the long-term ramifications of workers’ attendance at the Mechanics’ Institutes: if educated women might refuse their appointed marriages, might not educated workers decline to work at their appointed tasks? The response of the men who founded and attempted to nurture this educational opportunity responded much as *Ida* does: the educated woman dreads only a marriage in which she is subjugated as a “vassal”; the educated worker will, given the choice, avoid employment with those who consider him merely a “hand,” more dispensable and replaceable than a costly

machine, and as likely to have a say about the circumstances of work as a machine is. Additionally, these morally improved workers would begin to see work as worthy of the investment of time and energy and as an opportunity for proud accomplishments; they would be more motivated to work.⁵ Brougham, an avid supporter of the Institutes, argued, as Altick phrases it, that “a thinking workman would be a devout workman” (191) and that the moral strengthening of the workman would result in the strengthening of his work ethic. So strong, however, was the general conviction that educated men would refuse the baser employments, that Thomas Webster, who planned to establish a school for mechanics with the Royal Institution in London, wrote in his autobiography that he “was asked rudely . . . what I meant by instructing the lower classes in science? I was told likewise . . . that this plan must be dropped as soon as possible. It was thought to have a dangerous political tendency.” He added in astonishment, “I was told that if I persisted I would be a marked man!” (qtd. in Russell 152).

The great fears about the uprising and revolution of the educated workman, however, proved hyperbolic, because Birkbeck’s philanthropic efforts, though initially promising, failed in the long term. By the time Hudson chronicles their history in 1851, the Institutes are already in trouble: attendance has declined, seventy-three institutes have suspended most of the lectures indefinitely, and subscriber turnover is

very high, with workers departing “with the most perfect indifference” (xii). As Russell puts it, “by and large, the Mechanics’ Institutes were a colossal failure in the sense that the constituency assigned to them remained largely untouched once the initial flush of enthusiasm had faded” (156). Here we see a third set of parallels between the Mechanic Institutes that function in Tennyson’s frame and Ida’s college: both fail, or at least seem to fail, and the failures come about for similar reasons.

To begin with, neither institution could withstand the pressures of daily life; neither could shelter its students from the incursions of the outside world. Workers had difficulty attending regularly for a number of reasons, including exhaustion after long work days and inadequate clothing. Lecturers had to acknowledge that “however eager he may have been for intellectual improvement, the workman was in no condition, after a long, hard day’s work, to profit from the instruction the institute offered” (Altick 192). Added to that difficulty was that of personal toilette. Hudson writes that “the time and trouble of suitably attiring themselves to appear in the company of the middle classes” hindered workers (he suggests as a solution “an influx of fustian jackets” from charitable sources) and that “the quarterly and annual terms of payment” kept others from attending (he suggests “a system of weekly payments”) (viii). Birkbeck and his associates dealt as best they could with these problems, and some institutes retained fairly constant

student-worker populations; but in general the workers' daily schedules and financial duress caused attrition.

Ida, in establishing her school in a secluded place, attempts to keep the demands of daily life outside the college's walls. The college years have traditionally been a sheltered time, a privileged time given over to study and social development, more or less oblivious to fiscal pressures and familial obligations. Ida is following this tradition, established of course for young men; but she also endeavors to shut out the particular demands that the outside world makes of young women. Not capriciously does she set up seemingly harsh statutes; "Not for three years to correspond with home; / Not for three years to cross the liberties; / Not for three years to speak with any men; / And many more" (II.56-9). Although stringent, these statutes help the graduates stay the course, when undoubtedly leaving the fragile world of the college would fray their concentration and weaken their commitment, already made at such cost to their psychological reserves. Birkbeck, too, tried to provide a protected environment in which his students could learn, even though they could only inhabit that world for a few scant hours of a week.

Finances and fashion never enter Ida's considerations; the intrusion that life makes into her world is the hope of marriage. Early in the poem, we see the younger graduates, who have not lived long under Ida's strict rule, content with their self-subscribed imprisonment; but

those “of the older sort” complain that “They wished to marry; they could rule a house; / Men hated learned women” (II.439, 441-2). They are not willing to complete their course of studies but have become dissatisfied and impatient with Ida’s plans. In the first cantos, we observe Cyril wooing Psyche through her child: he “took the child, / And held her round the knees against his waist, / And blew the swollen cheek of a trumpeter . . . and the child / Pushed her flat hand against his face and laughed” (II.341-5). We hear Florian’s longings for Melissa: “If I could love, why this were she: how pretty / Her blushing was” (II.83-4). And of course we know that the Prince is there to claim Ida, to whom he refers as “my bride” (I.164). Literally, it is three men that breach the campus walls; but metaphorically, it is the social and biological pressures to choose a mate that force open the gates. The tensions between the Prince and Princess, Florian and Melissa, Cyril and Psyche eventually play themselves out among all the noblewomen gathered to study and the noblemen gathered to do battle when Ida orders the gates open and the wounded brought in and “Love in the sacred halls / Held carnival at will” (VII.69-70). In Ida’s fictional world, her royal status effectively eliminates the daily concerns of food and shelter; but she can not shelter her students even temporarily from the combination of social expectation and personal desire that eventuate marriage (in fact, Ida can not shield herself from these promptings).

Both institutions also faced, as all schools of any sort do, difficult questions of matching curriculum with students' needs. Birkbeck overestimated, perhaps by necessity, the workers' preparedness to undertake any, much less all, of the subjects in the ideal curriculum listed above. These were men who had been denied, for various reasons, basic education; they had mastery only of basic literacy and number skills, yet they suddenly faced not remediation of the basics but advanced classes; as Altick puts in, "men who had barely learned the rules of arithmetic were in no position to grapple with problems in hydrostatics" (193). Russell reports that "lectures were rarely at an appropriate level for an audience of artisans" (and in fact frequently lulled them to sleep) (156); and Hudson lamented in 1851 that "wherever industrial education has been attempted in these institutions it has a proved a signal failure. . . . Lectures have met with a premature decay" and have been replaced with "soft" studies of "light literature, criticism, music, and the drama" (57). These people wanted diversion and entertainment, not more work, when they left their jobs (Altick 194).

We might initially think that Ida's college avoids these problems of curriculum; Psyche's grand opening lecture to the novitiates demonstrates an impressive accumulation of knowledge, and the young men spend the day moving from one lecture to another: "we dipt in all / That treats whatsoever is, the state / The total chronicles of man, the

mind, / the morals" and more (II.357-60). Perhaps Tennyson is employing hyperbole to satirize Ida's grand strategy; yet had the young men wandered in and out of lectures at Oxford or Cambridge at random for a day, they would no doubt have heard snatches of lectures on the state (political science), the total chronicles (history), the mind (perhaps philosophy), the morals (theology or a related subject) and more. Ida's curriculum is thorough, and in that it is much like what Birkbeck hoped to offer workers. But Ida's students, though they do not battle exhaustion or gaping holes in their basic education, nevertheless have in common with the workers their general lack of preparation for advanced studies. The typical nineteenth-century parent did not care that his daughter study with tutors as did his sons, unless it was so that she could aid her brothers in their study; and we have many records of girls and young women bending and even breaking parental strictures in order to get time for study (Mary Somerville, for example, memorizing Euclid so that, when deprived of her candle, she could lie awake at night and work through geometrical proofs in her head). When the universities first agreed to open examinations to young women, the few who dared to present themselves as candidates had years of catching up to do in very little time, as they crammed Latin and Greek and higher-level mathematics to compete for entrance. Some succeeded; others did not. Ida's students come from north and south in great number; we can

surmise with confidence that many were as ill-prepared for college as the workers were for the institute lectures. Furthermore, just as many workers' minds were not focused on the lectures offered them, many of the graduates' minds wander from their purported purpose as well. The Prince reports the scholastic activities of some students: "One walked reciting by herself, and one / In this hand held a volume as to read" (III.430-1); however, he emphasizes with four times as many lines other activities, some beneficial to the students (rowing, playing ball, chasing and hiding from one another, chatting), and some clearly deleterious to the college environment and the graduates' education, especially the complaints of the older students that they may never marry. These women say that "they could rule a house" (III.441); to do that they don't need lectures into which "every Muse tumbled a science" (III.377).

The college and the Mechanics' Institutes ultimately fail because they pass into the control of groups other than those they are designed to serve. Birkbeck attempted to provide an environment in which mechanics could comfortably gain knowledge and a curriculum that served their needs. But some students suspected that a different program was at work, that their "masters," in collusion with their teachers, wanted to use the institutes to control them. Russell reports that even Engels claimed that the institutes had been taken over by the bourgeoisie (157); if an outside observer had suspicions, how much more

so those within the institutes? Workers wondered what “secret motive” impelled their patrons to support the lectures (Russell 157). And while Russell argues that using education, and especially scientific education, to control the workers’ political insurgency would have been quite ineffective and thus that it is unlikely that such motives influenced the Mechanics’ Institutes, other historians, notably Steven Shapin and Barry Barnes, counter with a strong argument that the movement’s leaders believed that “a regimen of scientific education for certain members of the working class would render them, and their class as a whole, more docile, less troublesome, and more accepting of the emerging structure of industrial society” (32).

Which argument is historically accurate is still for the historians of science to decide, but the students themselves worried that the institutes designed for them did not actually belong to them, and with good reason. As the constraints of working life and fiscal difficulty mounted, “the mechanics departed, or were pushed out, and in their place came business and professional men and their families” (Altick 191). The London Mechanics’ Institute, for example, had shifted its purpose entirely by the late fifties: “Instead of being an educational club for mechanics it became a large and expensive society under the control of, and appealing to, wealthier classes” (Royle 137). Eventually, progress reports began to read like this one from the West Riding Union of

Mechanics' Institutes: "the members of the mechanics' institutes are, nineteen-twentieths of them, not of the class of mechanics, but are connected with the higher branches of handicraft trades, or are clerks in offices, and in many instances young men connected with liberal professions" (qtd. in Royle 309).

Ida's college too undergoes a transformation that removes it from the control of the group for which it was founded. Actually, the college had always been, in a way, under the control of men: when Ida asks to use the remote summer-palace, Gama initially says "no, / Yet being as easy man, gave it" (I.147-8); it is his permission and his wealth and position that Ida needs to found and nurture her college. Since the assumption in Victorian minds would have been that Ida's wealth belongs in reality to her father (and later to her husband), readers would have also assumed that Gama could control Ida's actions simply by refusing to continue financial support. But he indulges his daughter so that she enjoys the illusion of command. When the battle for Ida's future commences, Arac and the twins fight for her partially because, like the other nobles, they need a battle in order to win honor, and partly because Ida is their sister; on their success or failure hang her hopes. Again, they are truly in control of Ida's college. The Prince's father, too, has control: he threatens to raze her castle and has the power to do it. For an institution run by and for women, the college is dependent at

some points and vulnerable at others to the control and final say of the men.

In the end, the college that is only superficially under the control of women passes officially into the control of one man, the Prince. It passes also from being a college to being a hospital, at least temporarily. This is no easy change; Tennyson personifies the gates as the men enter them: “the doors gave way / Groaning, and in the Vestal entry shrieked / The virgin marble under iron heels: / . . . great was the crush” as soldiers, the hale and the wounded, enter (VI.329-31). Clearly these are images of rape and penetration; it is hard to ignore Tennyson’s choice of the modifiers “Vestal” and “virgin.” “So was their sanctuary violated, / . . . At first with all confusion,” but eventually “sweet order lived again with other laws” (VII.1-4). How this order comes about is significant: the graduates, too, are transformed from students to “ministering hand[s]” as “the maidens came, they talked, / They sang, they read: till she not fair began / To gather light, and she that was, became / Her former beauty treble” (VII.6-10). Order overwhelms confusion because women are once again serving men, and their service increases their physical attractiveness. Tennyson goes on to say that the women have taken up “Angel offices, / Like creatures native unto the gracious act, / And in their own clear element” (VII.11-13). The “angels of the house” that

Coventry Patmore eulogized emerge from the “sweet girl graduates” so that the traditional roles, which had been in abeyance, are restored.

Before we too quickly assume that Tennyson has written a “happily ever after ending” after typical Victorian desires, however, we must consider the reaction of Ida, among the noblest of his women, to the “sweet order”: “sadness on the soul of Ida fell, / And hatred of her weakness, blent with shame” (VII.14-15). Ida submits to her role, nurses the Prince, watches as her students, for whom she has willingly given up much, turn their eyes from her and to the soldiers. But she abhors what she is becoming, and Tennyson abhors it, too, it seems: he allows her great dignity as she steps down from her position as Head and fulfills her vow to the Prince, who forgives her her indiscretions and harsh words and “types” her a member of “the crowning race of humankind” (VII.281, 279).

Finally, Ida’s dreams come under the overt control of men. The Prince speaks the beautiful lines, “in true marriage lies / Nor equal, nor unequal” and predicts that he and Ida will strive to become “The single pure and perfect animal, / The two-celled heart beating, with one full stroke, / Life”; Ida replies, “A dream/ That once was mine!” and gives it, title and deed, to the Prince. Many readers fail to notice that there is no word in the poem to indicate that the college will cease operations; Tennyson simply says nothing on this score. Perhaps it will continue to

admit and educate young women; perhaps its halls will see a mingling of men and women working on their studies; perhaps it will indeed shut its doors for good. We have not one word to guide us to a conclusion.

However, one matter is clear: whatever the college becomes, whatever the Prince and Princess accomplish during their union, *he* will guide it. To *him* Tennyson gives the final speech of the medley: “O 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” (VII.339-42). His prediction is noble and optimistic; it bodes well for the Princess’s life, but readers also cannot ignore the final lines, which clearly endow the Prince with the position of Head: “Yield thyself up,” he orders; “my hopes and thine are one: / Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself; / Lay thy sweet hands in mind and *trust to me*” (VII.343-5, emphasis mine).

With an understanding of the Mechanics’ Institutes, their founders’ hopes and goals, successes and failures, we gain insight into Tennyson’s claim that “there is scarcely anything in the story which is not prophetically glanced at in the Prologue (*Memoir* 251). Although we cannot know how many of Tennyson’s contemporaries were well versed in the then-current history of Birkbeck’s project, we do know that the project was awash in controversy by the publication of the fifth edition of *The Princess*, in which Tennyson first put before readers the completed prologue and conclusion, since only two years earlier Hudson had found

it necessary to publish a full-length report accounting for the Mechanics' Institutes' failures, lauding their successes, and encouraging their support. Perhaps Tennyson thought that Birkbeck's attempt to extend education to workers was, like Ida's own attempts to create a safe place for women to study, a "needful prelude of the truth" (*Conclusion* 74). Certainly, the poem's narrator is optimistic: "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" (*Conclusion* 75-8). And he throws his voice in with the crowd as "thrice they cried" their desire for more frequent access to such festivities, "some dozen times a year, / To let the people breathe" (*Conclusion* 104, 103-4). Tennyson even goes so far as to portray Sir Walter in such a way that stresses his common and, in Swiftian sense, grosser qualities, rather than those qualities associated with the nobility, distanced from the commoners. Sir Walter is "A great broad-shouldered genial Englishman, / A lord of fat prize-oxen and of sheep, / . . . A pamphleteer on guano and on grain, / . . . redder than a windy morn" (*Conclusion* 85-91). He may be titled, but he concerns himself with daily needs of getting and spending like any of his tenants. I think that Tennyson is in sympathy with the workers and their families, with their joy at the holiday and their cries for more, and with the unenlightened existence that causes them to be as easily amused and astonished as are children. Women, too, are so often rendered childlike

in Victorian thought: it is education foremost that will enable woman and worker to “lose the child” and become mature adults.

“Accomplish Thou My Manhood”:

Ida, the Prince, and Tennyson’s Ideal Human

Tennyson leaves the Prince in charge of Ida’s future, whatever that may be—or is the situation that simple? The Prince’s penultimate command (or perhaps request, but phrased with royal custom) to Ida is “Accomplish thou my manhood and thyself” (VII.344), a perplexing command and one which critics have debated much. In fact, some of the most optimistic criticism on *The Princess* stems from discussion of Tennyson’s uses of an androgynous ideal as it surfaces in the poem, culminating in the Prince’s strangely phrased charge to his bride. How can she “accomplish” him? Harder still, how can she “accomplish” herself? The answer that some critics give, and which I think the poem bears out, is that the Prince and Princess together will complete or complement each other’s natures, producing an ideal human who happens to exist in two persons. Eileen Tess Johnston puts it well: “The ideal individual . . . is someone who includes coherently and in the greatest possible degree the full range of human capacities and virtues. But this integrity is itself seen to be contingent. . . . self-sufficiency . . . is an imperfect ideal; interdependence is the condition of life” (561). Ida

and the Prince “accomplish” this ideal of interdependency and completeness by uniting their lives and their dreams. Interestingly, this unity is realized through the Prince’s memory of his mother and his sharing of that memory with Ida, who cannot remember hers and thus takes his for her mother-figure, saying “tremulously” in her desire, “This mother is your model . . . / I seem a mockery to my own self” (VII.315-7). Ida reconceives herself in the Prince’s mother’s image, and this reconception is not only hopeful in that his mother bequeathed him a dream of unity between man and woman but also because it bonds the two in a surrogate sibling love. Jeannie Watson argues that sibling love, strong and obligating, teaches individuals to love selflessly and fully others not of the same bloodline. In the poem, Arac and the twins defend Ida, Ida concedes to Arac, and Psyche gives up her position in the college and her beloved Ida to protect Florian.⁶ These characters are then prepared to transfer what they know of love to opposite-sex partners (72-4). Thus Ida’s newborn love for the Prince springs from an adopted sisterhood as well as from sexual love. As for the Prince, he has grown up with the image of Ida: “From yearlong poring on thy pictured eyes, / Ere seen I loved,” he tells her as the poem ends (VII.319-20); earlier in the poem, after the rescue has forced the Prince to drop his disguise, he says that “my nurse would tell me of you; / I babbled for you, as babies for the moon, / Vague brightness; when a boy, you stooped

to me / From all high places" (IV.407-410). In a sense, he has grown up with her; uniting for him is really reuniting. From their unity will come the "man-woman" and "woman-man" whom Tennyson contemplated.

Not all critics view Tennyson's contemplations of androgyny in *The Princess* optimistically, however. Marjorie Stone cites a fascinating bit of Tennysonian marginalia that reads "Men should be androgynous and women gynandrous, but men should not be gynandrous or women androgynous" (112). His use of terms is intriguing, since "androgynous" means, roughly, having the characteristics of both sexes (coming from the Greek *androgynus*, or hermaphrodite) or having neither characteristics specific to the male nor to the female. Gynandrous, more simply, describes a person of doubtful sex. Stone interprets this marginalia to mean that, while men may take advantage of the full range of human experience, women must retain only the characteristics which make possible their role, "which is centered in bearing and caring for children. This ideological message suggests that, despite its subtle exploration of gender inversion reinforced by genre subversion [the medley form], *The Princess* is a conservative poem" which restores the roles it ostensibly set out to question (112). Although childbearing is biologically associated with sex, childrearing need not be; gynandrous women need no particular sexual identity to care for children. Thus Tennyson, if we follow out this reading, is taking from women the

positive characteristics associated with them and assigning them to men, leaving the women sexually null.

More often, however, critics take heart when discussing Tennyson's androgyny, assuming the best of the poet. Johnston claims that Ida and the Prince "emerge as two halves of a potentially ideal individual" (552); she notes that Tennyson meshes not only gender traits (the manly and statuesque Ida, the effeminate and golden-haired Prince) but also an "enormous range of reference to times and places [which] simultaneously obliterates ordinary temporality and includes what seems to be all of human history"; from this meshing of gender, time, and place arises "the hopeful vision of selfhood that . . . is fundamentally social rather than individualistic" (553). Watson sees this hopeful vision not only in the marriage of Ida and the Prince but also, to a lesser degree, in the marriages of Psyche and Cyril, Melissa and Florian: these three pairs "bear the burden of responsibility for real change which will make possible and androgynous existence" and "represent a range of change, illustrating the point that there must be flexibility within the concept of androgyny itself" (70).

Watson and Johnston focus on Tennyson's extensive use of halves and pairs (Johnston points out, for instance, the remarkable number of compound words of all parts of speech that begin with "half-"); and while I agree with their optimistic view of the androgynous ideal as it

manifests itself in *The Princess*, I would add another perspective to it, that of groupings of three. Three women found a college; three young men invade it; three men defend their sister; three women become brides. In these triads (and other passing references to groupings of three, such as the three Graces) we see repeatedly the idea of two extremes and a middle position played out; and Tennyson achieves in the outcomes a more ideal personality than any single character possesses. This process is particularly important when it concerns the main characters.

If we look at the Prince and his companions, we see extremes of behavior and opinion and, in the Prince, an amalgamation of the extremes that eliminates the worst and amplifies the best of both. Cyril is “a gentleman of broken means / . . . but given to starts and bursts of revel” (I.52-3); perhaps we can blame his sudden and inexplicably injudicious singing of the tavern snatch on his impetuous nature. Cyril’s self-centered nature manifests itself particularly in his desire to marry Psyche. He offers to accompany the Prince immediately after hearing that the widow is in residence with Ida; and though he mocks her lecture, he lays plans to woo Psyche for her wealth: “dear are those castles to my wants, / And dear is sister Psyche to my heart” (II.395-6). Even his negotiations over Aglaïa are motivated less by a desire to rescue the child than by a desire to win Psyche’s approval, inspired when he

hears her say, “Ah! what might that man not deserve of me / Who gave me back my child?” Cyril’s motivations and behaviors are hardly pure.

Florian, to the contrary, appears pure to the point of naiveté in comparison with Cyril. In his tendency to think the best of people, he counters Cyril when the latter is at his most ungracious. When Cyril insists of the women that “they hunt old trails . . . very well; / But when did woman ever yet invent?”, Florian chides him: “Ungracious! . . . have you learnt / No more from Psyche’s lecture, you that talked / The trash that made me sick, and almost sad?” (II.368-72). Florian woos Melissa because he has fallen in love, not for mercenary (some would say practical) reasons. If he had discovered that Melissa was of base birth, his love would not have admitted impediment; in fact, he does discover her to be the daughter of one the two unsympathetic characters in the poem, Blanche, whose jealousies and schemes precipitate the college’s troubles.

The Prince represents an acceptable medium of his two friends’ personalities: sensitive like Florian, he can also summon up the energy to assess the pragmatics of a situation. While the kings argue over how the storming of Ida’s palace should proceed, the Prince pleads for more time to negotiate, as would the gracious Florian: “More soluble is this knot, / By gentleness than war” (V.129-30). But when negotiations fail, he feels “the blind wildbeast of force, / Whose home is in the sinews of a man,”

the same force that breeds impetuosity in Cyril (V.256-7). And the Prince is the only character who sees Ida as she is. Guided by the same practicality that Cyril uses to assess Psyche (she is worth three castles—and attractive, too), but tempered by the affection of Florian, he declares, “O my princess! true she errs, / But in her own grand way: being herself / Three times more noble than three score of men, / She sees herself in every woman else, / And so she wears her error like a crown / To blind the truth and me” (III.91-6). The Prince is heroic in this poem because, in a fashion very like the androgynous combining of positive traits, he adopts what is best of his friends’ more extreme natures.

Ida, Psyche, and Blanche form another critical triangle; each views her role in the college differently. Whereas the Prince comes into the poem fairly fully developed, we watch Ida’s painful process of growth as she mediates the approaches of Psyche and Blanche. Her imperious and possessive nature is likely a product of Blanche’s teaching; unfortunately, Blanche has created all too carefully a woman who, upon attaining maturity, can take the position of Head in real terms rather than simply in title. Blanche raised Ida as her own daughter; she is the false mother-figure who will be replaced, as the medley ends, by the Prince’s mother in Ida’s life. Throughout the plot, Ida must unmake herself from Blanche’s image. Blanche is harsh, quick to judge; she slanders Psyche for not revealing, out of mercy and sisterly concern, the identity of the men,

implying conspiracies that simply did not exist: “they knew her, they endured, / Long-closeted with her the yestermorn, / To tell her what they were, and she to hear” (IV.302-4). And she overestimates her sense of place, declaring “Dismiss me, and I prophesy your plan, / Divorced from my experience, / will be chaff / For every gust of chance” (IV.335-7).

Ida, initially, follows Blanche’s example. She judges harshly, to point out one instance of many, the accounts of the Prince loving her from afar: “Poor boy . . . can he not read—no books? / . . . To nurse a blind ideal like a girl, / Methinks he seems no better than a girl,” she mocks (III.198-202). And she rejects Psyche’s pleas for forgiveness until Aglaïa begins to soften her heart. Psyche’s role in this triad, much like Florian’s, is that of the trusting confidante, so sure of Ida’s love, so blissful in her sisterhood with the Princess that her banishment from Ida’s side is almost as painful as her loss of Aglaïa. Psyche seems to have no will but Ida’s, even after Ida wrongs her severely in the matter of the child (another comparison with Blanche, who sees in her own daughter an opportunity to maintain her influence in the college even after her own dismissal). When Cyril declares his intentions, well after the reconciliation between Ida and Psyche, she will not answer him “but feared / To incense the Head once more” until Ida, by means of a subtle blush, grants her permission for the suit to proceed. Blanche thinks to control Ida (and ultimately fails); Psyche seeks an equality of sisterhood

(but does not achieve it); Ida must wend her way between the inappropriately dominant extreme and the inappropriately passive extreme as she prepares herself to accept the Prince's suit. She cannot lead him; but she cannot bear the weakness of total submission, either.

The Prince tells Ida that they will live "Yoked in all exercise of noble end" (VII.340). Two beasts of burden in one yoke must move in tandem, neither dragging its partner back or pulling too far forward, if they wish to achieve their task. Tennyson's metaphor here is apt; and the Princess, too prone to dragging others with her into a future for which only a very few are prepared, moderates Blanche's drive with Psyche's loyal affection as she enters this yoke with the Prince.

I made the claim, as I began the study of Tennyson's uses of Ida, that she serves as something of a prophet-figure, as spokesperson for an ideal world that Tennyson is trying to create and explore through his poetry. Finally, her prophetic stance is reinforced by the triads in the play. While I do not argue that Ida is a Christ figure, since her fierce pride alone makes any comparison a remote possibility at best, I do assert that she is a quasi-religious figure. As Christ makes himself the sacrifice for his church, so many martyrs historically follow his example, losing their lives in the name of a greater ideal. Ida falls into this tradition: she sacrifices the pleasures of youth and is willing to sacrifice her life for her college. She inspires reverence in Psyche, in the students,

and in the Prince when he first sees her; Tennyson describes the chapel services in which “Six hundred maidens clad in purest white” attend a service in which the organ plays “solemn psalms, and silver litanies, / The work of Ida, to call down from Heaven / A blessing on her labours for the world” (II.448, 453-5). Tennyson repeatedly refers to her as the Head, as Paul calls Christ the head of the church; Christ is betrayed by one of the members of his “body,” and Ida faces betrayal from the person she had trusted implicitly. Tennyson has not created a perfect woman in Ida—far from it; but he has created a woman whose cause is worthy; his subtle but frequent allusions to her imperfect attempts at the actions of a saint or prophet, however misguided, help to render her heroic.

As the pairs in the poem melt into unified and somewhat androgynous wholes, so do the triads, like the Trinity which they must bring to Tennyson’s mind and the minds of many readers, resolve into a more perfect (but not entirely perfect, being human) wholes. The resolution offers a prophetic glance at a future time when each person will live more fully because each person will integrate the best of “manly” and “womanly” traits, perhaps eventually to the extent that the adjectives “manly” and “womanly,” and any adjectives of class, cease to have applicability—which brings to mind a final parallel to Christian doctrine. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, posits what complete immersion into Christian life should entail: “There is neither

Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3.28). This was Birkbeck's vision, and I think that it is Tennyson's, too, however impossible to realize.

Notes

1. Not all writers considering the question of women's spiritual nature agreed that lack of education, or miseducation, caused moral deficiencies, however; J. McGrigor Allen, for one, wrote in 1869 that women's undeveloped brains were to blame:

So little demand is there for the direct assistance of women in the mental departments which are the special province of man, that could all the male intellect in the world be suddenly paralyzed or annihilated, there is not sufficient [anatomical] development of the abstract principles of justice, morality, truth, or of causality and inventive power in the female sex, to hold the mechanism of society together for one week. (Qtd. in Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder 77)

2. Not surprisingly, these clergy were almost unanimously Nonconformist. Kelly notes that dissenting clergy were "commonly sympathetic and often active helpers" in the project (217).

3. The concerns that the King, Gama, Cyril, Florian, and Arac (all men) raise in *The Princess* are of course fictionalizations of the same concerns that every attempt at opening higher education and professional training to women faced; historians have documented this criticism

thoroughly. See for example Joan Burstyn's *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (Croom Helm 1980).

4. I find it neatly ironic that the prescient and cooperative words of the Prince, "The woman's cause is the man's" (VII.243), are echoed in "Of Queen's Gardens," although Ruskin inverts the logic: "We hear of the 'mission' and of the 'rights' of Woman, as if these could ever be separate from the mission and the rights of Man;—as if she and her lord were creatures of an independent kind, and of irreconcilable claim. This . . . is wrong" (63). Yet Tennyson and Ruskin draw very different conclusions from what they both see as a human mission and human rights.

5. This argument is not dissimilar to that behind the complaints of today's low-wage earners that some sorts of jobs are worse than unemployment and that the nature of employment, not the employee, needs improvement.

6. This emphasis on sibling affection and loyalty no doubt stems from Tennyson's own family history, as does in part his interest in the question of higher education for women, since he knew his sisters to be intelligent women capable of study.



" A moment, while the trumpets blow,
He sees his brood about thy knee."

CHAPTER II: IDA TAKES THE STAGE

“. . . at last there shall arise a woman, who will assume, in her soul, all the sufferings of her race, and that woman will be the Saviour of her race. . . . But now she is like that Archangel Michael as he stands upon Saint Angelo at Rome. She has an immense provision of wings, which seem as if they would bear her over earth and heaven; but when she tries to use them, she is petrified into stone, her feet are grown into the earth, chained to the bronze pedestal.”—Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*

In 1853 Tennyson brought out his final revision of *The Princess*; in 1870 the character of Ida was first presented on stage. 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 as he designs his “strange diagonal.” Tennyson, fascinated by drama, comes near that genre in the medley, and will of course work with the genre later in his career; but it is to a librettist, a novelist, and even a teacher of elocution that we must turn to trace Ida’s stage history, a history which we might characterize as treacherous, since Ida is made, for various purposes, to betray her Tennysonian self, to varying extents, in each dramatic presentation.

Ida’s story has been transformed into drama in four published (and no doubt many private) instances, beginning with William Schwenk Gilbert’s “Respectful Per-version” of the poem in 1870, which he later

recreated as a libretto for an 1884 collaboration with Sir Arthur Sullivan, the comic opera *Princess Ida*. Gilbert, as we shall see, pays his respects to Tennyson as author but uses his noble creation for his own and somewhat anti-Tennysonian ends. Then, in 1891, *Ida's* dramatic self again appears, odd as it may at first seem, in a novel for adolescent girls by L. T. Meade, *A Sweet Girl Graduate*; and Meade's use of *Ida* in this popular girls' story differs both from Tennyson's ideal and from Gilbert's "per-version." Finally, in 1914, Elsie Fogerty added the formal publication of *The Princess* to her repertoire of seven plays adapted for schoolgirls, which already included one of *The Princess's* ancestors, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Fogerty, like *Ida's* earlier dramatic proprietors, robs the Princess of her potent and controversial views; she reduces the plot to a naïve (and far less interesting) love story. *Ida* as a complex and at times distressingly human and character and *Ida* as representative of Tennyson's own struggles with the woman question are both eclipsed by her dramatic counterparts.

Gilbert's Allegorical Princess

In 1870 playwright and librettist William Schwenk Gilbert produced, with Tennyson's permission, a dramatic burlesque of the medley, entitled *The Princess* and subtitled "A Whimsical Allegory (Being a Respectful Perversion of Mr. Tennyson's Poem)." According to Ian Bradley, Gilbert used the poem as a vehicle with which "to poke some gentle fun at the movement for woman's education, which had gained momentum in the 1870s with the founding of Girton and Newnham colleges at Cambridge and Somerville and Lady Margaret Halls at Oxford" (211). Thirteen years later, Gilbert offered to convert his blank-verse parody into a libretto for

his latest collaboration with the recently knighted Arthur Sullivan. This collaboration resulted in the comic opera entitled *Princess Ida, or, Castle Adamant*, and billed as “A Respectful Operatic Perversion of Tennyson’s ‘Princess.’”

Gilbert’s views on issues regarding women’s access to higher education were, unlike Tennyson’s, neither ambivalent nor particularly thoughtful. Critic and biographer W. A. Darlington explains that, although “common sense was the essential quality of his mind,” Gilbert gave way to sentimentality on the subject of women:

On all other subjects, he was able to be cool, detached, and sensible; but he looked at women through a romantic haze. If they were young, lovely, and useless he was ready to worship them, but if they stepped off the pedestal he was equally ready to punish them with harsh gibes for their failure to live up to his ideal. (117)

For the women in the opera company, Gilbert took upon himself the rôle of *paterfamilias*, shielding them from suitors (both wanted and unwanted, apparently). Gilbert’s attitudes towards women as a class and as individuals with whom he worked necessitated that he be “opposed, automatically and inexorably, to any movement for [women’s] emancipation” (Darlington 118). And, although a bachelor himself, Gilbert did not question the sacredness of marriage (indeed, the majority of his plots, true to traditional comic form, resolve themselves in marriage), nor did he believe that women’s restricted activity within the domestic sphere limited them overmuch. To the contrary, he thought that

time spent educating women for activities beyond their domestic duties was time wasted (Darlington 118)¹. Accordingly, he did not concern himself with the artistically posed dilemma in Tennyson's poem; rather, he used his renditions of *The Princess* to render the question of higher education for women, in the case of the play, mildly silly, and in the case of the libretto, entirely ludicrous. In effect, he worked to remove the ambiguities that complicate Tennyson's text. Whether he succeeded in producing unambiguous, or merely differently ambiguous, texts is the question of this chapter.

Gilbert described his play as "whimsical" in the subtitle; only in retrospect do we have a clear sense of what whimsy meant to the playwright. That is, to read the play in comparison with the later libretto gives us a measure of Ida's progress through Gilbert's artistic biases. Simply put, the Horatian satire with which Gilbert approaches the woman question in general, and Ida's dreams in particular, in the play gives way during the following decade to satire with a decidedly Juvenalian edge. Certainly, all that is serious in Tennyson's mildly comic tale disappears in the play; but, as we shall see, the play provided Gilbert with a forum to test his approach with the smaller audiences who viewed his play before committing himself to the comically derisive statement of the libretto, which played to far larger audiences than the play ever reached, and which, coupled with Sullivan's music, survives in Gilbert's opus in a way that the play could not.

The play and libretto diverge identically from Tennyson's medley in several important ways; we must understand these changes before we can

compare Gilbert's 1870 and 1883 efforts or analyze the libretto as an independent work. Most notably, Tennyson's framing device is absent, and with it the motivation for the tale and an important key to its interpretation. Removing the frame may have served practical dramatic considerations by reducing the number of sets needed, calling for the hiring of fewer actors, and shortening the duration of the performance. But it also changes the story significantly: the comic elements of Tennyson's burlesque are largely confined to the cantos in which the story is told. The frame (and the intercalary songs, also missing from Gilbert's versions) gives Ida's story its sympathetic element. Lilia's complaint that a thousand women of noble nature are alive but unable to act because "convention beats them down" is sincere (Prologue 128); she pushes away "the hand [her brother's] that played the patron with her curls" in a remarkably kinesthetic restatement of the problem: men play the owners of women; men have the right to handle their women's bodies and direct their lives.² Sympathetic readers understand both Lilia's desires and Walter's restricted patterns of response as the sister and brother negotiate Victorian ideas of gender roles.

Likewise, the conclusion brings readers back to Lilia, her aunt, and the men, all of whom react with disappointment of various sorts to Ida's capitulation; at the day's end the party "sat / But spoke not, rapt in nameless reverie, / Perchance upon the future man . . ." (Conclusion 107-9); Lilia herself leads the party home, standing to remove her scarf from the statue of Sir Ralph. In the conclusion, the narrator contextualizes the woman question with other questions of social import: the feared conflict

between England and France, the dissolution of European monarchies, the question of British workers' rights. In discarding the framing of Ida's story, Gilbert discards the real social contexts of her desire and eliminates what is for Tennyson a needful debate, but for Gilbert a moot point.

Gilbert alters other details of the poem for both of his works; these changes, too, have their cumulative effect, namely that of making noble characters ignoble, less fit for a tale of kings and queens, princes and princesses (but perhaps more human). Immediately, readers notice that Gilbert gives names to characters who in the poem are referred to by titles or common nouns. Gilbert no doubt adds the names for clarity—audiences can thus better follow and keep in mind the twists of plot. Of course, he chooses the names carefully and for effect: the old king is Hildebrand, “sword of war,” a name that fits him well in the opera especially; Arac's brothers are Guron and Scynthus; a handful of graduates receive stereotypically pastoral names like Sylvia, Phoebe, and Chloe (and one sweet graduate is aptly called Sacharissa). Most important, however, is the name Gilbert assigns the Prince: Hilarion. How are audiences to take seriously, even in a comic setting (for audiences do care about the romantic fates of well-drawn characters), the plight of one named “hilarious”? In addition to robbing the Prince of the dignity attendant on his rank, the name's connotations lead audiences to expect little intelligence from him, and indeed, his actions are haphazard and reactive, unlike Ida's proactive planning. With no other character does Gilbert take such liberties, restricting Hilarion's ability to empathize with Ida's hopes, eliminating his debilitating yet enlightening seizures, and

finally reducing Tennyson's courtly lover to a flip and careless boy, certainly not fit for Ida, whose nobility survives despite Gilbert's burlesque.

Hildebrand, too, falls from his royal and intimidating position. In the poem he upholds his decree against Ida for the sake of general principles as well as personal debts: "she laughs at you," he complains to the Prince, "*and man: / She wrongs herself, her sex, and me, and him*" (V.112-3, emphasis mine). Ida is not an exceptional case that may go unredressed but a model which other women might well follow. In the poem and opera, however, Hildebrand bases his anger at Ida on his old dissatisfaction with his own late wife (in the poem he praises his late wife as "a good mother, a good wife, / Worth winning" (V.159-60)). In the play she is the object of Hildebrand's barbs: when told that Ida speaks a hundred languages, he remarks to his son, "Your late mamma had mastered only one, / Yet she was never at a loss for words!" Hilarion replies, "But think how useful is a wife who can / Express her fancies in a hundred tongues." "You will find one," advises Hildebrand, "of average length, enough" (217). While Gama may play the rôle of the hen-pecked father (since Ida's mother, too, is dead long before the action of the tale begins), more subtly, Hildebrand allows memories of an unpleasant marriage to justify his attacks on Ida.

Hildebrand's foil, Lady Blanche, undergoes a similar refocusing of motivation. Tennyson's Blanche is indeed jealous, but her jealousy stems initially from a motherly love for Ida; Melissa explains that Blanche "had the care of Lady Ida's youth, / And from the Queen's decease she brought

her up" (III.69-70). Psyche appears as a rival for Ida's attentions and energies; Ida and Psyche "grew . . . inosculated" and of "one mind in all things" (III.72-3. 75); the college, in Blanche's opinion, has suffered for their collusion. The college was, I believe, Blanche's dream first; but Ida's noble rank and wealth provide her with the necessary means to bring it into being; like the old king in the poem, Tennyson's Blanche responds to a higher principle in her contention, hidden for most of the poem, with Psyche.

To the contrary, Gilbert's Blanche is a vain old woman, fuming over lost opportunities and grieving, notably, over her lost youth. These less principled complaints fuel her jealousy of Psyche and of Ida herself. When Melissa, attempting to save Hilarion, Florian, and Cyril, tempts Blanche with the leadership of the college, Blanche responds in song: "For years I've writhed beneath her [Ida's] sneers, / Although a born Plantagenet! . . . Her elder I, by several years, / Although you'd never imagine it" (475). Later, when Hilarion saves Ida from the river's current by grabbing her hair, Blanche looks away and mutters, "And it comes off," in another slight against Ida's youthful beauty (481). Ida is not unaware of Blanche's hatred and responds ungraciously to it; when Blanche, pressed by Ida to summarize a lecture on abstract philosophy, claims that "the Princess Ida Is our head,— / The Lady Psyche Might Be—Lady Blanche— / Neglected Blanche—inevitably Must," Ida dismisses the threat with "Ambitious fool! And do you think you can / provide this college with a head. Go, go! / Provide yourself with one—you want it more!" (236). Gilbert easily reduces the question of the college's survival and leadership to a catfight

between two women obsessed with personal position and claims to beauty (Blanche, gossip has it, dyes her hair).

Ida's school itself experiences a subtle scaling down under Gilbert's crafting. It loses its emphasis on academic achievement and becomes something of a boarding school for socially wayward young women, incarcerated until their desire for normal Victorian womanhood causes them to run home. Blanche first enters, in Gilbert's versions of the plot, with a list of punishments for misbehaving graduates: Sacharissa is expelled because she brought a set of chess *men* into the walls; when Sacharissa protests that they are only men of wood, Blanche scolds, "They're men with whom you give each other mate!" (233) Sylvia is rusticated for three months for inserting lace into her gown; Phyllis loses three terms for sketching a forbidden object in her drawing book—a "*Double perambulator, shameless girl!*" (233). Gilbert requires the audience to feel more sympathy for the graduates as girls deprived of the daydreams of adolescence than for them as young women deprived of the education that will ready them for life, as wives, mothers, or whatever other rôles they may choose.

Similarly, Gilbert deletes from Tennyson's plot the setting for Cyril's unfortunate lapse, his tavern snatch that alerts Ida to his gender. Tennyson sets this turning point in the action in the fields, as the graduates and their teachers participate in a geological expedition, a common and respectable outing in Tennyson and Gilbert's time. The graduates, with the disguised men among them, climb the copses, "Hammering and clinking, chattering stony names / Of shale and

hornblende, rag and trap and tuff, / Amygdaloid and trachyte" (V.343-5). In Gilbert's versions of the plot, no such outing occurs; rather, Ida and the graduates merely sit down for a luncheon at which Cyril rudely eats and drinks too much. Gilbert as comic reductionist focuses, in Swiftian fashion, merely on the grossnesses of being human, and ignores or downplays the question at hand in Tennyson's poem: are these women out of their proper sphere as they study geology? Are they kicking against common sense by sequestering themselves in their university? At the end of the play, Cyril reminds the defeated Ida that "if at any time you feel / Awearied of the Prince, you can return / To Castle Adamant, and rule your girls / As heretofore"; Ida asks whether she would find Psyche there, to which the latter replies, "If Cyril, ma'am, / Does not behave himself, I think you will"—Melissa, on the other hand, pledges never to return, "however Florian turns out" (262-3). Gilbert succeeds in reducing Ida's university to the equivalent of country retreat for dissatisfied wives.

Though I have not touched here on every change that marks both of Gilbert's versions of the plot (I have not discussed yet, for instance, Aglaia's absence), it is easy to see how Gilbert turned Tennyson's poem to his own desires, removing Ida's tale from its social context and reducing the play to a comedy of thwarted love. In his changes to the plot between 1870 and 1883, as I have noted, we see a fiercer satire in which Gilbert portrays Ida, her colleagues, and their demands as more extreme and dangerous; the men in the opera, in turn, Gilbert presents either as inept and ineffective at parrying the women's threats, or as violent in response to the women's demands.

The effect of the changes in the women's rôles is to make Ida's plans for women's higher education simultaneously more ludicrous and intimidating and Ida herself a more powerful threat to the happy conclusion of her infant betrothal. Gilbert's alterations to this second "perversion" are many and often subtle, and many will come under discussion later; several instances, however, bear examination at this point in the argument. An important event for the audience is its first view of the college and its denizens, which, in Tennyson's poem, is one of grace, elegance, and of course intelligence. The Prince's first glimpse of the college includes five statues, one of a winged woman, the others of winged horses. He recounts "the splash and stir / Of fountains" (I.214-5) and the bust of Athena, fit guardian of Ida's gates. We hear soon of "lucid marbles" of the Graces and the Muses (II.10) and are shown the students' books and musical instruments lying about (the students, at dawn, are not yet at their studies).

Gilbert does not need to describe the scene, since his audience can see the set. In the play, his gently mocking description focuses on the students' leisure activities; in the libretto, we first meet the students as they discuss their ridiculous curriculum; then, more damaging still, we hear what the young men imagine life in a women's college must be like (of which more later). We may rightly call the scene in the play comically charming. Melissa bursts in with exciting news for Chloe and Ada: "I've just been shown / The robe for doctors of divinity, / Oh, it's the sweetest thing!—Magenta silk, / Trimmed with chinchilla, *bouillonné* behind. / . . . and on the skirt, / Two rows of Cluny lace as deep as that!" She continues

to describe in rapturous terms the cap of “amber satin” accented with pearls and “the tiniest, tiniest rosebuds in the world!” Poor Ada and Chloe sigh enviously; their legal gowns are of “green grenadine,” and Chloe considers changing her major because she “look[s] a fright in green” (232). Gilbert thus makes fun of the students while making a point about women’s real concerns as he conceives of them. In the opera, he is much less kind: we meet the graduates first asking Psyche in song what knowledge they should possess. Psyche responds to a student reading for a degree in Classics that she should read Anacreon, Ovid, Aristophanes, Juvenal—apparently, however, Psyche worries that these authors present knowledge too bluntly for her students, singing, “if you will be advised, / You will get them Bowdlerized!” (449-50). Sacharissa then asks the question that the other maidens are too shy to frame: “What’s the thing that’s known as Man?” Psyche answers with a catalogue of misinformation (or, more threateningly, disinformation). “Man will swear and Man will storm— / Man is not at all good form— / Man is of no kind of use,” Psyche begins, and so she continues until Ida arrives to reiterate the baseness of all men. Gilbert aims two blows against the women in this scene—he mocks their curriculum, and he exaggerates the original Ida’s plan, which calls for women to sequester themselves for three years only. In the opera (though no explanation for the absent but necessary years is made), the girls have apparently never seen any man but Gobbo the porter, and him only once yearly. Gilbert reinforces this particular change when Ida pronounces the vows of the college to her three new students: they must swear that they “will never marry any man” (to which Hilarion, Florian,

and Cyril readily agree, in a nicely comic moment) (465); Tennyson's college requires, again, only a three-year period of sequestration, not an unreasonable request, even if a difficult one, since Ida's students are likely in attendance against their fictional families' wishes. At the end of three years, the students will return to their homes, more prepared to fulfill their rôles. To require total and lifelong celibacy is extreme—and Gilbert must know it to be so, especially at a time when the tradition of the bachelor fellow had been called into question (in fact, the opera debuted in 1884, the same year in which fellows at Oxbridge were first allowed to marry).

If the school and students strike audiences as laughable in comparison with Tennyson's, they are nonetheless also quite intimidating in Gilbert's second treatment of the plot. The women's assessment of all men clearly generalizes all that is worst in any human being; and while in the play, the men get ample opportunity to respond to Ida and Psyche's insults, rarely do they have a chance to defend themselves in the opera. One such contrast concerns the character of Gobbo, who appears in the play both as the porter for the college and as an example of ugliness for the maidens. Ida causes this unattractive and elderly rustic to parade before the noble maidens once a year, saying, "See—this is what you lose in losing man" and calling Gobbo, whose very name marks him humorously as a poor specimen of masculinity, "a type of all that's beautiful in man" (225). But the men set the students straight not much later in the action; when they remove their disguises, the astonished Melissa pronounces her own version of Miranda's "brave new world"

speech in *The Tempest*: “How marvelously strange! And are you then, / Indeed, young men? / . . . / They told me men / Were hideous, idiotic, and deformed! / They’re quite as beautiful as women are!” (239). In this version, then, the prince and his companions wipe away the prejudices which the students have learned. In the opera, too, Melissa, Psyche, and the three men engage in a song about the beauty of men; but that song is not a direct response to earlier misinformation about (in this case) the physical attributes of men.

Nor do the men in the opera manage to respond to the comic yet insulting comments about their manners and minds. One of the funniest songs in the opera is Lady Psyche’s parable of the woman and the ape (discussed later in this chapter); that song is foreshadowed in the play when Psyche explains to the young men the edict that men may not enter the college: “It’s based upon the grand hypothesis / That as the Ape is undeveloped Man, / So Man is undeveloped woman.” (1870, the year of the play, is of course also the year of the publication of *The Descent of Man*.) Hilarion turns the analogy back against Psyche, arguing that “If Man is only undeveloped Woman, / We men, if we work very hard indeed, / And do out utmost to improve ourselves— / May in good time *be* women!” He notes with some relief (and, I imagine, a brief visual check of his physique) that as yet “the metamorphosis has not commenced,” undermining with a bit of bawdy humor Psyche’s critique (238-9). In the opera, Gilbert develops the analogy into the song about the Ape who “craves” the “lady fair, of lineage high”; his love, when it “took formal shape,” caused the lady to “express such terror / At his monstrous error”

that he flees the scene. Psyche's cautionary tale has the Ape shaving, dressing well, getting a good haircut, but remaining "the apiest Ape that ever was seen!" (470). Of course, the lady is not taken in by the Ape, no more than Psyche is taken in by the disguised men, who get no time to reply to the parable because they are surprised by Melissa's sudden entrance. The students in the opera must wait until after the battle to learn the truth about masculinity; ostensibly, had the college not fallen, they would have continued in their ignorance.

It is worth noting that, in this point as in others, Gilbert's tale is not at all in keeping philosophically with Tennyson's. Psyche, in *The Princess*, does criticize the historical relations of men and women; she lectures on the "evolution" of these relations; but her claim is only that men have historically exercised an often brutal tyranny over women. When Psyche speaks of the future, however, she rises "upon a wind of prophecy" and speaks the often anthologized lines describing an equal partnership of men and women in business, government, art and learning (II.154). In short, Tennyson's object is conciliation; Gilbert's is division for the purpose of satirical effect. His Ida must be humbled; her ideas are too much a threat to men's dominance.

Gilbert creates in Ida herself embodiment of this threat, making her more regal than any other character, female or male, yet—paradoxically—reducing her to a narrow schoolmarm. When Ida first takes the stage, she sings Sullivan's nobly composed recitative and aria, whose words invoke Minerva:

Oh, goddess wise

That lovest light
 Endow with sight
 Their unillumined eyes.
 At this my call,
 A fervent few
 Have come to woo
 The rays that from thee fall. (452-3)³

Ida's dress is ornate, her bearing aloof, as she pronounces this invocation, which does not appear in the play. Further, immediately before Ida's entrance, the chorus of students implores her help in words that allude clearly to Christ's mission as prophesied in the ancient Book of Isaiah and recorded in the Gospels, allying Ida's mission with his:

We are blind, and we would see;
 We are bound, and would be free;
 We are dumb, and we would talk;
 We are lame, and we would walk. (452)

Audiences thus form a favorable and sympathetic first perception of the Princess, one which Gilbert moves quickly, however, to alter. Ida is not messianic; rather, she has delusions of godhood. Ida's idea, we see, of guiding students to Minerva's "sacred shrine" consists of advice on the universal removal of male dominance by the students' defiance of fashion dictates. It is almost as if Gilbert himself can not tolerate Ida's noble and authoritative nature and must lessen it as soon as he depicts it. Certainly her queenly nature makes itself known again as she dispenses *noblesse oblige* generously to the "young women" requesting entrance into the

college; she assures them that rank means nothing among the students. She offers no “sham degrees for noblewomen” and allows no “cruel distinctions, meant to draw / A line ‘twixt rich and poor” (464). More notably, Gilbert sets Ida up in power in the opera when she deals with the discovered men. In the play, she merely orders them to leave the college grounds, showing mercy because Hilarion has apparently saved her from drowning. That “doughty deed” carries no weight with the operatic Ida, however; as she prepares to condemn the men to death, they cry out in unison, “Have mercy, lady,—disregard your oaths!” She responds, “I know no mercy, men in women’s clothes! / The man whose sacrilegious eyes / Invade our strict seclusion, dies”; then she orders their summary arrest (481-2).

It must come as no surprise to careful readers of the play and the libretto, given the greater threat posed by Ida, her colleagues, and her college, that Cyril’s tavern snatch, which gives the men away during the luncheon, also changes in nature. In the play, it concerns a sexually aggressive man, a student at law who pursues the company of a woman; in the opera, it concerns a sexually aggressive *woman*, whose desirability lies in her sham modesty: the woman who sets Cyril’s heart aflame must hide her eyes and blush “for shame-a” while her lips say silently, “Oh, kiss me, kiss me, kiss me, / Though I die of shame-a!” The maid who boldly declares her sexual interests is not for Cyril; she is too aggressive. But demure desire attracts his own bold desires, those for Psyche, specifically, which he makes no attempt to hide. From man as aggressor to woman as aggressor—the change is significant.

As significant are the two types of male responses to the women's more extreme natures in the opera. Again, Gilbert's libretto voices more strongly his criticism of Ida's position and its effects on the male characters than does his play: it renders the young men inept and the older men, particularly Hildebrand, quite violent in comparison with their respective characters in the play.

Although the ineptness of Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian is the subject of discussion later in this chapter, we can note at this point their evolution from the play to the libretto. In general, Tennyson's Prince, though occasionally hampered by his seizures, can gather information and produce a reasonable plan of action. In Gilbert's play, too, he knows before entering the college grounds that he does so on pain of death; he performs reconaissance by questioning Gobbo; he chooses to disguise himself and the other young men as women before infiltrating the college. He attempts some mastery of a difficult situation. In the libretto, his approach is quite different. He and his fellows sneak over the college walls in pre-dawn hours as if they were playing an enormously jolly prank, oblivious to the death penalty. They find the students' robes and put them on simply to have a little fun—their joke becomes their "plan" suddenly, and without preparation, when Ida surprises them. And they are unable to maintain their disguises from scene to scene (no doubt, Gilbert took advantage of their dilemma to direct a series of sight gags for the audience's amusement). Ida's brothers, too, who in the play offer their defense to their sister willingly, offended that Hildebrand would molest her home, back down in the libretto, preferring jail to their avowed trade

of war and begging Ida to save their lives rather than send them into battle.

Hildebrand, quite to the contrary, undergoes a frightening change in the libretto: as Ida's demands become more threatening, so do his responses. While waiting for Gama's party, Hildebrand threatens to "trounce" Ida herself (433); when his son is held captive, he sends to Ida to inform her that she must release him or "we'll storm the lady" (444). In the play, the old king never threatens Ida's person; indeed, when he must decide to take Castle Adamant to retrieve his son, he suggests quite another tactic. "As other girls are stormed so shall they be," he commands; "we'll use no cannon, bayonet, or sword, / . . . / We'll witch them forth / With love songs, odes, and idle fripperies, / Such as a woman can not long withstand" (249). Then, to heighten the comedy, the soldiers head for the castle walls not by rank but by vocal part. "Who leads the scaling party, sir?" inquires the second officer. "The first light tenors—they can the highest go," Hildebrand replies. He also orders that five hundred valentines be delivered to the castle inmates, and plans other romantic diversions as well. One might expect Gilbert to seize the chance, in his collaboration with Sullivan, to send men into battle in companies of baritones and basses; in the libretto, however, Gilbert puts aside the potentially comic army of voices, so that Hildebrand states his threats quite explicitly to Ida: "I'll make the whole of you shake in your shoes. / I'll storm your walls, / And I'll level all your halls, / In the twinkling of an eye!" (486). Clearly, in the libretto, Gilbert has sterner words for Ida and those who are sympathetic to her goals.

Princess Ida debuted on 5 January 1884 and ran for nine months, a successful run for any other comic opera of the day, but far short of its predecessor on D'Oyly Carte's stage, *Iolanthe*. We may wonder whether Gilbert's satire had outlived its day in 1884; by that time, women were attending Cambridge and Oxford (though not as eligible candidates for degrees). The point, seemingly, had been won—women had taken their places (circumscribed places, at least) by men in the universities. The battle, however, continued in various forums, as women pressed for admission to the professions for which they could now receive training. In 1882, after the founding of the London School of Medicine for Women, a critic wrote in the *Lancet* that

certain *persons* have succeeded in passing the examinations open to them and others may do the same, but the world and the good sense of the sex will no more permanently tolerate the unseemly invasion of an unsuitable province of labour than women, as a class, will ultimately show themselves fitted for the discharge of duties they have rashly and, as we believe, indecorously undertaken. (qtd. in Hibbert 161)

At the same time that the leading medical journal was objecting to the activities newly open to women, feminists began agitating for the vote. The historical context, then, left the satirical option open for Gilbert, whom critic Isaac Goldberg describes as “no misogynist” but as one who “had an eye for Tennysonian ‘sweet girl graduates in their golden hair,’ and a heart for them. The more reason,” Goldberg concludes, “why he

should resent their withdrawal from a man's world, and seek to woo them back with parodies in blank verse" (293).⁴

An examination of Gilbert's "parodies in blank verse" reveals, as we have seen, that he managed both to stick closely to Tennyson's plot and to exaggerate the comedy of the medley into true burlesque. To make this point clearly, we have only to look at Gilbert's treatment of Ida's goals and the accomplishments of her university. For instance, upon welcoming the Prince and his friends, disguised as "sweet girl graduates," into the university, Tennyson's Ida pronounces an inaugural address that should truly inspire any seeker after wisdom: speaking of great women of the past, she exhorts, "Dwell with these . . . Knowledge is now no more a fountain sealed; / Drink deep, until the habits of the slave, / The sins of emptiness, gossip and spite / And slander, die" (II.71, 76-9). In Gilbert's libretto, Ida begins her speech nobly enough, with an invocation to Minerva and her sacred shrine; but her speech soon deteriorates into a ridiculous comparison between elephants and men, and then she lays out the university women's plan to subdue the tyrant man:

Let no one care a penny how she looks—
 Let red be worn with yellow—blue with green— . . .
 Let all your things misfit, and you yourselves
 At inconvenient moments come undone!
 Let hair-pins lose their virtue: let the hook
 Disdain the fascination of the eye— . . .
 In other words—let Chaos come again! (454)

Thus a sort of blackmail will overcome men's resistance to feminist aims: by ignoring the dictates of fashion, presumably until women's demands are met by men who miss their companions' loveliness.

Gilbert also removes the grudging words of praise that Tennyson allows the Prince and Florian to speak when they see the college at work. In place of Tennyson's characters' admission that Lady Psyche's "flawless demonstration" and "classic lecture, rich in sentiment" have advanced their own understanding (II.351-2), Gilbert writes a trio, "Gently, gently," for the three young men to sing, as they breach the college walls, mocking the idea that a woman's university could teach a man anything useful:

Useful knowledge / Everywhere one finds,
 And already / Growing steady, / We've enlarged our minds.
 We've learnt that prickly cactus / Has the power to attract
 us / When we fall.

That nothing man unsettles / Like a bed of stinging nettles, /
 Short or tall. . . .

A Woman's College! maddest folly going!

What can girls learn within its walls worth knowing? . . .

I'll teach them twice as much in half-an-hour outside it. (458)

Gilbert's men do not wait to enter the college grounds and examine the curriculum before dismissing it; Cyril in particular is more interested in "breaking curfew" with a student—any student—than in any knowledge he may gain. Later in the song, the young nobles hypothesize about the projects going on behind the ivy-clad walls: to square the circle, to teach pigs to fly, to get sunbeams from cucumbers (in a nod to Swift that brings

to mind an unfavorable comparison between the “projectors” of Laputa and of Ida’s colleagues), and, less impossibly, though Gilbert could not have known it, to “cross the Polar Ocean” and to establish communications with people on the moon (460-1).⁵

A final comparison of the two writers’ treatments of the idea of a women’s university involves the lectures that the graduates hear. In Tennyson’s work, *Lady Psyche* acknowledges that men in the past have misused women, but then speaks of a “dawn . . . a beam of promise” (II.122-4) and voices, in one of the most frequently excerpted sections of the poem, a noble hope for a future in which both men and women forgive the abuses of the past and collaborate:

. . . . Everywhere
 Two heads in council, two beside the hearth,
 Two in the tangled business of the world,
 Two in the liberal offices of life,
 Two plummets dropped for one to sound the abyss
 Of science, and the secrets of the mind;
 Musician, painter, sculptor, critic, more;
 And everywhere the broad and bounteous Earth
 Should bear a double growth of those rare souls,
 Poets, whose thoughts enrich the blood of the world. (II.155-64)

Quite to the contrary, as we have seen, Gilbert gives *Lady Psyche* a different vision of the relationship, past, present, and future, between the sexes: “We are all taught,” she sings, “and, being taught, believe / That

man, sprung from a Ape, is Ape at heart"; then she plunges into a hilarious song about an ape in love with "a Lady fair, of lineage high" which concludes that the Lady is "a radiant Being, / With a brain far-seeing—While Darwinian Man, though well-behaved, / At best is only a monkey shaved!" (469-70).⁶ Obviously, here is no ground for reconciliation, or indeed for rational discussion, between men, who still require a bit of evolution, and women, who never required any (we may also note Gilbert's humorous use of anachronism—Darwinian thought in a medieval college!).

We see Gilbert's spoof of the possibility of women at college even in his instructions to the set-builder. In contrast to the stately grounds in Tennyson's college, with their fountains (so often a symbol of knowledge and inspiration in his poetry) and statues of noble women, Gilbert ordered a frivolous and fantastic set that reflected his idea of Victorian woman's obsession with heavily ornamented decor and stressed the fantasy that women who desired higher education indulged in. The set was in fact the most expensive of all the D'Oyly Carte productions (Bradley 238).

Through libretto and set, then, Gilbert makes clear his opinion of Ida's project. However, we may notice a subtler thesis at work within Gilbert's characterization of Ida and her maidens. Critics such as Eileen Tess Johnston, Jeannie Watson, and Marjorie Stone have pointed out the potential androgyny of the Princess and the Prince in Tennyson's poem; Gilbert's comical machinations go further, "unsexing" all of the main characters moreso than does Tennyson's text. Gilbert's Ida is not as problematic as Tennyson's: although she is "fascinating, yet eccentric"

(Cellier and Bridgeman 121), she is, Alan Jefferson claims, “one of Gilbert’s most human and admirable characters, in spite of her implicit belief in a lost cause”; Gilbert gives her a “dignity which ridicule cannot penetrate” (161). Rather, the problem originates with Ida’s usurpation of a role traditionally held by men—that of university president (though we should note here that Gilbert maliciously misrepresents her presidential duties to be the design of university fashions and administering sanctions against misbehaving students (474)).

Ida’s position undermines her femininity and that of all the women at the university. She herself has renounced marriage; and though she alone makes that decision in Tennyson’s poem, requiring the students only to forgo male companionship for three years, Gilbert has her cause all of the graduates to give up marriage, setting up the humorous scene in which the disguised suitors sincerely and willingly take oaths never to marry any man and to prefer the university maidens to all mankind. Though Ida herself wears royally embroidered robes (with hearts, ironically, ironed into the pattern), following Gilbert’s costuming instructions, the Ladies Blanche and Psyche, and the maiden Melissa, sport the latest in body armor: Ida’s influence, wielded from her position of authority, has defeminized them, too. Further, Gilbert deletes entirely the clearest feminine aspect of the college’s triumvirate, Lady Psyche’s infant daughter Aglaïa, whom Tennyson calls the true heroine of the play, and whose influence initiates the softening of Ida’s will. Gilbert’s Ida, who punishes a graduate for sketching a double perambulator in her drawing-book, has no place for children in her realm.

Ida's renunciation of mankind androgynizes the women within her realm; far worse, though, is her influence on nearly all the men of the opera. First, Gama Rex: the father of such a wayward daughter cannot be a strong male character by Victorian standards, and in neither text is he. But Tennyson restrains his description of Gama the scant description of "A little dry old man, without a star, / Not like a king" and portrays him as perplexed and flustered by his headstrong daughter; "all she is and does is awful," he complains (l.116-7, 139). Gilbert, on the other hand, has a heyday with this character, transforming him into a twisted hunchback with a warped and bitter personality (and partly, his biographers agree, into a caricature of himself), "as though Dame Nature, angry with her work, / Had crumpled it in a fit of petulance," Hildebrand says (431). From the opening lines till the final curtain, Gama is in Hildebrand's firm control, as Hildebrand makes clear in lines sung while he waits to see whether Gama will deliver Ida to his castle as agreed:

For Gama place the richest robes we own—
 For Gama place the coarsest prison dress—
 For Gama let our best spare bed be aired—
 For Gama let our deepest dungeon yawn—
 For Gama lay the costliest banquet out—
 For Gama place cold water and dry bread! (432)

When Gama arrives without his daughter, Hildebrand carries out these and other threats against him, and the twisted king makes no attempt to defend himself. His inability to manage his daughter undermines his manhood, in his own eyes and in those of Hildebrand and his court.

Gama's opening solo brings into further question his manliness: he spends his time, he confesses, spying, prying, and engaging in witty repartee to degrade those around him. His description of himself reminds readers of a stereotypically petty gossip: "Each little fault of temper and each social defect / In my erring fellow creatures I endeavour to correct. / To all their little weaknesses I open people's eyes; / And little plans to snub the self-sufficient I devise" (439). Gilbert's audiences certainly recognized this character type from earlier librettos, but they were accustomed to the interfering old gossip being a woman. Yet Gama, unsexed by his hero-daughter, registers no shame concerning his hen-pecking behavior; to the contrary, he revels in what is generally a negative feminine role.

The petulant, peevish Gama has one source of pride: his manly, warrior sons Arac, Guron, and Scynthus. If we label any characters in this opera masculine, it ought to be these three sons. Their very introduction brings up the point in question: they sing, to a cleverly cloddish accompaniment, "We are warriors three, / Sons of Gama, Rex. / Like most sons are we, / Masculine in sex" (437). They admit that they are not overly intelligent and prefer fighting to anything else. But despite their armor (with its strangely effeminate breastplates), weaponry, and bravado, they never rise to their sire's defense and, indeed, go almost willingly into captivity with their father when he fails to produce the bride as agreed. Later, when Hildebrand storms the university, Ida calls on her brothers, whom Hildebrand has sent to her as messengers, to stand and defend her cause by her side as, in Tennyson's poem, they do. But though earlier they had sung, "Bold, and fierce, and strong, ha! ha! / For a war we

burn" (438), they now suggest, as Ida, undaunted, arms herself, that she give in to Hildebrand's demands:

We may remark, though nothing can / Dismay us,
That if you thwart this gentleman, / He'll slay us.
We don't fear death, of course—we're taught / To shame it;
But still upon the whole we thought / We'd name it. (486)

Stranger still, these warrior brothers, when they finally agree to fight Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian to decide Ida's fate, begin without a word of explanation to *take off* each component of their knightly armor. Arac sings in Handelian style, "This helmet, I suppose, / Was meant to ward off blows, / It's very hot, / And weighs a lot, / As many a guardsman knows, / So off that helmet goes" (501). In like manner he and his brothers evaluate and reject every piece of armor before going into battle. Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian, who before this odd tactic were out-materiéled, now easily defeat the brothers; their woundedness shames Ida into her decision to accede to her marriage with Hilarion. Ida's own loss of Victorian femininity finds its counterpart in the emasculation of her father and brothers; she capitulates to save them, not herself, from death at Hildebrand's hands (ironically, they are further emasculated because a woman saves them).

Ida's defeminizing influence extends not only to her family, but also to her betrothed and his companions; and it is here, in the case of the Prince, that Gilbert alters Tennyson's text most significantly. First, he names Tennyson's anonymous character Hilarion, a name that, with its connotations of hilarity, adds comic effect while reducing the character's

masculine credibility in a period that praised earnestness and self-control. As important is Gilbert's reduction of the Prince's rôle from narrator of the tale to one among several main parts: without his introspective commentary, the Prince's complex nature and, especially, his sympathy with and partial validation of Ida's aspirations in the medley's seventh canto collapse into elements of a merely romantic comic plot—boy marries girl (Gilbert refers to the infant betrothal as a marriage); boy loses girl (in this case, the rival is Minerva); boy lays siege to girl; boy is made prisoner by girl; boy overcomes girl's brothers and takes back his bride. Gilbert also discards the Prince's "weird seizures," further reducing any enigma in his character and, notably, eliminating a device which Tennyson uses to question the accepted station of women in Victorian England. Once the simplistic Hilarion emerges from the complicated and ambivalent Prince, Gilbert can allow him to participate in the burlesque of gender-switching without dealing with the sensitive issues that perplex Tennyson. Hilarion is far more Hildebrand's son than Tennyson's Prince is the son of the harshly misogynistic King in the poem.

Hilarion, Florian, and Cyril invade Ida's college, as they do in the poem; however, unlike their originals, they have not previously heard of the edict forbidding men on pain of death from entering the campus, nor do they have any sort of plan beyond climbing the walls. This alteration of Tennyson's plot is critical: the young men do not *choose* to dress as women and enroll in the college. Rather, once within the university's walls they happen, comically and conveniently, upon three academic robes, which they don and strut about in, singing, "I am a maiden, cold and

stately.” Here Gilbert’s stage instructions specify several characteristically feminine gestures in which the actors must engage as they sing “Haughty, humble, coy or free . . . / Every maid is the maid for me!” (462).⁷ As the three curtsy with fingers under chin, mocking feminine courtesy and jesting about what women really want (to break men’s hearts), Ida’s sudden entrance surprises them and forces them to retain the female disguise against their will and to put on an act not easily maintained as they repeatedly bow when women should curtsy during the following scenes; Hilarion cautions his companions to govern their behavior and sings, “For willy-nilly, we are maidens now, / And maids against our will we must remain!” (467). Not only does Ida’s presence force the young men to stay in their feminine disguises, however; they make ungainly women and arouse Ida’s suspicion, compelling Hilarion to explain away their odd appearance by admitting, “We’re homely ladies, as no doubt you see, / And we have never fished for lover’s love” (465). Ida’s presence transforms Hilarion, Cyril, and Florian into ugly women under the hand of a librettist who historically treats women who miss his standard of beauty unkindly in his works.⁸

Gilbert’s “topsy-turvy” society is righted finally by Hildebrand’s siege of the university. When the only unambiguously male character in the opera takes the stage, gender behavior suddenly snaps back along stereotypical Victorian lines. Only Ida maintains her character, singing, “Though I am but a girl, / Defiance thus I hurl, / Our banners all / On outer wall / We fearlessly unfurl” (488); the chorus of graduates, led by Melissa, responds with a clear betrayal of their head:

Thus our courage, all untarnished,

We're instructed to display:

But to tell the truth unvarnished,

We are more inclined to say,

"Please you, do not hurt us.

Do not hurt us, if it please you!" (489)

Not only do these women refuse to fight with Ida, they beg the men not to harm them—if they wouldn't mind not doing so. Clearly, the graduates acknowledge men as the possessors of their lives, who may rightly choose whether to destroy or spare them. The graduates betray Ida individually as well as corporately as each confesses, at this crucial moment, that she never learned her profession with the intent to practice it (if indeed she learned it at all). When Ida tells Sacharissa, the surgeon, to prepare to receive the wounded, the latter exclaims in alarm, "What, heal the wounded? And cut off real live arms and legs? . . . In theory I'll cut them off again, / With pleasure, and as often as you like, / But not in practice" (491). The quartermistress likewise has left the rifles (another Gilbertian anachronism) in the armoury, "for fear / That in the heat and turmoil of the fight, / They might go off!" (492). Even the bandmistress begs off, apologizing that "the band / Do not feel well, and can't come out today" (492). With Hildebrand, the clear and dominant patriarch, advancing on the university, the women drop all pretensions of knowledge and self-sufficiency and plead for mercy. Ida's lovely solo, in the midst of this comic action, provides a tragic and human perspective on the siege of her university and of her dream for the women:

I leant upon an oak,
 But in the hour of need,
 Alack-a-day,
 My trusted stay
 Was but a bruised reed! . . .
 Ah, trait'rous oak,
 Thy worthlessness to cloak. (494)

Ida is of course the only character of oaken strength; under such a woman's influence, Gilbert implies, women lose that aspect of femininity which requires the protection of men; but only in an unrealistic isolation, that is, in the absence of men, can the "mighty maiden with a mission" (452) even temporarily convince women that they can practice self-sufficiency.

Similarly, Hildebrand's arrival gives Hilarion back his manhood and more. We know that Ida has kept her prisoners in their feminine garb since, as the released Hilarion enters his father's camp, Gama sneers, "Why, you look handsome in your woman's clothes! Stick to 'em! men's attire becomes you not!" (500); but the young men, once released from captivity, quickly divest themselves of their shameful garments. They arm themselves and, though not warriors by training, quickly defeat Ida's brothers; Ida sees their imminent deaths and cries, "Hold! Stay your hands— . . . to my fate I yield— / So ends my cherished scheme" (504). In her return to Victorian womanhood, Ida lays aside her desires and dreams, as any good sister should do, to secure her brothers' well-being. Ida abdicates as head of the university and becomes again obedient daughter,

devoted sister, and subservient wife. Her influence no longer affects the women and men around her; Hildebrand's presence has redefined the lines of activity in terms of Victorian gender.

In Tennyson's medley, the Prince reassures Ida that their marriage will not annihilate her dreams for women: "Henceforth thou has a helper, me, that know / The woman's cause is man's: they rise or sink together . . .," he tells her, and looks to a time when men and women become "the single pure and perfect animal, / The two-celled heart beating, with one full stroke, / Life" (VII.242-4, 288-90). Exactly what the poet has in mind for the evolution of humanity is difficult to determine; at least, however, Tennyson envisions a future in which both women and men live contentedly together. Gilbert's libretto allows for no such future: Hilarion's parallel speech of reassurance divides men and women inexorably. "Madam," he sings, "you placed your trust in Woman—well, / Woman has failed you utterly—try Man, / Give him one chance . . . / Women are far too precious, too divine, / To try unproven theories upon" (505). Hilarion sums up prevailing Victorian understandings of women: inconstant, easily swayed, needing protection from threats to their essential nature.

Sir Arthur Sullivan's contribution to *Princess Ida, or, Castle Adamant* increases the ambivalence with which Gilbert approaches Tennyson's text. Critical reception of the music was (and is) positive. George Grossmith, who sang the rôle of Gama among his many performances with the company, called *Princess Ida* Sullivan's finest musical work (Baily 223); and even Sullivan's contemporaries in music criticism, who earlier "gave

utterance to some feeling of regret that the ability and talent of one of our representative composers should be frittered away in the composition of burlesque music,” agreed that the opera demonstrated “yet further progress towards that intellectual standard which should be the goal of every earnest composer” (*Musical Times* 1884). Sullivan consciously drew on the musical styles of Handel, Rossini, Beethoven, and Mendelsohn (Jefferson 161) to create a musical text, according the Sullivan’s conductor, “full of grace, fancy, and delicious melody, and, as ever, brimming over with rich humour; [and] choral and orchestral passages as novel, quaint, and picturesque as any the master’s mind had ever conceived” (Cellier and Bridgeman 123).

Ironically, Sullivan’s musical achievements did not wholly coincide with Gilbert’s intentions. On occasion throughout the opera, Sullivan’s lyrical lines undermine Gilbert’s comic libretto rather than, as was their wont, increasing the comic effect by pairing incongruous words and music. This problem occurs frequently in the vocal scores of Ida and Hilarion in particular and has the effect of rendering them more sympathetic characters even when they are the targets of Gilbert’s satire. We find the best example of such an incongruity in Princess Ida’s invocation to Minerva, “Oh, Goddess wise,” a song in which Sullivan “concentrates upon words of real poetic quality . . . and responds with music which reaches a pitch of idealism which is rarely to be found in English musical art” (Dunhill 120-1). Marked *andante espressivo*, the aria’s soaring and sustained lyrical phrases call convincingly to mind the high and noble task that Ida has set for herself, though Gilbert takes pains, as we have seen, in

his libretto to render this task ridiculous in Ida's next solo. It is quite interesting to note a historical parallel between the opera and the poem: just as the intercalary songs from *The Princess* have survived to be regularly anthologized, Ida and Hilarion's lyric solos continue to be part of the standard soprano and tenor repertoires, while the complete opera has seen only rare revivals (in 1926, 1954, and most recently in 1978).

Not only did critics compliment Sullivan's music—the set and costuming also met with approval. According to those involved in the staging of *Princess Ida*, “nothing that care, liberal expenditure, and consummate taste could do was left undone The costly silver-gilt armour, specially designed and manufactured in Paris by the famed firm of Grange et Cie., excelled in brilliancy” (Cellier and Bridgeman 123). The reviewer for the *Theatre* assessed the three sets as “amongst the most beautiful pictures ever exhibited upon any stage,” describing the graduates' attire and the “Amazonian armour” as “gravely gorgeous” and “indescribably . . . splendid” (qtd. in Baily 226). But the set, too, interfered subtly with the content of Gilbert's libretto: dazzled by Sullivan's best music to date, an unprecedented number of scene changes, and lavish costuming, audiences could easily lose sight of the opera's theme in a “submersion of Victorian topicality in fantasy,” which, Charles Hayter says, “is perhaps just as well [since] Gilbert does not regard *Princess Ida*'s feminism with any seriousness at all” (121).

Finally, as in the case of Tennyson's poem, critical reception of Gilbert and Sullivan's opera lacked a decidedly positive voice—praising music and production, yet critical of the story line that bound too loosely

the disparate elements of the production together—and eventually consigned *Princess Ida* to relative obscurity, in comparison with other Savoy operas. Popular first night reviews were complimentary; the *Pall Mall Gazette* borrowed a line from Gama: “there is ‘nothing whatever to grumble at,’ or very little” (qtd. in Baily 231); and the *Observer* opined that the opera’s success “was never for a moment in doubt” (qtd. in Hibbert 165). However, critical reviews in theater journals were less kind. *Figaro* complained that *Princess Ida* failed to match in excellence its Savoy predecessors; another reviewer wrote that the performance was “desperately dull” with “not three and a half jokes worth remembering throughout three and a half hours of misery” (qtd. in Hibbert 165). The critic writing for the *Theatre* condemned the opera most harshly, detecting “symptoms of fatigue” from both composer and librettist (qtd. in Baily 229). Even the *Musical Review*, so complimentary of Sullivan’s effort, qualified its praise by adding that “this comparative excellence is the more apparent because Mr. Gilbert’s share in the work is confessedly weaker than usual” (*Musical Review* 1884).

Like those friends of Tennyson who despaired over his choice of subject matter, critics today conclude that the relative failure of *Princess Ida* stems from Gilbert’s handling of the topic. Darlington notes that, by “mixing prejudice and bad temper,” Gilbert “found himself in opposition to all but the most obstinately unprogressive sections of opinion. . . . the rather elementary sneers of *Princess Ida* seemed cheap and foolish” (120). But *Ida*, whether in Tennyson’s portrayal of her or Gilbert’s, still interests and perplexes critics; the ongoing debate over the worth of Tennyson’s

medley within his canon mirrors later critical re-evaluations of Gilbert's libretto. Even Gilbert's successful comic demonstration of a woman, out of her proper sphere, unmolding and remolding the gender identities of those around her, is called into question by the comments of a friend who outlived Gilbert to see Ida's return to the stage in the 1920s:

Our observations may appear somewhat involved, but the idea we would convey in brief is that, whilst there were no Suffragettes in Queen Victoria's reign—or, if there were, they were wisely latent, certainly they were not militant—yet did not Tennyson seriously, and after him, Gilbert facetiously propound the doctrine that was eventually to resolve itself into the present-day cry, "Votes for Women"? (Cellier and Bridgeman 119)

Clearly, in the historically critical contest of last words, Gilbert's creation outlives her author and claims audiences' attention in their own times.

Gilbert takes his final lines of blank verse (before the brief closing song) directly from *The Princess*. Ida's Tennysonian words to Hilarion, "We will walk the world / Yoked in all exercise of noble end!" (506) lose their weighty meaning, however, when the reader realizes that not only does Gilbert give these words of vision and concession to Ida (the Prince speaks them in Tennyson's work) but also has Ida preface them with a confession and surrender: "I have been wrong—I see my error now. Take me, Hilarion—" (506). Viewers of the play can not easily make the shift from the true burlesque of patter songs and cross-dressing to a serious pledge of not love only but true companionship; the possibility of man

and woman working side by side that ends Canto VII of Tennyson's poem thus mocks itself as Gilbert completes his "perversion" of *The Princess*, robbing Ida and Hilarion of any future but that of the romantic and courtly life described in the closing chorus: "together gliding . . . / In sweet society . . . / With serenading / And such frivolity . . . / The happy hours / Will gaily fly!" (507). Certainly, the audience is not left musing about the "strange diagonal" with which the narrator of Tennyson's conclusion attempts to reconcile the realists and the mockers; in Gilbert's version of Ida's story, there are no realists—there are only mockers and lovers, and both groups are satisfied as the curtain falls.

Meade's Optimistic Princess

Of the approximately 280 books authored by L.T. Meade, not one is currently in print, according to Meade's biographer Mavis Reimer (198). Nevertheless, Meade, born Elizabeth Thomasina, figures importantly in the history of British fiction for adolescents, and in this study as well, because she "established" the school story for girls in 1866 with *A World of Girls* (193).⁹ In her school stories, Meade treats "the girls' exploration of their own needs and desires, their development of social and emotional relationships with one another unmediated by adults, and the passionate pleasure they take in learning" (Reimer 197). This said, however, readers will notice that Meade's contributions to this genre functioned not only to whet girls' interests in attending college but also to instruct them in proper behavior and priorities should they actually matriculate; *A Sweet Girl Graduate* was originally published in 1891 and frequently reprinted; Meade wrote it at a time when her solid reputation ensured her a wide

readership; she employs Tennyson's characters in an unambiguously didactic manner. Meade's *Ida*, and the student who acts her rôle, leaves young girls no question about what should take precedence in a college woman's life: family, marriage, service—and last, academic achievement, although Meade clearly hopes that a young woman's attention to the first three obligations will not necessarily rule out success in the college world.

In fact, the theme of *A Sweet Girl Graduate* comes as something of a surprise to readers who know a little of Meade's own life; she was in many ways a prototypical feminist. Her father took exception to her desire, expressed young, to write, going so far as to deny her paper at home and to instruct the governess to punish her if she jotted stories on stray scraps of newspaper; later, however, he settled an allowance on her that did not cover her basic needs, so she took up the pen to support herself. Meade postponed marriage until her thirty-fifth year and continued to use her maiden name professionally, a choice which sparks heated discussion even today. Her professional activities, like her professional name, express her early feminist views: in 1887 she accepted the editorship of *Every Girl's Annual*, which was reborn during her tenure as *Atalanta*, a name which certainly suggests, as Reimer puts it, "the magazine's celebratory tone toward girls' aspirations" (197). With Meade as editor, the magazine featured discussions of women's education and women's colleges, with articles like "Girton College" and "Newnham College" (both in 7:1893/4) contributed by Meade herself. Finally, Meade began in 1892 to work closely with the Pioneer Club, an early feminist group. Meade's various choices and activities leave a record of a woman of strong feminist values;

and she knew from personal experience the difficulties facing women who must earn their own way without proper preparation; yet her school stories, while encouraging girls to take advantage of newly available opportunities in education, also carefully promote a typically nineteenth-century prescription for male-female relationships. We can only conjecture why this contradiction marks novels such as *A Sweet Girl Graduate*: perhaps market considerations forced Meade to adapt stronger opinions to an audience not ready to consume them; if this is the case, then Meade's authorial decisions are not unlike those that Tennyson himself had to make when preparing *The Princess*, a poem in many ways ahead of its time, for an audience whose commonly held beliefs were, by contrast, anachronistic.

A Sweet Girl Graduate is one of thirty school stories by Meade, but only four of these are set in college, all the others concerning secondary girls' education. Reimer reports that the plot of each of these books "turns on a debate or a dramatic presentation" (197); in this novel, Tennyson's play, adapted for the college women, serves as the pivot in the action and makes it possible for one graduate to convince another to acknowledge her love and accept a marriage proposal.

Meade's own reading of Tennyson's medley informs her use of *Ida* and the Prince as models of womanly and manly behavior. The dramatic presentation itself plays a relatively small part in the novel's plot; but we see, in the two main characters, *Ida's* internal conflict and later its resolution, brought about by the dramatic presentation of *The Princess*. The colorfully named Priscilla Penywern Peel (she is as odd as her name)

and the handsome, dynamic Maggie Oliphant embody Ida's struggle with her divided sense of duty to her college and to the Prince.

Meade sets her story on the fictional campus of St. Benet's, a college that draws on the real campuses she knew for verisimilitude, but which owes as much for its description and situation to the sequestered college created by Tennyson to shelter Ida's students. Though men can, under chaperonage, enter the campus grounds, these are nevertheless isolated, "quite shut away"; the college is "approached by a private road, and high entrance gates obstructed the gaze of the curious. Inside there were cheerful halls and pleasant gardens, and gay, fresh, unrestrained life. But the passer-by got no peep of these things unless the high gates happened to be open" (Meade 12). Similarly, the Prince and his companions, approaching the college, first see "fountains . . . showering down / In meshes of the jasmine and the rose" (I.215-6). And while Diana and the partially transfigured Acteon have no part of St. Benet's gates, these function in the same way as those which imprison and condemn the Prince, Cyril, and Florian: to ensure an unmolested realm in which the women may study. At St. Benet's, young women do study, "receiv[ing] the advantages of University instruction to prepare them for the battle of life" (13); Ida's students, too, study so that they may return to the outside world and maintain themselves: Ida assures them, "Some future time, if so indeed you will, / You may with those self-styled our lords ally / Your fortunes, justlier balanced, scale with scale" (II.50-2).

On both campuses, too, the professors abjure the women to abandon all that has kept them in servitude: Ida tells the disguised men

“to cast and fling / The tricks which make us toys of men” (II.48-9) and become serious candidates for degrees; as Gama paraphrases Ida’s idea to the young men, they must “lose the child, assume / The woman” (I.136-7). At St. Benet’s each student is trusted with her conduct and study: “the young girl graduate is no longer thought of as a child. She is a woman, with a woman’s responsibilities; she is treated accordingly” (118). Lectures, chapel, signs of the serious pursuit of knowledge mark both campuses; the women of St. Benet stay up with candles to “drink deep” of the unsealed fountain of knowledge long after the electricity has been shut off (II. 77). And finally, the potential of each group of graduates is promising: Ida hopes to be one “Who learns the one *pou sto* whence afterwards / May move the world, though she herself effect / But little” (III.246-8); and the novel’s narrator rhapsodizes, “Those were brilliant days in the Hall. Some girls resided there at this time whose names were destined to be known in the world by-and-by” (262).

Nevertheless, each college has its problems. Meade’s narrator has no sooner praised the women of the Hall than she must qualify that praise, admitting that “shallow girls there must always be where any number are found together” (262). In fact, of course, shallowness, pettiness, and jealousy accrue to create the vulnerabilities of Ida’s college; the jealous factionalism of Blanche and Psyche threatens the graduates’ protected environment and would perhaps wound it mortally, had not the appearance of the men forestalled that event. At St. Benet’s, too, pettiness mars the would-be perfect world. As Maggie warns Prissie, who, new and rather odd, faces unkind hazing rather than warm welcome in her new

home, “We are supposed to be democratic, and to go in for all that is advanced in womanhood. But, oh, dear, oh, dear! let any student dare to break our own little pet proprieties, and you will see how conservative we can be” (23). “All that is advanced in womanhood”—Ida strives towards the same goal when she calls her students’ attention to the statues of noble women and implores, “O lift your natures up: / Embrace our aims” (II.74-5); but neither student body transcends petty rivalries, and students on both fictional campuses suffer in the resultant divisive climate. Meade goes so far as to mimic the pairing of Psyche and Blanche in her creation of the two Vice-Principals who are heads of the two college halls: Miss Eccleston, dark, heavy, and unattractive, “was estimable, and the college authorities [all men] thought most highly of her, but her character possessed more hardness than softness, and she was not popular with the girls and young lecturers who lived in Katherine Hall as Miss Heath [of fair coloring] was with her girls” (174). Like Psyche’s lilac-robed girls, Miss Heath’s devotees defend her against the smaller group who favor the rather masculine Miss Eccleston, who judges the girls harshly when they hold an unapproved (and, to the poorer girls, personally embarrassing) auction of personal items to pay off personal debts, much as Blanche is readier to see the sentence of death pronounced on the intruders (until she learns how to turn their presence to her own good). But the major factions in *A Sweet Girl Graduate* turn not on these older women but on Maggie, around whom the graduates divide their loyalties: those who once worshipped a young woman named, ominously, Annabel Lee, and now

follow her beloved Maggie; and those whom Maggie has reprimanded or snubbed.

Having laid the foundation for a Tennysonian campus, Meade creates two main characters who clearly echo Ida's dutiful, intelligent, loyal, but ultimately divided nature. Both women come to college as serious scholars, Prissie arriving on campus "full of courage and good resolves . . . quite determined that the world should not conquer her" (Meade 11). Ida calls her young womanhood "our dead self," which ended when she became "other—since we learnt our meaning here, / To lift the woman's fallen divinity" (III.205-7); like Ida, Prissie has voluntarily set aside her youth for a nobler cause. Meade describes her as only nineteen, but with "a careworn face, thoughtful, grave, with anxious lines already deepening the seriousness of the too serious mouth" (6). Maggie, too, is a serious scholar, at liberty to immerse herself in her studies, luxuriating in limitless time to read and reflect. Readers glimpse her studying *Æschylus* in a scene which idealizes academic pursuits:

A fine fire filled her eyes; her brow . . . showed its rather massive proportions. Now, intellect and the triumphant delight of overcoming a mental difficulty reigned supreme in her face. She read on without interruption for nearly an hour. At the end of that time her cheeks were burning like two glowing crimson roses. (73-4)

Maggie clearly heeds Ida's call to "drink deep" of the long-desired fountain of learning.

Also, Maggie and Prissie approach their college experience with a sense of destiny akin to Ida's, and each woman assumes that the fulfillment of this destiny precludes marriage. Ida herself has forsworn marriage so that she can devote herself to "the woman's cause" (VII.243), and Prissie describes herself as "the girl who is to fight the world, and kill the dragon, and make a home for the nestlings" (20), referring to her three younger sisters. The four girls are orphans, wards of an aunt who can scarcely afford to feed them; Mr. Hayes, her vicar turned tutor, sends her to school, recognizing that her "great gift for acquiring knowledge" fits her for a career as a teacher (9). Meade says of poor Prissie that "there was no beauty in [her face]. The mouth was wide, the complexion dull, the features irregular. . . . her eyes . . . were neither large nor dark . . . [and] thin hands" complete an unattractive portrait (one which the novel's illustrations belie, however) (54). Prissie is too homely to get a man, and her duty is to her sisters anyway. She focuses her energies on her education instead of on courtship, encouraged by her hall's Vice-Principal, Miss Heath, to "give up her classics . . . and devote herself to those accomplishments which are considered essentially more feminine" so that she can be "the support and blessing of her three little sisters" (282).

Maggie, with "her rich, calm, rather lazy voice, the different lights which glanced and gleamed in her eyes, the dimples about her mouth . . . the beautiful oval of her face . . . almost ivory white" (38), has also ruled out marriage, though for different reasons. "Your position and Prissie's," advises Miss Heath, "are not the least alike; it is your duty to do your very utmost with those talents which have been bestowed upon you" (282); and

Maggie quite willingly works for first class honors (the tripos) as a distraction, if for no better reason, from her heart's grief, the death of her beloved Annabel. Maggie believes that she caused Annabel's death; however, Meade dispenses with this possibility when she describes Annabel as "one of those rare and beautiful creatures who, like a lovely but too ethereal flower, must quickly bloom into perfection and then pass away" (263).

Ida has committed herself to her sex, turning away from men so thoroughly that she refuses even to see her father and brothers. In fact, Ida claims that she would die for her "sisters": "Oh if our end were less achievable / By slow approaches, than by a single act / Of immolation, any phase of death, / We were as prompt to spring against the pikes, / Or down the fiery gulf as talk of it, / To compass our dear sisters' liberties" (III.266-71). Death never threatens Maggie and Prissie, but their loyalties to their sisters, blood and other, is fierce nonetheless. Prissie tells Mr. Hayes of a girl at college "who has a strange power over me. I love her—I have a very great love for her . . . I would do anything in the wide world for her" (218). Maggie, though her love for the odd Prissie comes to her slowly, finally confesses her loyalty as well: "I love that dear true-hearted child . . . I want to keep her all to myself" (185). But her greatest loyalties are to Annabel, even after her untimely death. Maggie's allegiance to Annabel also supersedes her love for George Hammond, a student from a nearby men's college. Tennyson describes Ida and Psyche as "inosculated" and as "consonant chords that shiver to one note" (III.73-4); Maggie and Annabel recall to their peers the legendary friendships of Jonathan and David, and

Orestes and Pylades.¹⁰ While the fragile Annabel is lying gravely ill, however, Maggie surprises her with the news of Hammond's proposal of marriage. The sick girl faints, and the servants find the two together, Maggie "in an awful state of misery—in quite an unnatural state . . . [in] hysterics" (107). Annabel recovers enough to tell Maggie that she loves her, but not to express her approval of the marriage, before she dies. In like manner, Psyche's separation from Ida causes the first break in Ida's stern resolve. Gama reminds Ida, when he and others attempt to call her to reconciliation with the outcast, that "when she first came, all flushed you said to me / Now you had got a friend of your own age, / Now could you share your thought; now should men see / Two women faster welded in one love / Than pairs of wedlock" (VI.233-7). In response, Ida, "drained of her force," calls to Psyche to embrace her "Quick while I melt"; and she laments her betrayal of Psyche in significant words: "I should have had to do with none but maids, / That have no links with men" (IV.249, 268, 273-4). Annabel and Maggie have this sort of exclusive sisterhood, too. Meade writes that "Maggie often said that she never knew what love meant until she met Annabel"; their inseparability is legendary among their colleagues, and Annabel tames Maggie's wild brilliance and disciplines her unruly mind (263).¹¹ With her death, "something had died in [Maggie] which could never live again," and in its place is born an overwhelming sense of guilt (264). Maggie, believing that she betrayed Annabel's love by accepting Hammond with joy, grieves that "without meaning it, I broke Annabel's heart. Without meaning it, I caused my darling's death . . ." (271). Ida, too, grieves over causing Psyche anguish,

the death of joy that she experiences because of her lost Aglaia; but Ida is indeed guilty of this harm, while Maggie is mistaken in her own self-blame. Blinded by her error, Maggie rejects Hammond and all prospects of marriage, devoting herself to her studies; readers note, however, that the pleasure she had once taken in them is abridged by her guilt and the loss of her beloved friend. "What is the winning of tripos to me?" she muses in her despair. "What do I want with honors and distinctions?" (271). Just as Ida senses that her carefully protected world has been disrupted by her treatment of Psyche, Maggie's expectations of college glory fade without the soul mate with whom she had thought to share them. Indeed, after her initial grief abates (and Prissie begins to take Annabel's place in her heart, though in a different sort of friendship), Maggie complains that she has "tired of stretching out my hand to like a baby to catch soap bubbles" (282); her education is no longer the gift it once seemed, and only an admission, long in coming, of her love for Hammond will repair her damaged world.

Inexorably, however, destinies centered around marriage draw these two women forward, though they postpone their marriages till after they graduate. They can no more resist the social pressures to assume the rôle of wife than can Ida, who eventually keeps the troth plighted for her in her infancy, called to it as much by a sense of duty as by a sense of awakening love. Prissie's tutor, vicar, and patron, Mr. Hayes, admires her despite her lack of beauty: "he liked the rugged power which her face displayed . . . he prophesied great things from that brow, so calm, so broad, so full" (217). His constant financial support and increasing

intimacy tell of his love for her, which she, out of a sense of gratitude and duty, will eventually reciprocate. Prissie will enter marriage gratefully, embracing it as an unexpected blessing for herself and her sisters; but Maggie fights her growing affection for Hammond, preferring loyalty to the memory of Annabel and duty to her intellectual gifts. She too succumbs in the end and enters into a brilliant match with Hammond. What finally wears Maggie's resistance down is the student production of Tennyson's *The Princess*.

Shirley Marchalonis reports, in her history on fictional accounts of women's colleges, that dramatic performance was an important area of achievement for real students, with the senior play becoming a "feature" of commencement ceremonies: "Often professionals were called upon for help and the plays might even be reviewed in the newspapers" (77). She further notes that such dramas quickly became standard features in girls' school stories (77); but Meade is not merely following convention by importing *The Princess* in dramatic form into her story, and her decision to use Tennyson's poem is, as should by now be clear, hardly an arbitrary one. The characters of Ida and the Prince make themselves useful to Meade as she reforms Maggie and integrates the college experience and marriage.

St. Benet's proposed presentation arouses strident competition among the students for Ida's part, but each acknowledges, whether openly or only to herself, that the only right choice for the rôle is Maggie—"no one else could possibly take her place" (204). With this decision made, Maggie exercises her royal prerogative, commanding that "Miss Peel must

be the Prince: I will have no other lover" (156), and the rehearsals begin in earnest. Meade's casting is appropriate. Prissie, who never swerves from her duty to sisters, school, and—in time—suitor, comes to represent the Prince calling his Princess to her duty.¹² Maggie, like Ida, refuses a marriage which she sees as fundamentally incompatible with her academic goals. One evening during the weeks of preparation, the shy Prissie finds herself conversing with Hammond and responds with fervor to his generous nature and bright mind: "He had touched on great subjects, and Prissie's soul had responded like a musical instrument to the light and skilled finger of the musician. All her intellectual powers were aroused to their utmost, keenest life during this brief little talk" (154). This "keenest life," realizes Prissie, is what Maggie has rejected in her misplaced loyalty to the dead Annabel. It is a love for which Prissie would not dare to hope (Mr. Hayes is no romantic swain, blending rather the suitor and the father in his love for Prissie) and she takes it upon herself to woo Maggie for Hammond. As rehearsals progress, "gradually the stony (or was it yearning?) look in Maggie's face moved her. She fancied herself Hammond, not the Prince. When she spoke to Maggie she felt no longer like a feeble school-girl acting a part. She thought she was pleading for Hammond, and enthusiasm got into her voice, and a light filled her eyes" (157-8). The longer Prissie rehearses her rôle, the more attuned to the longing Prince she becomes, so much so that "tenderness" energizes her voice, and "passion" sweeps her to "power." So attuned to her part is she that "she ceased to be Priscilla; she was the Prince who must win this wayward Princess or die" (274). Meade's characterization of Maggie as

“stony” recalls Ida’s statuesque nature. How like the Princess is to her hall of statues—her stance unmoved and unmovable—strikes the Prince at several points in the narrative, as when he approaches the college in his battle gear and observes Ida, “among the statues, statuelike . . . too hard, too cruel” (V.499-505).¹³ Both women’s stony natures must “melt” before they can love. Meade’s description of Prissie’s obsessive quest to melt Maggie, her utter identification with the Prince’s own quest, brings to mind the Prince’s own preference of death to life without his bride. As he lies on what he believes to be his death-bed, he begs Ida to let him die with a kiss, and with the fantasy that she loves him unbroken; Ida cannot but be moved by the words “I shall die tonight. Stoop down and seem to kiss me as I die” (VII. 134-5). Neither will Maggie, in Ida’s place, hear these words without letting “her falser self [slip] from her [and leave] her woman” (VII.146-7).

When Meade at last brings readers to the night of the production, she emphasizes the affinity between Tennyson’s college and hers: “there was a buzz of hearty applause when the curtain rose on the well-known garden scene, where the Prince, Florian, and Cyril saw the maidens of that first college for women—that poet’s vision, so amply fulfilled in the happy life at St. Benet’s” (312). We do not know with certainty which adaptation of *The Princess* Meade had in mind when writing *A Sweet Girl Graduate*, although many clues in novel lead us to a probable answer; however, she draws special attention the scene in which the older graduates complain of wanting to leave the college and marry, when they “murmured that their May / Was passing” and worried that “Men hated learned women” (II.439-

40, 442). The scene, of course, reiterates the question of marriage with which Prissie and Maggie each struggle. When the main characters enter, the stage fills with a magical and prophetic love, the love of two women for each other, and the love to come as each departs the friendship for more fitting devotions. "All the pride of mien, of race, of indomitable purpose was on the face of the young girl who acted the part of Princess Ida" (313); but Prissie's presence is stronger than pride and purpose: "she was Hammond, pleading his own cause, she was wooing Maggie for him in the words of Tennyson's Prince. This fact was the secret of Priscilla's power . . . she communicated the sensations which animated her own breast to Maggie" (314). As the curtain falls, Maggie is so greatly moved that she can hardly hear the audience's approving applause. Her whole attention is engaged in finding Hammond among the spectators. Prissie has triumphed; the prince has melted Ida again.

After she accepts Hammond's proposal, Maggie finds her formerly divided sense of duty strangely unified and experiences a renewed interest in her learning. Relieved of her self-imposed obligation to Annabel, she can redirect her energies to her classwork and score a first class in the tripos, while looking forward to a day of greater accomplishment and celebration, her wedding. The novel ends for her with the promise of "brilliance, beauty, wealth . . . strong personal influence and the power of creating love wherever she went" (320); Meade makes no mention of whether Maggie's privileged four years of college will play any part in her married life. Prissie, too, completes her degree, always with duty as her goal: "her feet were set in the right direction; the aim of her life was to

become—not learned, but wise; not to build up a reputation, but to gain character; to put blessedness before happiness—duty before inclination” (320). The promise of these women’s lives is very like the promise that the Prince makes to Ida, that they will “walk this world, / Yoked in all exercise of noble end” (VII.339-40). Yet Meade clearly approves of one course, though she appreciates the other: “Women like Priscilla live at the root of the true life of a worthy nation,” she declaims in her narratorial voice (320).

Meade’s use of Ida, then is more in keeping with Tennyson’s original character than is Gilbert’s use. Whereas Gilbert distrusts entirely the idea of higher education for women, so that he concentrates on ridiculing Ida, Meade, an early feminist, promotes higher education while guarding her young female readers against viewing marriage as incompatible with that education. However, Meade and Gilbert are alike in that both end their plots with marriage, whereas Tennyson continues both plot and commentary in the concluding section of the frame. Both choose marriage as a resting place for plot; neither explores what comes after marriage. For Gilbert, marriage is the goal of a woman’s life and thus an obvious and logical event with which to end a plot (and his libretto is comic—thus his final event of a triple marriage also fulfills the archetypal requirements of comedy). But the case is different for Meade, and I suspect that she has not yet thought out what a marriage between equally educated intellects would be like, at least not thoroughly enough to write about it. Or perhaps, as Marchalonis notes of many writers of girls’ school stories, she was working to “reassure” the “outside world” that the college years were

a “harmless aberration, an irrelevant or even preparatory period before a girl returned to life and womanhood” (36). Certainly, Meade advises women to take time before marriage; Miss Heath tells Prissie that “we do not care that our students should think of love and courtship while here, but we have never limited their freedom in the matter” (285); in this allowance, Meade’s optimism exceeds Tennyson’s. Ida’s requirement that the graduates avoid male company for three years indicates his suspicion that, without forced isolation, women will not bear up under the pressures to marry and will desert the college prematurely (Gilbert plays on this idea—the gates and walls are not to keep men out but women in, as he tells the tale). And the concerns of the older graduates who fear that passing time and increasing knowledge will render them unmarriageable foreshadow their desertion of Ida’s world for marriage; when the wounded soldiers are brought into the college for nursing, “Love in the sacred halls / Held carnival at will, and flying struck / With showers of random sweet on maid and man” (VII.69-71). Only for the marriage of the Prince and the Princess does Tennyson forecast, and then only subtly and by implication, a relationship that will be productive by Ida’s definition. Meade, perhaps because forty years have passed, bringing with them ever broadening opportunities for women, can write hopefully of women who are both educated and married.

Meade’s St. Benet’s College for Women has another advantage over Ida’s college: it is a simpler world because children have no place in it (in this simplification from the original, Meade and Gilbert both eliminate an important complication from the plot, for different reasons). The

presence of Aglaïa in *The Princess*, as we know, complicates the action by introducing motherhood with all its attendant duties (and joys, as Ida discovers to her surprise and dismay), in addition to the duties of wifehood that so beleaguer Maggie and Prissie. What makes this simplification possible, even easy, for Meade, is the adaptation of the medley used by these fictional college women. The question of adaptation brings us to a discussion of the fourth dramatic use of Tennyson's *Princess* and to Elsie Fogerty.

Fogerty's Respectable Princess

Born in 1865, the "author" of the standard adaptation of *The Princess* for schoolgirls, Elsie Fogerty, was for most of her life in love with the theatre and all that it could, at its best, be and do for her nation. Even as a child, Fogerty was interested in adapting stories and plays (especially the famous Greek tragedies and Shakespeare's works) for various audiences. Her life-long friend, Lady Violet (Sallon) Pasteur, recalls many days of her childhood during which the two "act[ed] out plays of her own, Shakespeare, dramatised versions of well-known fairy tales—in one another's drawing-rooms, dressed up in our mothers' sheets, counterpanes—even curtains were torn down if they were considered suitable for a toga, a cloak or a royal robe and train for a queen!" (Cole 9). Fogerty, like Meade, fought her parents' disapproval, this time not on matters of writing but on matters of the theatre; they held to the common belief that acting was a profession of dissipated individuals and forbade her to pursue what, to her, was the only desirable career. Not their disapproval, however, but Fogerty's father's deteriorating physical

condition caused her, as she matured, to give up dreams of acting and to offer elocution lessons instead. She had an ear for the music of language, and she had, from a young age, a mission. Marion Cole, a former student who compiled memoirs and remembrances of “Fogie” after her death, recalls this mission: “to help people to understand and speak poetry as she knew it could be done” and, most important, to make “the theatre an honoured profession so that even ‘correct suburban society’ would have no good reason to forbid their sons and daughters to go on stage” (19). Fogerty accomplished the former goal by training young actors, including such later famous actors as Sir Laurence Olivier, whom she accepted on a scholarship that she herself partially funded, at her academy, the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art. Indeed, her devotion to spoken English did not stop with training professional speakers and actors, but led rather to a growing interest in helping any person with a speech impediment (she felt especially the problem of stutterers, whose inadequate speech effects shamed and humiliated them). Some historians consider Fogerty the pioneer of speech therapy, now a well-developed and scientifically rigorous field, both in England and in the States, where she collaborated with physicians interested in the problem.

Fogerty attacked the second part of her mission, making the theatre wholesome and reputable, by producing series of adaptations for various groups of amateur players; and she regarded amateur productions seriously. Her series of plays for schoolgirls grew out of her own teaching experience at a school named Halliwick (and later Levana), which ceased operations after the deaths of its founders. Fogerty approved heartily of

this small school and others like it, saying that “their influence helped to make women’s education in England something like Tennyson’s idea of what it could be when he wrote his *Princess*” (Cole 22). Her appreciation of Tennyson’s work, perhaps, accounts for her turning her hand to the poem when she assembled her series called *Standard Plays for Amateur Performance in Girls’ Schools*, which includes Shakespeare, Sophocles, Euripides—and Tennyson. It is hard to understand why else Tennyson, who, though he attempted the genre of drama, will always be classified as a poet, takes his place with the great Greek tragedians and Shakespeare.

We do not know when Fogerty first led students in a production of *The Princess*, or when she finalized the written form of the play. She taught at Levana in 1889 and 1890, and we know that the girls produced Tennyson’s medley during her tenure at the school; but the first publicly recorded performance of the adaptation occurred in 1895, and its most famous performance occurred in 1897, for the Jubilee (this is somewhat ironic, since Victoria’s official words on higher education for women are somewhat censorious). By 1914, an inexpensive printing of the play was widely available in England and in the States; and it is this printing, by Allen and Company of London, to which I refer in this study.

Of the many considerations guiding Fogerty as she adapted Tennyson’s medley, two exercised the greatest control over her choice of materials. First is simple practicality. Young women, untrained in drama, attending a school which has limited means, necessarily cannot produce any long play in its entirety. The adaptation must be cut heavily from the original; the cast must suffer cuts of minor characters whose functions

must then be embedded in the rôles of the major characters; expensive set changes must be minimized—these sacrifices of authorial intention and integrity must occur if the play is to be realized on a small scale. Fogerty, in fact, labors to make amateur productions as possible as she can, devoting twenty pages of text (a third of the publication) to descriptions of costumes; simple patterns for creating them, with illustrations of the finished products (she hints that “shoes and boots can be contrived by covering old shoes, and binding the edges with ribbon or by shaped soles and uppers” (viii)); a remarkably short list of stage and hand properties; instructions on how to convert, with minor modifications, a room into a functional theater (she advises students “to dispense altogether with scenery in these representations, using only a draped background” (vi)); advice on casting the major roles; and a long list of published musical settings of the songs that punctuate the medley. Throughout this introductory material, she writes seriously yet encouragingly so that schools and students will view the project as within their scope. These practical considerations are permissible and need no defense. What is more interesting, and more thought-provoking, is an examination of what the author adapting the play chooses to cut. Fogerty’s cuts and simplifications do more than result in a production suited to young women; they also further her mission of rendering theatre respectable as she eliminates ignoble actions and words, comic relief of any sort, and the more controversial questions with which Tennyson grapples. Fogerty uses *Ida*—a less complex *Ida*—to rehabilitate the theatre; in all likelihood,

Meade takes the same Ida to use in her novel (no clue or reference to the play controverts this conclusion, at least).

Fogerty takes the Aristotelian definition of nobility of character quite seriously as she demonstrates in her adaptations the uplifting side of drama. Throughout her *Princess*, she emphasizes the need for the actors to portray noble characters, both in her directions and in the changes to the plot. Of the few stage properties required, the most important is “a raised dais, with a state chair” from which Ida, in stately Greek dress, delivers most of her lines (vii). Fogerty stresses certain actions and speeches that increase the nobility of Ida and the Prince: she directs the actresses playing the students to look down, rather than at Ida, when she speaks, signaling respect for their Head; and she presents to us a more human and animated Ida than we might see and hear in Tennyson’s poetic lines. Ida’s dignity does not lack in a proper sense of place, and she shows a queenly embarrassment whenever she speaks too earnestly or enthusiastically, rather than with the decorum that royalty should maintain. She turns away, slightly ashamed, for instance, after her speech advising the students to be noble or not to be at all (5). These gestures of humility belong not to the medley itself but to Fogerty’s marginal comments as she directs the action from the pages of her adaptation. Fogerty also increases the dignity of Ida’s character by giving her a strong and in fact maternal protectiveness towards the students. She adds text (and this she does quite rarely, preferring to delete and occasionally move text instead) when Ida and the students are lunching in the tent during the field trip. The addition brings Melissa and a few other students onto

the stage for a choreographed dance; but Fogerty could have prepared this entrance in any number of ways. She chooses to have Ida, glancing out through the tent opening, spy Melissa dancing on the planks laid across the river as a make-shift bridge. "Come in," she calls to Melissa; "come and dance for us, / The sword is safer than the narrow bridge / Where one false step means death" (21). In the poem, Ida protests several times that she is willing to die, but to die on behalf of her cause, of all womanhood; we do not see so overt a display of compassion for her students. Fogerty's task necessitates much cutting of plot and dialogue (her adaptation is twenty short pages); here, she complicates her task by adding dialogue to render the Princess a nobler character. She gives Ida great emotional range, too, which lessens her cold and statuesque nature by showing the audience how her self-appointed task tears at her soul. In her conversation with the Prince while they rest in the tent, she speaks angrily, resentfully, then "checks herself" and continues quietly and "with renewed confidence"; later she regrets with intense bitterness how unwomanly she must appear to her students (17). The audience viewing a good amateur actress in this part meets an Ida who suffers greatly from the sacrifices she has made for her cause; Tennyson's Ida, we might easily assume, does not greatly regret leaving behind the life planned for her (and all women, whatever their status) and to which she is pledged to become Head of the college; her regrets, her longing for wifhood and motherhood, are long in coming, and she meets these rôles ambivalently when they do come.

As she creates a more sympathetic Ida, Fogerty carefully deletes Ida's less noble actions. Ida does not sing her gloating song of victory over a field scattered with wounded soldiers; she does not claim the right to keep an infant from her mother; she does not come close to collapse when she reconciles with Psyche; and Gama, Arac and others do not have to plead with her to extend forgiveness. And, most notably, the scenes in which Tennyson takes Ida through a dark and painful transformation—scenes in which she laments her losses, calls all her work failure, and bows her head under the weight of her despair—are lightly passed over in a few short lines. In this adaptation, Ida is not so very wrong-headed; she is more malleable and changes with little mental anguish. Doubtless, Fogerty must simplify Ida's complex character to make the rôle possible for an amateur actress; how she goes about this simplification, however, raises questions about her reading of Tennyson's poem.

Fogerty worries particularly about the Prince, advising that the woman acting this part must bring out "the sense shown by the Prince of the dignity and responsibility of his place It redeems the character from weakness" (vi). To further redeem his character, she (like Gilbert) deletes the troubling seizures completely; they are not even mentioned in passing. And she has the Prince and his companions arrive at the college as candidates for Lady Psyche's rolls with no mention whatsoever of their cross-dressing; no humorous references to past cross-dressing plays in which he, Cyril, and Florian have engaged; no explanation of how they came by women's clothing; and late in the play, only the slightest and passing reference by one of Ida's twin brothers on the dishonor of their

disguise. It is as if Fogerty, in making theatre a moral and uplifting pastime, overtly turns her back on a long and cherished history of cross-dressed comedy on the British stage. She cannot change the plot at this point, but she can pass it over, leaving a Prince at whom we have no reason to giggle.

Fogerty calls for slight changes in the minor characters as well, to the same end. We rarely see the spineless Gama, in her adaptation; and when we do, he is in state, behaving in acceptable royal fashion. He is perhaps not much of a king, but neither the Prince nor any other character insults, however mildly, his status as patriarch. He is sometimes stern, sometimes indulgent, but never weak. Fogerty downplays the factions that plague the college, too, so that the men get no advice about which tutor to choose but simply choose Psyche at random. The students' worried comments about men's hatred of educated women are absent; indeed, Fogerty shows us a student body that is united, happy, and industrious, even if the girls do try to flee the soldiers when the college is besieged. Fogerty goes so far as to omit the battle scenes—perhaps because they would be difficult to play out under these circumstances—but the omission removes from the stage, and even from report on stage, the strife and bloodshed of battle. No one in her adaptation acts maliciously, though war occurs; in fact, only Blanche is unredeemed in Fogerty's play. Blanche (not the King, whose chauvinistic rantings have no place in this version of the plot) is the focus of all that is negative in the play; all the other characters may act in anger now and then, or speak harshly under duress; but only the jealous, petty Blanche is truly ignoble.

Fogerty's second set of changes concerns the humor that marks Tennyson's text, making it possible to think of the poem as somewhat melodramatic, as the burlesque that he calls it, and complicating the reading of the poem greatly. On a practical note, Fogerty may assume that good comic acting is best let be by the amateur, but again I believe that her intent goes beyond the ease of production. Obviously, comedy and nobility of action mix tentatively at best; it is in Fogerty's interests to play down and even delete much of the comedy as she simplifies the issues of the play. She may even be trying to undo the extent to which a poem she clearly admires has been burlesqued by Gilbert, who stretches its comic elements as far as he can. Only one character in the adaptation remains mildly comic, and that is, predictably, Cyril, whose function in the poem is to provide comic relief for the too-serious Prince.¹⁴ Cyril's humor, which in the poem is lively and likable, turns sour and sardonic in the adaptation, and Fogerty keeps it tightly controlled, using it twice. At one point, Fogerty directs the actress playing Cyril to turn aside with a sneering laugh at the idea of Psyche even "mouth[ing] the great name" of Lucius Junius Brutus, much less comparing herself to him (9); his humor goes little further. Fogerty solemnizes the rescue scene, deleting the Prince's wry description of his Beowulfian feats of swimming: "I caught her; then / Oaring one arm, and bearing in my left / The weight of all the hopes of half the world, / Strove to buffet to land" (IV.164-7). She also deletes the escape scene, in which Tennyson relieves the tension of the death penalty facing the men by foiling the Prince's attempt to run when "At last I hooked my ankle in a vine, / That clasped the feet of a

Mnemosyne, / And falling on my face was caught and known" (IV.249-51). The questing Prince, struggling to be lost and forgotten in the grounds, is tripped up by the goddess of memory—this is hardly a noble image. Fogerty makes no use of the eight mighty daughters of the plow, either, so that the dignity of Ida's college is not ruffled by the enjoyment that these unusual women get from pitching the Prince off the college grounds "with grim laughter" (IV.534). Bullying women have no place in Fogerty's solemn play.

Fogerty's most important cuts, however, for our understanding of the use to which she puts Ida, concern the controversial issues addressed in Tennyson's poem. She advises putting the famous lines from the Prince's closing speech—"The woman's cause is man's; they rise or sink / Together—dwarf'd or God-like, bond or free."—on the programme that the audience will receive. Beyond the programme, however, she slashes the discussion of women's place that threads its way through the poem. The names of the five acts exemplify this omission: The Arrival, Discovery, Punishment, War, and Reconciliation clearly identify the stages of the Prince's quest; they have nothing to do with Ida's college except as a setting for the action. Fogerty removes Aglaïa from the plot (perhaps the pragmatic concern of finding a stage-worthy and available maid "a double April old" and "headed like a star" (II.94-5) figures into this decision as well) so that the kidnapping (since we may and should call it that) never takes place; and Ida's sense of duty is never awakened by her urge for a child of her own.

Fogerty downplays the college as an environment in which women are called to their best efforts. The statues that Ida describes in detail in the poem receive only a quick remark (they are not actually on the stage, either, so that their existence depends on the words used—or, in this case, not used—to describe them). These statues bear a great burden of proof in the poem, and editors of *The Princess* have used them, as we shall later see, to carry several varying messages to readers; but Fogerty cuts them. And Psyche's long and complicated lecture is reduced in the adaptation to the often anthologized lines describing “two heads” in all the walks of life (5), so that the men have no cause, now or later in the play, to argue over her teaching style, her knowledge, or her right to place herself in a position of professor. These questions, the questions of Tennyson's medley, are too dangerous for an author who wants to sanitize her dramatic presentations so that no parents will hesitate to let their daughters watch or act in the adaptation.

Gilbert with his ridicule, Meade with her hopeful marriage, and Fogerty with her “corrected” love story all take from Tennyson what they want and ignore or even deny what disturbs their own opinions; and in that sense they violate to an extent the integrity of the poem and especially of its central character, Ida. Like all readers, those who read for private enjoyment and those who prepare interpretations for the public, these authors turn the text of *The Princess* to their own ends; the impact that their work had on public perception of Tennyson's work cannot be gauged, but each reached mass audiences which included, in Meade's and Fogerty's cases, great numbers of girls and young women living under

conflicting social pressures, deciding whether to hold with their parents' separate spheres or to participate in the gradual blurring of the lines of a threatened patriarchal system. Gilbert, Meade, and Fogerty are among the first "public readers" to employ the person of *Ida*, often in contradiction with her depiction in the poem; but they were certainly not the last: following them is a long line of editors, prepared to edit, annotate, and comment on the medley as they guide their readers' experience and comprehension.

Notes

1. How Gilbert squared this belief with his need for women trained to act and sing, we do not know; he never mentions the contradiction in his writings, which supports my suspicion that he had not thought out the issue as had Tennyson.

2. Walter's petting Lilia may also remind readers of the narrator's prediction for Amy's fate in "Locksley Hall": her husband will hold her "Something better than his dog, a little dearer than his horse" (96 l.50); here also, Tennyson expresses woman's position briefly but forcefully.

3. Here and here only, in either the play or the libretto, Gilbert deliberately uses the *In Memoriam* stanzaic form and rhyme pattern; though I can not say with certainty what his intent was in this deliberate imitation, I do assert that it lends solemnity and gravity to Ida's song, since *In Memoriam* was, by the time of Gilbert's work, a much respected and beloved poem among the English.

4. *Princess Ida* is in fact the only libretto in which Gilbert employs blank verse.

5. Incidentally, in 1920 the Oxford University Gilbert and Sullivan Society adopted this trio as their signature song; it is still sung at the opening and closing of every meeting (Bradley 248).

6. Baily makes a case for Gilbert's impartiality, pointing out the librettist's overt criticism of men as well as women in this song (230); other critics, however, take the target of this satire to be Darwin himself, not men in general.

7. Gilbert's choreography, from his marked promptbook, for this refrain is very specific and humorous: the men sing "haughty" with both hands thrown out to the left; "humble" with hands crossed and laid against the breast; "coy" with the left hand under the right elbow, the right index finger touching the lips, and the legs bent in a mock curtsy; and "free" with both hands thrown open (Bradley 254). These four positions happen apace in the first line of the chorus, which runs, "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!" (462)

8. He is kinder, on the other hand, than many other Victorian writers to women who have lost their beauty to age; see Jane W. Stedman, "From Dame to Woman: W.S. Gilbert and Theatrical Transvestism," in *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, edited by Martha Vicinus (Indiana UP, 1972).

9. In recent years some excellent work has been done on this genre and its importance in preparing young girls and their families for the new college experience. Judith Rowbotham's *Good Girls Make Good Wives: Guidance for Girls in Victorian Fiction* (Blackwell, 1989) and Shirley Marchalonis's

College Girls: A Century in Fiction (Rutgers, 1995) are good books for scholars new to the genre.

10. That both examples consist of men may be Meade's subtle comment on the state of female friendship, but it more likely reflects the state of the mytho-history of friendship.

11. This sort of love, in its normal and also its perverted form, is a topic of interest in Marchaloni's work. Describing something that sounds much like the tradition of courtly love, she argues that "the separateness of men's and women's spheres forced both to find closeness and affection within their own sex, and that the language available for the expression of this affection was what we today identify as the language of heterosexual love" (150).

12. Prissie is, in fact, too dutiful for her own good, and her character suffers somewhat from her seriousness (as does the Prince's, for some readers). Miss Heath finds it necessary to take Prissie aside and advise her to relax a bit, but Prissie sticks to her duty: "I have come here to study. It has been done with such, such difficulty. It would be cruel to waste a moment" (91).

13. It seems likely that Tennyson's choice of field trip subjects, geology, purposefully reinforces the descriptions of and references to Ida's stony nature.

14. Ironically, Fogerty comments at one point in the play that Ida's tendency towards embarrassment results from her seriousness: "A lack of humour is perhaps her greatest fault" (16).



"And sweet girl-graduates in their golden hair."

CHAPTER III: IDA AND THE EDITORS

“What else is conventional life? *Passivity* when we want to be active. So many hours spent every day in passively doing what conventional life tells us, when we would so gladly work. . . . Women dream of a great sphere of steady, not sketchy benevolence, for which they would fain be trained and fitted, instead of working in the dark, neither knowing nor registering whither their steps lead, whether farther from or nearer to the aim.”—Florence Nightingale, *Cassandra*

In the closing years of Tennyson’s life and the first several decades after his death, *The Princess: A Medley* appeared in twenty-two separate editions in England and the United States, and yet another appeared in 1956. Editors and publishers produced editions for schoolgirls and working people, pocketbook editions and scholarly editions. Indeed, *The Princess* began its history with the five editions that Tennyson wrote, each more complex than its predecessor, as he rewrote passages, grafted the intercalary songs into the text, added the seizures, and finalized the frame of the medley, and made numerous other changes to the developing text, which he at last considered finished in 1853. Allan Dooley reports that, of the various Victorian poets, none exercised as much power over publishers and paid such meticulous attention to the public presentation of poems than did Tennyson. He was demanding, even before he accepted the laureateship, often insisting that “his publishers . . . have his poems printed in ‘trial editions’ of a handful of copies which he ‘circulated’ . . . some months before publication and

gave . . . prolonged study” (21). This practice meant that Edward Moxon and Tennyson’s other publishers were forced to let editions stand in type, sometimes for weeks, while Tennyson altered his text and its presentation, an expensive and inconvenient practice for their firms.¹ Dooley adds that by 1851 and the publication of *In Memoriam*, Moxon “had ample experience to anticipate that Tennyson would soon insist on revisions that might be extensive enough to render a set of stereoplates worthless” (93).

In the case of *The Princess*, Tennyson’s corrections, additions, and revisions were frequent enough that the first editions were quite probably never stereoplated; both sales and changes to the text came too rapidly for Moxon’s printers to keep up. Dooley notes that “if the original 1847 typesetting was indeed kept standing, undergoing extensive alterations through the years, then all of the first five ‘editions’ of *The Princess* would be in fact impressions of one edition” (118). In short, Tennyson, who thoroughly understood the process of printing public manuscripts, “habitually bent the printing process to his will” (117n); he “exploit[ed] every one of his publishers and printers in matters of proofs and private printing,” achieving greater textual control than any other poet of the century (155).

Tennyson’s control of the content and design of his publications, however, affected only the editions that he himself oversaw; he had no textual control over the many editions of *The Princess* that this chapter studies. He could present his *Ida* to readers, dressed in the rich language of the poem and accessorized by his complex framing device, and let

readers make of her what they would. Other editors of the poem, however, were not content to allow readers to decide without assistance who Ida is and what she represents. The series of twenty-one editions that spans the change of the century represents not merely later publications of the poem but didactic presentations of Tennyson's medley which, rather than celebrating the poet and the beauty of his accomplishment, use Ida as a means to various ends.

Many of these editions were published by American publishers for American readers, and to understand how these editions differ from British editions requires some knowledge about *The Princess's* reception in the States. John Eidson's study, *Tennyson in America: His Reputation and Influence from 1827 to 1858*, finds that Ida met with a more unanimous welcome in the States than she did in her native land.² She took America by surprise, apparently; "the rumors rife in England during 1846 and 1847 concerning Tennyson's preparation of a startling and extraordinary work seem not to have reached America until after *The Princess* had been published"; but as soon as the news broke, William Ticknor of Boston prepared the first American printing, which he made available to customers on or about 8 February 1848. It sold rapidly, undergoing several reprintings in 1848 (57). Eidson describes Ida's debut in the States positively: "Ticknor's first edition of *The Princess* was a neat little volume which, though differing slightly in size and pagination from the first London edition, was equally as attractive a book as Moxon's" (58).³ Americans did not get their own printing of the intercalary songs until 1853, the year in which Tennyson published his final revision; and

they had to wait until 1857 for an American printing of the final revision (58). Perhaps the wait made them eager to get their hands on *Ida*, or perhaps, living in an avowedly democratic society, they were simply somewhat more prepared for her character and story; whatever the case, the poem received reviews that, in general, were more favorable than those it first received in England.

“Americans liked *The Princess* from the beginning,” writes Eidson. “Newspaper reviewers praised it immediately” (58). The Boston *Daily Atlas* reviewer claimed that “the more [a reader] reads it, the better he likes it” (qtd. in Eidson 58-9); and one anonymous reviewer (Eidson suggests that it was Margaret Fuller, writing from Europe, where she was traveling) rhapsodized in the New York *Daily Tribune* that “If we were to express the feeling of satisfaction with which we have just read every word of this beautiful, charming and profound little book we should be thought extravagant” (qtd. in Eidson 59). Another reviewer described the poem as “bathed in beauty, and invit[ing] perusal after perusal” (qtd. in Eidson 59); and James Russell Lowell praised Tennyson’s mastery (to the annoyance of any critic deprecating the poem, I imagine), trusting that “it must argue a poverty in ourselves if we cannot see it as a harmonious whole” (qtd. in Eidson 59). Eidson remarks that the lone negative American reviewer, Thomas Powell, had to admit, after calling *The Princess* Tennyson’s “greatest failure,” that “it abounds in fine passages” (qtd. in Eidson 62).

But Eidson’s review of the poem’s initial reception in the States also makes it clear that Tennyson’s ambivalent stance on the poem’s

subject was in large part responsible for its popularity: “That it did delight American readers is beyond question, and one reason was the genial satire mixed with serious elements which never made it quite clear whether Tennyson was defending the Woman’s Rights movement or making fun of it. Readers were thus enabled to give to it the meaning which best suited their fancy” (63). Obviously, the problems that still perplex readers of *The Princess* today were in operation at its debut as well. Eidson speaks of how Horace Greeley, staunch defender of women’s rights, used the poem when arguing for them; of “crusaders for feminine independence” quoting the poem canto and line as others might quote the Bible chapter and verse; of feminists offering other feminists “a score of passages on *their* side of the question” as tools for the task at hand (64). But finally, whichever side of the question readers favored, Americans loved the poem, so much so that “nowhere in American criticism has been found anything resembling the caustic British reviews which greeted *The Princess* during the first few months after its publication” (Eidson 65).⁴

Those publishers, editors, and scholars who inherited *The Princess* from its early reviewers, too, were united by their appreciation of the poem, deeming new editions of it worth their investment in time and financial risk. They were likewise as divided as the reviewers on what the poem meant, what it taught (all having agreed on its utilitarian nature) about women and their standing in the world, and what readers should get out of the poem. Their editions employ various apparatus—dedications and forwards, introductions and prefaces, notes and

definitions, critical exercises, and afterwords—to sell readers on particular interpretations of Tennyson’s medley.

The first three editions listed in the *National Union Catalogue* were produced before Tennyson’s death and elicited some response from the poet. These editions bear close attention because those that follow them imitate them, use them, take issue with them, defer to them—sometimes even plagiarise them. These editors, S. E. Dawson, William Rolfe, and Percy Wallace, effectively controlled the public discussion of the poem for years as they guided readers to interpretations and bolstered these interpretations with carefully chosen excerpts of criticism. The first and strongest argument against these editions—the first that we might call feminist in approach—appeared only in 1896, after Tennyson’s death, and then anonymously.

Samuel Edward Dawson, an Anglophile Canadian publishing out of Montreal, reigned for a decade as the preeminent editor of *The Princess*. His 1882 was the first; and it elicited a remarkably long letter from Tennyson in which, though he generally praised Dawson’s work, he took issue with the editor’s claim that some ideas in it were not original, some images not true to nature. Unlike the other editors, Dawson did not produce his work under Tennyson’s title, but rather under his own: *A Study; with Critical and Explanatory Notes, of Alfred Tennyson’s Poem The Princess*. In his preface, he explains that he had recently written a paper on the poem to present to “a small, semi-literary society” and had found some passages to contain allusions that were “very recondite, and others in which the meaning did not lie upon the surface”; other

passages were hard to comprehend “on account of some peculiarity of diction or of versification” (np).

No other editor thinks more highly of the poem, which Dawson laments “has been and continues to be singularly underrated” (1); this lack of appreciation puzzles Dawson, who views the poem as “a transfusion of Greek spirit into modern life,” in the tradition of *Lycidas* (2). After excerpting various negative reviews of *The Princess*, mentioning the few positive comments that he has come across, and giving the poem’s textual history, he then comes to the exposition of his thesis, announcing that “A great poet is more than a seer of things which are; he is a prophet of things which are beginning to be. He is the exponent of the aspirations and the tendencies of his age. He reduces into coherent form, and clothes with beauty, the unuttered thoughts of which he age is dimly conscious” (8); this Shelleyan description of Tennyson’s task in *The Princess* bodes well for Ida’s cause, but readers learn quickly that the “unuttered” truths of Dawson’s poet-prophet call Ida to judgment for her erroneous ideas about woman.

The poem “contains Tennyson’s solution of the problem of the true position of woman in society—a profound and vital question, upon the solution of which the future of civilisation depends.” Dawson acknowledges that women have legitimate grievances and praises “the sweet visions of New England transcendentalists” who have raised protofeminist issues (9). When Tennyson concentrated his poetic powers upon the problem, he “discern[ed] the truth” and “clothed it with surpassing beauty” (10); that truth, readers learn after reading several

pages of plot summary,⁵ is distinctly anti-feminist, and it establishes a reading that other editors will follow:

the practical application of extreme theories of women's rights necessarily leads to the incongruous; and the incongruous, combined with kindly feelings, produces the humorousness—in the minds of men. Women, though quicker and wittier than men, are destitute of humor. They never possess that outsideness of mind by which many men can contemplate their own absurdities . . . and enjoy them with a quiet and indulgent laughter. The advocates of women's rights never seem to imagine that there is no ridicule, no feeling of superiority, in the irresistible smile which their theories provoke. They become angry, and consequently more absurd. (21)

What “extreme theories” are so laughable? The “incongruity of opposed functions”: perhaps God, says Dawson, or perhaps evolution, made women what they are and must be, “beautiful, lovable.” Perhaps God, perhaps evolutionary processes, have assigned to her certain functions, “towards which the same tyrannous environment has adapted every fiber of her mental and physical nature.” Should she abandon these functions, “she necessarily becomes absurd” (22). Tennyson discerned this truth, and his poem teaches readers that while no sensible person would claim that women are inferior to men, women go too far when they “demand the same education for both sexes, ignoring both the difference of physique and the object of this difference” (23). What if,

Dawson muses, men wanted to nurse children? He refers to an anatomical work which suggests that men could possibly “develop their neglected lacteal possibilities, and devote themselves to the alimentation of infants”; but any man who did so would rightly be scorned: “Would not blue-eyed Minerva herself burst into laughter, and would not the laughter be mixed with contempt, although, be it observed, the function in question is the most important and sacred in human society?”⁶

Dawson admires *Ida*, but saves his strongest praise for the *Ida* of Canto VII, the *Ida* who is disabused of such nonsense.

Dawson includes in his study a description of *Ida*'s college that later editors hand down one to another; it, too, is anti-feminist. Readers might, when “viewing” the college initially, through the Prince's eyes, find it dignified; it might remind them of campuses they know or have read of, heard of, seen drawings and pictures of. But Dawson precludes any reading but his own, which, once readers have ingested it, will necessarily flavor their own encounter with the text. Dawson shows readers a campus “full of knick-knacks and kick-shaws” (24). He comments on the clocks: “The love of precise punctuality, so deeply implanted in the female breast, has full scope at last Everywhere are busts, and statues, and lutes, and such like bric-a-brac aids to knowledge—promiscuously strewed about like blue china and crockery-ware bull-dogs in a modern drawing room.” Even in this description Dawson tries to move women back into the kitchen and the parlor, emphasizing their “true roles,” and then he mocks the college further: “Instinctively the male reader shrinks through this part of the poem,

fearful of upsetting something.” He derides the comfortable rooms: “Everything matches in that university. No common pine—the professorial desk is of satin-wood.” And the graduates dress so nicely! (25). One wonders whether Dawson had ever visited an elite university, along the lines of Harvard or Oxford. Had he, he might have noticed statues, beautiful furnishings, the regal atmosphere of a president’s office, or the then customary robes of dons and tutors. Dawson joins other critics in demeaning the curriculum, while insisting that “there is no malice or depreciation” in his humor, or Tennyson’s, at women’s expense (28).

Dawson answers the question of women’s right position by examining the intercalary songs, which stress the importance of parentage and parenting. Pregnancy, childbirth, grief over death, early widowhood—woman’s lot is hard, and “the gift of tears is too often her only solace” (31). But children must be born and raised if the race is to survive. It is a trying and often thankless job, Dawson admits, but someone has to do it: namely, woman. “To her, if she will take it, is committed the trust of moulding the coming generations. In her mainly is to be found the accumulated sum of moral education painfully acquired through many generations. She is the most potent conservative force in human society. . . . To this fundamental law all theories of blue-stockinged ladies must conform; and, therefore, our dear awesome Princess yields, through her innate goodness, and we kiss her feet in deep abasement that we ever could have laughed, even in our sleeves, at her

vagaries" (35). Apparently, Dawson is willing not only to admire but to worship Ida, as long as she behaves herself.

Dawson was the first critic to proclaim Aglaïa the "conquering heroine" of the poem (35). "Ridiculous in the lecture-room, the babe . . . is made the central point upon which the plot turns"—and the next line is pivotal to Dawson's narrative—"for the unconscious child is the concrete embodiment of Nature herself, clearing away all merely intellectual theories by her silent influence" (35-6). Aglaïa represents total and desirable womanliness to Dawson: she is mute, unquestioning, "natural"—she assumes her role unconsciously; it never occurs to her to do otherwise. Woman's "grand mission" is "the conservation and elevation of the human race through the family"; woman's grand nature is the divinely submissive to the promptings of nature, as is man's; woman's grand accomplishment is "the hearth-altar tended by the sacred mothers of every age" (37-8). A college education is no help, perhaps even a hindrance, to sacred mothers, because it blinds them to their "seeming weakness," which is really their "surpassing strength and glory" (38): unthinking submission to biological determinism.

Dawson then analyzes the main players of the plot, demonstrating at every turn that, when a character follows "natural" promptings, that character is good. Ironically, since marriage for mercenary reasons fits Dawson's vague understanding of Darwin,⁷ Cyril has his admiration as "the impersonation of clear, healthy, jovial common sense" (41) and as "a manly and amiable character" (43). Lady Psyche is misdirected, playing at her professorial duties "the same way as young women . . .

take up willow pattern china, and ugly furniture, and dignify such pursuits with the name of culture,” until Aglaia’s kidnapping “reveals the true woman,” sobbing, helpless, and eventually rescued by a man (43). Dawson exclaims, in one of his frequent moments of pathos, “Alas, dear Lady Psyche, that the mother-hunger cannot be appeased by primal nebulae!” (44) Alas, too, that the two must be, in this reading, incompatible. Blanche “stands out as a type of unlovely and unloving women, self-elected champions of the cause, who are its greatest hindrances”; she strays so far from nature that her husband is lucky to be dead: “Happy was he in his early escape from her awful and transcendent capacity for ‘nagging’” (45).

Ida, as we might expect, fares better in Dawson’s hands, but only because she is finally convinced of the error of her thinking. She is noble, enthusiastic; she, not Guinevere, is a fit mate for Arthur (instead, she gets the Prince, who compares poorly with Arthur, according to Dawson) (46). She is selfless, but her altruism is misguided, as she strives for women in general rather than the children whom she refuses to bear (47). Her natural womanhood, not the Prince, who acts only as a foil to her and who is as thoroughly defeated as is she, subdues her: “She is worsted by Nature—by the constituted order of things” (48).

No wonder Dawson finds *The Princess* “the most complete and satisfying of all Tennyson’s works” (54); he finds in it, as all readers are tempted to do, exactly what he wants to find. Unfortunately, his lengthy and often moving comments, which appear in the edition before the poem, discourage readers from finding anything else. And finally,

his own solution to the Woman Question, which he admits has not been resolved in the poem, is facile and dissatisfying, reminding readers then, perhaps, of “happy Sissy” at the end of Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times*, and perhaps readers now of Lennon and McCartney’s jaunty insistence that “all you need is love.” Dawson holds forth in a final, moving passage: “Of what avail is mere knowledge before these profound social and moral problems. . . . The intellect is finite, but the affections are infinite. We know in part and we prophesy in part. Our prophecies shall fail and our knowledge vanish into a clearer dawn, but *Love*, of which woman is the priestess, abideth for ever” (57).

So Dawson closes his study, but we are not finished with him yet, because he carries out his case in a set of notes upon which other editions rely heavily. In studying the various annotated editions, I have noted the purpose of the notes and concentrated particularly on those which predisposed readers toward a feminist or anti-feminist reading of the poem, guided always by the question of Ida’s function for any particular editor. I am especially interested in how editors deal with the numerous allusions to women of myth and history. Tennyson’s range of mythohistorical knowledge is extensive; clearly, readers do need notes to understand him when he invokes the seldom-mentioned Tomyris and Egeria and even the better-known Diotima and St. Catherine. In a sense, Tennyson has embedded in *The Princess* a “roll call” of noble women, and the information that editors choose to give or withhold about these women tells us much about the lesson that Ida seems, to them, to teach.

Dawson's annotations are extensive and are largely concerned with interpreting the text. A few examples, chosen from many, will demonstrate the anti-feminist reading which he pushes on the uncritical reader. Commenting on I.134-5, in which Gama describes Ida's conviction that "knowledge . . . was all in all," Dawson writes, "This is the central point of the Princess' delusion" (67); and many later editors simply reprint this note, not taking it upon themselves to analyze Ida's delusions, or Dawson's claim, further. His treatment of the roll call is in keeping: he identifies but then devalues the various women whose statues Ida keeps in her halls. The mythic nymph Egeria may have codified Numa's laws for him, but Dawson stresses her loss of will to live after Numa's death; so "inconsolable" was she that Diana turned her into a fountain, Niobe-like (71). Semiaramis "is fabled to have founded Babylon," but Ida would have done better to include a statue of Queen Nitocris "as having been much wiser, and as having constructed greater works" (71). Consistently, Dawson implies that either Ida or Tennyson (we know whom he would blame) has chosen poor role models for the graduates: historically unimportant, ultimately weak women; but perhaps she (or he) is not to be blamed, since the choices are so limited. Perhaps, on the other hand, Tennyson makes a statement through his many allusions to past women that revisionist feminist historians echo today as they try to reconstitute a past forgotten at best, suppressed at worst. Artemisia, Dawson admits, was a great warrior; but her greatness had the unfortunate side effect of shaming Xerxes's men;⁸ and she gained victory through "the discreditable stratagem of running down a friendly

ship,” and she ended her days an unrequited lover, gouging out her eyes in despair and drowning herself (71). Readers need to know the history of these allusory women; but Dawson deals briefly with whatever noble elements they might have had and gets right to the juicy details of their eventual failures. He is not evenhanded.

Cloelia fares well with Dawson because her brave act, swimming the Tiber on horseback after having been assigned to Porsenna as his booty, reunites her with her family. She follows nature. Cornelia is identified by her function, “the mother of the Gracchi” (74); Zenobia only as a queen. One particularly interesting explanation follows Tennyson’s reference to Etrurian custom; Dawson inserts a spirited discussion on the Etruscan women that other editors ignore. He speaks of Tanaquil, a noblewoman who was “haughty and high-spirited,” a “manager of the first order” who made her husband wealthy through her financial acumen but whose name nevertheless became “a proverb in Rome for a domineering wife.” Dawson laments that the unreasonably high position of women in Roman life was an outgrowth of Etrurian custom, which allowed women to hold even positions of religious power and “sent their girls to school,” even for higher education. He cautions readers that “it would be erroneous to suppose that Etruscan society was better than Greek or Roman. It was distinctly worse. The women were extravagantly fond of personal adornment, and Atheneus says they were wonderful women to drink. Their husbands were noted in Italy for being fat and idle. Altogether the less the ladies say about the Etruscan women the better” (76). Do readers need all of this tangential

information to recognize one passing reference in Psyche's speech? Of course not, but they need it if they are to form the right opinion of the text—Dawson's opinion.

Diotima was wise, of course, but mostly she taught Socrates of love (never mind that she defined love as desire for the eternal good). (83). Corinna did indeed take the prize for poetry from Pindar five times, but "she was very beautiful, and some say, so beautiful that Pindar had no chance of success with the too susceptible judges" (85). Perhaps her beauty swayed them once—but Dawson suggests that beauty beat talent five times running. St. Catherine, as the myth has it, converted fifty wise philosophers and died the martyr's death for her faith and her heavenly betrothal, "espoused in a vision to Jesus Christ"; but she has lost some of her queenliness since then: "the French say she is the patron saint of old maids, because it requires so much philosophy to remain an old maid" (99).

Dawson's notes throughout the text demean the women to whom Ida is compared, to whom she and Psyche draw readers' attention. He employs the words "is said to," "is fabled to," "myth," "tale" and others repeatedly as he undermines Lilia's claim that thousands of noble women have always existed but have been and are being beaten down by convention; these noble women are either myths, or misreported historical figures, or freaks of nature. In short, they do not really exist. Nor does Ida exist as hero, reformer, prophet, scholar. She is finally the Prince's bride and nothing more, as Dawson takes pains to demonstrate.

William Rolfe's 1883/4 edition of *The Princess*, from Houghton Mifflin, was the first response to Dawson's study. Rolfe was a scholar, a schoolmaster and principal who spent most of his life teaching in Cambridge, where he was for a time head master of the Cambridge, Massachusetts, high school. Historians of education credit Rolfe with instituting English literature in regular secondary curricula; in fact, they consider him a major reformer of American education. He eventually gave up teaching to devote himself to the preparation of school books with "the passion for accuracy and thoroughness of a born textual critic" (DAB 118) and included among his projects a twelve-volume edition of Tennyson's works. Rolfe's apparatus draws heavily on Dawson's work, but it also brings a much-needed scholarly balance to the poem. Tennyson was pleased with the edition, noting that Rolfe had corrected a few of Dawson's slips (and Rolfe did not accuse the poet of the occasional lack of originality).

Rolfe's edition is scholarly, relying heavily on textual critical practices; for instance, he discusses the decision not to regularize Tennyson's use of the apostrophe to form the past tense of verbs, respecting the poet's stylistic choice, though he himself finds the practice anachronistic and distracting. He explains that his initial work on *The Princess* aimed at making it comprehensible to girls in his classes, but the scholarship of this edition puts it beyond the need or use of typical high school students (then or now). Rolfe's history of the poem and its criticism includes citation of Dawson's work, but Rolfe provides other critical opinions as well, providing some balance. He examines

Tennyson's prosody and then completes the introduction with a long passage from Kingsley's anti-feminist review. But Rolfe is content to leave the critical discussion to other interpreters of the poem; he emphasizes textual criticism. The annotations of this edition explain matters of prosody, trace changes of the text through its five presentations, explicate sticky passages, and identify allusions. But though his notes are more objective, Rolfe follows Dawson's interpretation of the text, not only in his introductory remarks but also in his notes.

He agrees with Dawson that the seizures fail to interest readers in the Prince and cites a long passage from Dawson's study (150). More to the point, he cites Dawson's long and mocking comments about the clocks and the cluttered campus, thus throwing his scholarly weight (and great personal reputation) behind Dawson's belittling reading (155). Rolfe deals more briefly and thus more objectively with the roll call and other allusions; for instance, he does not mention Artemisia's ignoble stratagem (158), and he refrains from judging the Etruscans on their habits of personal adornment, merely mentioning the existence of murals from Etruria which depict women and men together at banquets (159). Now and then, though, Rolfe lets the mask of the objective textual critic slip, as in his note identifying the Danaids, "condemned eternally to the hopeless task of filling a leaky vessel with water. It seems a little pedantic here; but perhaps not more so than Melissa's reply. Both teacher and pupil are crammed with ancient lore" (161). On the one hand, he omits the fact that the Danaids (fifty of them) receive their

sentence for murdering their husbands (fifty of them); but on the other, he demeans the knowledge passed on from professor to graduate.

Diotima passes with the mere title of “instructress of Socrates” in Rolfe’s text (165); of Corinna, he remarks only that she triumphed over Pindar (166). Catherine’s brutal death has no place in Rolfe’s annotation, nor does her appearance in an insulting French proverb. Tomyris is noted as a warrior queen who, after defeating Cyris, “insulted his dead body,” which is putting it mildly (177). Rolfe simply is not interested in espousing a personal reading of the text; and he actually tones down Dawson’s sometimes sarcastic comments. However, he does as little to aid Ida as to condemn her, and his avowed appreciation for and frequent recourse to Dawson’s study hardly challenge the latter’s hostile interpretation.

Rolfe ends his treatment of the apprentice in good casebook style, printing the text of Tennyson’s letter to Dawson and adding a concordance of terms and words explained in the annotations. He does not change the direction of Ida’s career, but he at least brings to it a more objective point of view.

The third early and influential edition of *The Princess* came out in the year of Tennyson’s death, 1892, too late for Tennyson, in his late illness, to respond to it. Percy Wallace, “late professor of English literature, Mohamedan Anglo-Oriental College, Aligarh,” according to the title page, produced it for Macmillan in order to educate non-British students of the text about British customs that appear in the poem. He explains “points with which every native of England is familiar from his

cradle” but which “foreign” readers might not recognize. He is, as we might gather from his place of employment, particularly interested in guiding “natives of India” as they read; he is in a sense involved in a post-colonial translation of colonial literature to colonists (v-vi).

Wallace took care to produce an edition that would please Hallam Tennyson, who was about to become the guardian of his father’s personal memory and professional reputation, submitting the proofs to and receiving comments from Hallam that would eventually appear in the *Memoir*.

Wallace includes first, in this rather thick volume, a general introduction to the poet’s life and work, by F. J. Rowe and W. T. Webb, professors at Presidency College in Calcutta; then he himself provides a brief textual history of the poem and of the struggle for women’s rights in England. Tennyson’s voice in the debate, argues Wallace, deserves our attention, since the poet “is profoundly interested in all the social problems of the day, but also has shown himself specially happy in his studies of various types of womankind” (xxvi). He traces, in a very few pages, the Woman Question through Amelia Jenkins Bloomer’s attempts at dress reform to Auguste Comte’s ideas on educational reform, quoting Mary Wollstonecraft and Defoe. This positive consideration of women’s rights movements ceases, however, when Wallace comes to the question of women’s right to higher education. Although that part of the general women’s movement began “along sober lines,” it “branched off” and “went to range at will over districts into which it was not designed or fitted to intrude. Instead of confining itself to a rational appeal for the

recognition of woman's right to a more liberal education, it broke loose into a wild and hysterical clamour that women should be admitted side by side with men into all the offices of public life, with respect both to kind and to degree" (xxix). Wallace's wording suggests that he had a particular passage in mind when he wrote these lines; perhaps he is suggesting to students how to read *Psyche's* frequently anthologized passage that predicts

Two heads in council, two beside the hearth,
 Two in the tangled business of the world,
 Two in the liberal offices of life,
 Two plummet dropt for one to sound the abyss
 Of science, and the secrets of the mind (II.156-60)

Like Dawson, Wallace insists that Tennyson's answer to the question involves nature: "Nature is the strongest of all things, . . . she will not be thwarted, . . . attempts to act in defiance of her principles must be either grotesque or tragical in their results—not improbably both— . . . true wisdom consists in the organisation of our lives—physical, mental, moral, social, political—in conformity with her eternal laws" (xxxiv). Unlike Rolfe, Wallace does not excerpt Dawson's comments about the campus; but his sentiments sound familiar. In this college, "all is pretty, graceful, luxurious, full of rich colour and lovely design—too much so, it would seem, to be compatible with real work" (xxxv). And as for the graduates, "a strong sincere resolve and the attractiveness of novelty will support these enthusiasts *for a few weeks*, but Nature will

assert herself at last and redeem them to their proper sphere” (xxxvii, emphasis mine).

Wallace discusses the poem’s structure, which he says is planned and purposeful; he touches on possible sources for the plot; he comes very near to plagiarizing Dawson in his analysis of the characters; and finally, he comes to Ida. He approves of her as “essentially earnest and devoted to her cause for its own sake” and lauds her enthusiasm, “which dazzles her lover, swells her brother’s heart with pride, and commands even the respect of the Northern King.” And he excuses her bad behavior, which results from “the monstrous and ridiculous positions into which she is occasionally forced by the burning indignation that dominates her or the honest misdirection of her energies” (xlviii). Ida’s fallacies are apparently imposed from outside of her character—she simply needs exorcism.

Wallace’s notes are unmarked by studies of prosody or textual criticism, as these would be inappropriate to his audience; he stresses historical understanding of the text, explicates difficult passages, and defines unfamiliar terms (such as “celt,” “calumet,” and “claymore”). Still, like Dawson and, to a lesser extent, Rolfe, he insinuates interpretation into what appear to be largely objective annotations.

For instance, when Lilia complains, as she pushes Walter’s petting hand away from her head, that she would like to shame men because they “love to keep us [women] children” (Prologue 133), Wallace chides her: “This is an exaggeration on Lilia’s part. Although when this Poem was written there were not the Ladies’ Colleges and other opportunities

for woman's work that now exist, English women . . . did enjoy . . . far more personal and social liberty than falls, or has fallen, to the lot of the women of most countries. What she means in that there is not the adventure and the excitement in a domestic life that men encounter in the wide world" (105). So he says, yet Lilia is talking, not about "the wide world," but about college; and she is suffering trivialization of her person and her idea at the hands (literally, in Walter's case) of the men; in fact, the men refer to her as "little trifling Lilia" (Prologue 186) and pet and cajole her as one does a fretful child. Even the act of storytelling is associated with childhood, and particularly with bedtime, when even a child's sleep patterns are dictated by its gaurdians.

Wallace is even stronger than Dawson about Ida's claim that "knowledge is all in all," writing that "this fallacy . . . is one on which Tennyson has expressed himself with great vehemence and earnestness in several passages throughout his works." And for a woman to think this is worse than for a man to think it, since "the province of women in the economy of Nature is not intellectual eminence but the more graceful and tender offices of life, and this, the established verdict of the centuries, is the central idea and doctrine in the Poem" (113). Wallace could hardly guide his readers more firmly than he does in this claim.

The edition treats the roll call thoroughly; and while Wallace adds nothing new to readers' knowledge of these women, his word choice is informative. Egeria does not codify laws; instead, Numa "is said to have betaken himself [to her] for instruction"; Wallace gives the power of action to the man, not the woman whose statue is mentioned (120).

Semiaramis, an acknowledged historical figure, is “legendary” and the reports of the cities she founded thus also questionable (120).

Artemisia’s military misdeed comes back here, too: “she did not shrink from procuring her own safety [not the victory, as other editors have it] by the shameful device of running down a friendly vessel”; Xerxes uttered his praise of Artemisia, according to Wallace, before he knew of this action (the implication is, of course, that he would otherwise have withheld the praise) (121). Cloelia may or may not have escaped her conqueror and swum the river Tiber; and Zenobia, “a woman of vehement energy and ambition,” experienced only temporary victories and was “ultimately defeated, captured, and taken to Rome” (121). Agrippina alone is spared Wallace’s critique, since she was a “typical Roman matron, cultured, courageous, and devoted to the husband and family” (121). My point here is not that one editor provides correct information while another does not, but that each editor, constrained by the pressures of time to publication and space on the paper, must and does include and exclude details, guided by some unifying purpose.

Wallace’s is clearly anti-feminist; he turns Ida against her own cause, even as he seems to appreciate the history that she presents her students by calling the memorialized women “eight of the most eminent women of antiquity, representing respectively legislative sagacity, political enterprise, military prowess, architectural skill, physical courage, intellectual culture, imperial ambition, and wifely devotion” (122). Yet Wallace presents all but one of these eminent women by emphasizing their defeats, disgraces, and deaths. Even the accomplishments of

Elizabeth I are preceded by the phrase “whatever may have been Elizabeth’s failings” (127).

One note is unique in Wallace’s annotations; he comments on Cyril’s casual yet rude remark that women may follow the ideas of others well, but “when did woman ever yet invent?” (II.369). Wallace admits the existence of many “instances of women of great appreciative power, capable of acquiring and reproducing with extreme skill” but opines that “they seem almost totally devoid of the inventive or originative faculty in matters of the intellect; no great school of thought, no system, moral, scientific, or otherwise, looks to a woman as its founder” (134). To Wallace, the situation may be “tragical,” but it is historically documentable.

Wallace’s note on Diotima wanders off into a discussion of Socrates’ trial and death (148); his note on Corinna begins with her, but lingers on Pindar and which of his works are extant (151). He is, to his credit, the first and one of the few editors to interpret “caryatids” not as architectural features but as “the women of Caryae,” who became the spoils of war and were led into slavery, so that the architectural function of the column named after them stems from their burdensome lives as slaves.

Wallace’s annotations take up well over a hundred pages of text in this edition; they are longer than the poem itself. Many later editors followed Dawson’s study of *The Princess*; as many followed or even used Wallace’s extensive notes, which clearly advocate—even insist on—an anti-feminist use of the text.

1896 saw the publication of three separate American editions of *The Princess*. We do not know who edited the first of these, from the American Book Company in Chicago as part of that publisher's Eclectic English Classics series. Although it is anonymously edited, it is important because it is the first edition to break with the anti-feminist interpretive tradition established by Dawson and Wallace and legitimized by Rolfe's scholarship.⁹ The editor, whom we may identify as a man because of the male pronouns he uses to refer to himself, opens his edition with a brief and somewhat romanticized biography of Tennyson that flatters both the son and his father, "a man of considerable accomplishments in music and the languages" whose "sturdy lads" wandered "the famous Lincolnshire wolds, sometimes far enough to look out upon the north sea, . . . telling one another tales of marvelous adventure" (5). He gives a brief critical overview of Tennyson's works and includes J. S. Mill's comment (originally in the *Westminster Review*) that Tennyson's poems' "originality will prevent their being generally appreciated for a time," a problem that this editor undertakes, at least in the case of *The Princess*, to solve (6). In this section he also presents Tennyson as a man of a mildly reformist nature which events sometimes stoked to a fiery poetic pronouncement ("The humanitarianism of the [reform] movement seized Tennyson and affected his poetic spirit"), although he admits that the poet "reflected the spirit of his time" (6). The editor verges on hagiography in this introductory section, writing that Tennyson created his work "for Englishmen . . . of calm skies and tracts of shady pasture . . . of the

spirit of honor and duty and reverence, and of these he was never weary of singing" (7). Perhaps he feels that, because he is about to put before readers a potentially offensive reading of the poem, this description of Tennyson will placate readers and render them less hostile to his interpretation.

The editor then moves to the poem and, as the each editor before him, samples the critical field; but, like no editor before him, he employs quotes from critics that at least do not attack Ida's ideas outright and with scorn. We must note that he does not identify Tennyson as a decided and emphatic voice in the cause of women (the editor himself makes his assertions cautiously); in fact, he reminds readers of the line from "Locksley Hall" in which the speaker compares his emotions to wine and woman's to water, an idea from which Tennyson "is never quite free . . . even in the most rapt and exalted idealism of the Princess" (9). But Tennyson, the editor claims, at least took women's arguments seriously and examined them on their merit; he knew that, in time, Ida's college would come to pass, and his medley is "a poetic outburst of the large view which moved the popular mind, which impelled parliamentary action to better English laws regarding women, and incited the legislatures of the United States to declare that a woman might own, manage, control, and devise by will, property belonging to her, that she might carry on a trade and have the control of her earnings, and that she had certain rights and possessions in her children" (9). The editor agrees fully with the passage of these reforms and extends his approval, and Tennyson's, to women's demands for higher education.

He speaks of this subject now, beginning with his own experience in Boston, where a school for young women was forced to close, ostensibly for financial reasons, but actually because “it seemed as if the girls would not leave its walls, so great was their craving for instruction” (10). This man, writing anonymously (perhaps even a woman hiding doubly behind anonymity and a man’s gender), quotes women of the past who spoke to the need of their sex for education, women like Mary Wollstonecraft, Catherine Parr, and Elizabeth Tudor. He mentions the learning of Marguerite de Navarre, Vittoria Colonna, Renée of Ferrara, Olympia Morata— “Hundreds of such women must have lived and died, who are now unknown to us”; but of those of whom we know, he writes that “their full, strong characters gleam from the pages of history,” and that their strength resulted in part from “the amplitude and robustness of their studies.” He discusses the Medieval period, so often thought of as a time of intellectual darkness, mentioning the many nuns who, like Heloise, “assayed in the sciences of the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* courses of the study in the mediæval universities” (11).

Like Wallace, this editor prepares students for the closing passage of Psyche’s lecture, which ends with a prediction that the earth will “bear a double growth” of poetic minds and other needed intellects (II.163), writing that “when we shall have applied to all the problems of society the new and as yet unused elements which exist in womanhood—all results will be reached twice as quickly as they are now reached” (12). Clearly, students, who so often early in their college years want “the right answer” as they read literature and who look to the teacher to provide it,

will approach, read, and either dismiss or consider this important passage depending on whether they read Wallace's edition or this 1896 edition.

The editor turns then to a very brief summary of the plot and finally to the task of annotating the text. His notes concern historical clarification—they explain archaic forms of words, college lingo, allusions, borrowings; and in several important instances they advance his interpretation of *The Princess* as a potentially feminist document. Right away, we see how differently an editor can guide readers, as this editor glosses Ida's claim that "knowledge was all in all": this is not an error, as Dawson, Rolfe, Wallace and other editors who publish later claim, but Ida's realization that "what had been denied her would . . . accomplish the betterment for women which she sought" (32). To "lose the child" means "to put away childish things, and live as a reasonable being responsible for her acts" (32).¹⁰

The editor's treatment of the roll call of women is, as we might expect, positive; but it is more than that—it becomes a history lesson which goes far beyond its explicatory function. Egeria becomes not simply a nymph but "a prophetic nymph" and religious leader; Semiaramis built Babylon "with all its wonders." Artemisia is "queen of Helicarnassus, the strongest city in all Caria" whose assistance to Xerxes in war was marked by "courage and perseverance." The destruction of the ship is here, as are Xerxes's words of praise, but the editor says not a word about the ignoble circumstances surrounding the ship's sinking (40).

This editor not only chronicles Cloelia's escape but adds that "the Romans [who had given her to Porsenna as booty in the first place] sent her back, but Porsenna dismissed her with a part of the hostages; and later her countrymen honored her with a statue." She not only rescued herself from slavery but also caused the release of other hostages on her behalf. When he comes to Zenobia, the editor discusses her military prowess but points out that she exercised it on behalf of her young sons, for whom she was holding the throne as regent until they attained maturity. His treatment even of her defeat develops readers' sense of her noble and determined spirit as he includes several significant details: "Conquered *at last* by the Emperor Aurelian, she was shackled *in gold* and led in the emperor's triumph along the *Sacred Way*" (40, emphasis mine). The last statue represents Agrippina, who, according to the editor, is not only marked by her familial devotion but also by her "gifted" character and "noble mind" (40).

When the editor comes to Psyche's reference to women famed "in arts of government / Elizabeth and others" (II.145-6), the editor lists some of the others: Dido, Catherine de Medici, Ekaterina of Russia (Catherine the Great), Maria Theresa of Austria—and he adds the abbreviation "etc.," implying that the list could go on, but that a list of all the possible names would make for a burdensome footnote. He expands likewise Psyche's mention of women famed in "arts of war / The peasant Joan and others" (II.146-7): he reminds readers of warrior-women already mentioned and then adds "Boadicea, and Mary Ambree and the Maid of Saragossa, who are celebrated by poets" (44). And

Psyche's reference to Sappho as a woman representative of others famed in the "arts of grace" (Il.147) prompts yet another list: Erinna, Myrto, Margaret of Navarre, and other learned women mentioned in the introductory remarks take their places here with Sappho and Corinna (44).

Like Wallace, and perhaps indeed in response to Wallace, the editor comments on Cyril's casual yet categorical remark on women's inventive powers; he paraphrases Cyril's words in such a way that readers know his opinion of Cyril's claim and his own position on the matter: "Having by convention been debarred from instruction and from the freedom necessary to develop their originating and inventive faculties, and never having created a great school in literature or art, women, even with instruction and untrammelled conditions, never will,—is Cyril's position" (53). The editor clearly disagrees with Cyril and thinks that Tennyson does as well; from his remarks we can infer his own position, that women have not yet invented precisely because they have been "debarred from instruction" and trammelled with cares and restrictions of their liberty. They have not yet experienced the conditions under which inventive minds operate best; when they do, they will invent.

This editor's treatment of Tomyris is unique (although some later editors will borrow it from him) because he lingers on the gorier details of her military exploits. She defended the Massagetæ, her people, when Cyris attempted to conquer them, as other editors have mentioned; but her subsequent actions were unladylike even given the extremes of war

(she can, of course, be compared to a mother defending her children, a situation that excuses many typically unfeminine actions). The editor writes that “having conquered and slain the king, Tomyris put his head in a leather sack of blood, in fulfillment of her promise that he should have blood enough if he warred with her” (102). Since Tennyson allies Ida’s nature with Tomyris’s, readers who know this detail are encouraged to take her more seriously as a leader and a defender of her own people,—women and particularly the graduates under siege—than are readers of other editions.

Dawson and Wallace agree, when they come to the reconciliation scene in Canto VI, with Arac as he exclaims to Ida that “the woman is so hard upon the woman” (205-6); in fact, they accept this claim and, arguing *a priori*, use it to insist that such natures are ill suited to higher education. This editor reverses the order of the claims and guides readers to an opposite understanding of Arac’s complaint with this gloss: “This fact Ida’s scheme of broadening women’s wisdom and sympathies would do away with. Much harsh judgment comes from narrowness of experience and lack of a knowledge about life” (116). It is in fact Ida’s own growth of wisdom, as the actions of the plot progress, that enables her to reject her initial harsh judgment of the Prince and to consider whether her objectives and his are, after all, compatible. In this edition, Ida does not give in to Nature; she is not defeated by the Prince; rather, she comes gradually and painfully, but at last gladly and with relief, to the understanding that not all men hate learned women and that marriage need not mean the death of her mind and will. In his

introductory statements, the editor tells readers that “the poem was doubtless written to help the establishment of better relations between men and women, and the true idea of marriage as Tennyson conceived it” (8). He does not rejoice in Ida’s fulfillment of her betrothal; nor does he say, with Walter, “I wish she had not yielded!” (*Conclusion* 5), because, in his interpretation, Ida does not yield anything. She loses nothing but gains a partner, a helpmeet in her cause, and can now look forward as well to children. Ida, in this edition, is the woman who has it all. Finally, in 1896, she found a champion, unnamed but eloquent, for her cause, and her career moved forward in a new direction.

But not unimpeded—the other 1896 editions refer often to Dawson, Rolfe, and Wallace; and the two 1897 editions merely lift passages from the more misogynistic critics and then append, with acknowledgments, Wallace’s annotations. And in 1900, Albert S. Cook produced an edition out of Boston, written especially for use in girls’ schools and characterized by a vitriolic rejection of Ida and her ideas. Although three editions by women also appear early in the twentieth century, these do not uniformly support Ida and in fact in some instances bear out Arac’s accusation that “the woman is so hard upon the woman.” Tracing Ida’s path through the twenty-two editions, we see that each editor uses her didactically, as an icon of woman’s strength or of her weakness, of her nobility or of her failure, of her educability or of her pretentiousness, of her autonomy or of her submission.

With the publication, thirty-four years after Farrand’s 1922 edition, of Charles Tennyson’s edition in 1956, Ida’s many editors, having had

ample opportunity to direct her long and contradictory career, fell silent. Long before 1956, women attended college lectures and labs with men and earned their degrees; women had participated in battle, nursing the wounded in the war that many hoped would end all wars and serving in many ways in the war that followed it; women had developed political muscle as they cast votes. Perhaps these and like achievements explain why no one has returned to the text with the objective of producing a new free-standing edition; or perhaps Tennyson scholars and readers consider Christopher Ricks's objective, scholarly, and rigorously unbiased edition of it in his three-volume collection of Tennyson's works the final word. His edition is now, and has been since 1963, the standard; the older, more vocal editions have disappeared, as surely as have those who engineered them. These polemical little volumes now inhabit the shelves of rare book rooms in libraries across the country. They have been little read since the day of their publication. We no longer need them to help us understand Tennyson's poem; but we learn much from them still about the uses to which Ida has been put, as we trace the history of her iconic life.

Notes

1. The practice was potentially debilitating to publishers who needed to have all their type and cases available and working; when Tennyson worked with C. Kegan Paul, the publisher demanded contractual provisions to prevent an extended and financially difficult revision process (Dooley 101).

2. It is a truism going back, of course, to New Testament teachings that a prophet is never welcome in his—or, in this case, her—own country.

3. I gather from this description that the finical Tennyson might have been satisfied with this materialization of his poem.

4. Interested readers will find in Eidson's work a thorough review and analysis of the musical settings of the intercalary songs in *The Princess* (69-73).

5. Dawson punctuates the summary with complaints about the obsessions of critics: why, he asks, do critics harp on the fantastic elements of the poem? Do these critics, he wonders, complain of lack of verisimilitude of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? "Or who ever tried to calculate the dead reckoning of Ulysses in the *Odyssey*?" (14). He registers outright disgust with those critics who "with a wearisome iteration . . . dilate upon this surface-indication [the subtitle], without,

for the most part, examining how far the word medley really applied” (13).

6. Times have of course changed; on a personal note, I know men who watched their children nursing and felt it unfair that they could not participate in this process, so basic to the nurture of their child. Various feminists novelists, too, have imagined futuristic societies in which men can nurse their children, not replacing but supplementing the mother’s role: see, for instance, Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

7. That he does know something of science we can tell from comments like the following: “Huxley himself could not have sketched more vividly than the *Lady Psyche* the progressive development of the world from the primal cosmic vapour” (55).

8. Xerxes is said to have complained that, after Artemisia’s entry into battle, his women had become men and his men women—a Tennysonian transformation indeed. Perhaps the poet had it in mind.

9. We might be tempted to think that American Book Company could not find an editor willing to go public with this reading in 1896. I also find it interesting that this first, mild feminist reading appeared *after* Tennyson’s death.

10. Note the allusion, embedded in the editor's word choice, to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians: "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (I Corinthians 13.11 KJV). The editor's phrasing draws a parallel between the Apostle and Ida.



“Blow, bugle, blow; set the wild echoes flying.”

AFTERWORD

“. . . a parable is perhaps the best teacher that can most surely enter in at all doors.”—Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*

When I first read Tennyson's *The Princess*, I must admit that I rather fell in love with the poem and with its protagonists. Perhaps this is why I chose to study it: reading extensively the critics' considered opinions, examining Tennyson's possible motives, discovering the contexts in which Ida appears, I thought, would cause me to see the poem clearly, not with the proverbially blinded eyes of affection. The process has indeed been enlightening. I have heartily agreed with Tennyson at points and sighed in frustration over him at others. I have taken offense at the occasional critical remark and laughed with the delight of the mind's enjoyment at other critics' ideas. I have experienced vicariously the lives of men and women of Victorian England who struggled with the questions that we now explore with the luxury of a century's progress on our side. And I have witnessed, sometimes in astonishment, the didactic maneuverings of those who marketed Ida over the decades that turned the last century into ours. I have learned

so much; yet I know that, even if I confine my future study to this single work, I still have much to learn.

After all of the reading and writing, I still find myself moved greatly by *The Princess*. As I leaf through my marked-up copy of Christopher Ricks' 1963 standard edition, trying to find the right words, the right lines to support this point or justify that claim, passages catch my eyes and I stop to read them again. I smile at the Prince's affectionate criticism of his beloved; I shudder at the Lady Blanche's unkindness and self-promotion; I shrink from the old King's brutally chauvinistic proclamations on woman's nature; I cherish the heroic efforts of Ida even as her fragile world shatters around her. In short, familiarity has failed to breed contempt.

This poem has not been edited and published since 1963, as part of Ricks' monumental and now standard three-volume collection of all of Tennyson's poetry. It has not stood by itself in a book since 1924. December 25 of this coming year, 1997, will mark the sesquicentennial of Tennyson's original publication of *The Princess: A Medley*. It is time for a sesquicentennial edition of *The Princess*, such as traditionally commemorate the passing of anniversary dates. *In Memoriam* and the *Idylls of the King* are available in recent casebook editions notable for

their academically rigorous approach and for their affordability. Thus two of Tennyson's most challenging poetic efforts are easily available to the public; *The Princess*, too, needs placement in an affordable and thoroughly edited book so that, free of the expensive cloth collection, it can reach new audiences in these last few years of the our century and continue to puzzle, teach, and delight readers of the next.



“ Happy he
With such a mother ! ”

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